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Turf Selection

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SUMMARY

There's a lot to consider in the selection of a turfgrass. A successful selection will match your location and needs to a turfgrass species' characteristics. Key elements to consider are where it will be grown, how it will be used, and the level of appearance you want to maintain.

Lawns – if you must have one then choose wisely.

Q. I just moved into a new home in Lafayette. I am surrounded by dirt. I have two very young children and a small dog and I want some lawn for them to play on. I know that lawns are a dirty word these days but right now I need one. What type should I choose?

A. You are right, these days the direction is to move away from lawns for a number of good reasons. Lawns consume precious water. To keep them looking attractive they require the application of fertilizers and pesticides which frequently run off the lawn and into gutters during irrigation, contaminating our local creeks, streams, and the Bay. Power mowers and blowers used to maintain them consume energy, pollute the air, and annoy the neighbors. The reality is that sometimes, as in your situation, one wants a turfgrass surface to support certain activities.

Turf characteristics to consider. Since you have already decided on a lawn then let me help you choose the right one for your situation. There is a lot to consider in the selection of a

turfgrass, and a successful selection matches your location and needs to a turfgrass species' characteristics. Key elements to consider are where it will be grown, how it will be used, and the level of appearance you want to maintain. In your particular situation you will want a turfgrass that is wear resistant, drought tolerant, and well adapted to summer heat. Another important consideration is sun exposure. Let's assume for this response that you have full sun.

The University of California has a website titled UC Guide to Healthy Lawns. It contains a chart of turfgrass species adapted to summer heat that rates their tolerance for drought, wear/traffic, shade, cold, and salinity. That chart can be found at <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/TOOLS/TURF/TURFSPECIES/charhighht.html>.

Types of turf to choose from:

There are two basic categories of turfgrass, warm-season and cool-season. Warmseason grasses usually lose their green color and go dormant if the temperature drops below 50° to 60°F.



“...remember that planting a new lawn requires careful planning and preparation.”

That means that part of the winter your lawn may be brown. Cool-season grasses do not typically lose their green color unless the temperature drops below 32°F.

If you want your grass to be green during at least part of the winter, you should choose a cool-season grass. In inland areas with summer heat there is only one recommended cool-season turf species and that is tall fescue. It has a moderate to high heat tolerance, moderate drought tolerance, moderate to high wear resistance, and moderate shade tolerance. Tall fescue is a good species to plant for general lawn use and is the most common lawn grass in California.

If you don't mind if your grass is brown during the winter then you would choose a warm-season grass. You have three options that have both a high tolerance for drought and wear resistance, and those are Bermudagrass, kikuyugrass, and zoysiagrass. These

grass species have good qualities but here are some things to consider.

Bermudagrass can be a troublesome invader of garden areas. Kikuyugrass has an extremely vigorous growth habit and it is considered to be a weed in some inland areas of California. Zoysiagrass is slow to become established and forms a thick turf, prickly to the touch. A summary of the qualities and cultural requirements of these and many other turfgrass species can be found at the *UC Guide to Healthy Lawns* website.

You now have some options for choosing the right turfgrass for your personal situation but remember that planting a new lawn requires careful planning and preparation. Get help with preparing your planting bed, designing and installing your irrigation system, and ongoing care and maintenance by consulting the *UC Guide to Healthy Lawns* at:

<http://ipm.ucanr.edu/TOOLS/TURF>



Photo by Cheryl A. Reynolds, courtesy UC Statewide IPM Program