



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Lawn Removal – I Can't Afford to Save You...I Can't Afford to See You Go (July 16, 2022)

By William Beau Keen, UCCE Master Gardener

So, you want to get rid of your lawn to save water and resources. Here is the conundrum however...It will take effort, finances, and resources to remove a lawn and replace it with new plants. If a landscaping firm is too much on a limited budget, consider the following methods and resources.

First, what do I have?

Figure out what type of grass you have: cool-season or warm-season. Cool-season grasses, such as tall fescue, are green all year long and tend to require more water. Warm-season grasses, such as Bermuda grass hybrids, do best with less water in the hot months and go dormant/ brownish in the winter months. Some methods of removal work better for each type of grass, so knowing before you start will help you save time and pick the best methods.

Remember to call 811 "Call before you dig" to have your in-ground utility boxes located to avoid damaging them.

Old Fashioned Elbow Grease a Little at a Time:

While not glamorous, you can dig out your lawn using a shovel, a pickaxe, or a Maddox. You can work as you have time (and energy), scraping out small sections at a time and placing in your green waste trash bin.

If your soil is rock hard, watering small sections where you work will help to release the grass. If you have warm-season grass, after you are done, water well again several times for resprouting grass.

Pros: inexpensive, fitness, great for small areas, easier for cool season grasses.

Cons: very physical, lengthy process, neighbors think you are mining for gold.

Sheet Mulching:

Sheet mulching is a way to apply a thick barrier over the lawn that will kill the grass, roots and all, over the course of 6-10 months. What remains is a 'blank slate of mulched area' that you can plant with whatever type of plants you like.

1. Prepare the site by scalping the lawn by weed eater or mowing at lowest setting.
2. Water lawn thoroughly.
3. Apply cardboard or 5-8 sheets of newspaper, overlapping each layer a hands width. Do not use glossy magazines or prints.
4. Spread mulch 5-6 inches thick on top. You can order mulch delivered or you can also get 'free mulch' / green waste by contacting local tree trimmers. Avoid walnut and eucalyptus as these allelopathic species inhibit plant growth. Water mulch thoroughly afterwards.
5. Wait 6-10 months (*Cool season grasses will have a shorter time. For warm-season grasses be ready to dig out or use herbicide on surviving grass poking through*)
6. Plant your new landscape into the mulch, cutting away cardboard as needed.



Pros: less physical method, area ready for planting, looks better earlier.

Cons: advanced planning needed, warm-season grasses take longer and tend to return more vigorously.

Rent a Sod Cutter:

Sod cutters are available for rent at most home improvement stores as well as local equipment rental businesses. The sod cutter will remove lawn in strips that you can then easily remove by hand. They are easy to operate, although they also tend to be ungainly and jumpy, especially in hard soils.



Mark and/or remove obstacles, like sprinkler heads, utility boxes, and steppingstones. Grass under tree canopies will need to be removed by hand to avoid damaging surface roots.

Pros: removes a lot of lawn quickly, machine does the work.

Cons: upfront rental cost.

Herbicides ~ the Scorched Earth Option.

For many this might be the first thought that comes to mind. But spraying an entire lawn is discouraged as there are some potential downsides:

- Increased Exposure Risk- As the area treated and the amount of herbicide used increases, so does your amount of health exposure risk.
- Overspray and Drift – This is more pronounced in hot or windy weather. Herbicide droplets are carried by wind or vaporized in the heat and are taken up by the surrounding plants. You may inadvertently kill plants you want to keep. This includes the line of shrub roses your neighbor is now asking you to replace.

Herbicides are better used in conjunction with the previous methods to kill off any grass that lingers, or if other noxious weeds are present. For example, if you covered your grass 6-10 months earlier with sheet mulch, you would be spraying or pulling anything that reappears before replanting.

Please read all herbicide labels. If you are removing all lawn and vegetation, then a non-selective ‘kills all that it touches’ type of herbicide will work. A grass selective herbicide such as ‘Grass Getter’ or ‘Grass B’ Gone’ is very helpful in killing unwanted grass in or near wanted vegetation. For example, if Bermuda grass is coming up inside your new or existing plantings you can use a grass selective herbicide to kill the grass and not your plant.

Apply for Financial Assistance.

While not available in every water district, there are public incentive programs that will help cover the cost of having your lawn removed and replaced by a low water use landscape. Go to “Save Our Water” <https://saveourwater.com/> to look up your local water agency. Rebate programs are usually either clearly listed or only a phone call away.

The application process is detailed so be prepared to submit planting plans, measurements, before-and-after pictures, and have someone visit your site in person. You may elect to have a professional landscape firm draw up plans for you to submit and help organize the approval process.

Do not start your project or purchase anything until you are 100% sure, authorized, ‘green light go’ by your rebate program. You will be paying for the landscape project up front out of pocket and get reimbursed afterwards with a final inspection. Rebates typically pay for a portion or a set amount by square foot, but not the entire project cost.

Pros: the rebate can repay your costs for labor (if needed) and help pay for plants to replace the lawn.

Cons: still need to front the costs and wait for reimbursement, need to be organized with paperwork and follow all the rules.

The Master Gardeners will be available to answer your questions at a few select locations in the next few months!

Visalia Farmer’s Market- 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8-11 am, 2100 W. Caldwell Ave (behind Sears)

Hanford Farmer’s Market – 4th Thursday – 5-9 pm

Questions? Call us:

Call us: Master Gardeners in Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

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