

# So Long, Lawn

How to kill your lawn and what to  
plant instead....

# Gene Ratcliffe Tree of Life Nursery



# Why replace lawn?



- Substantially and permanently reduce water use.
- Permanently reduce maintenance costs.
- Reduce /eliminate fertilizer and pesticide use.
- Improve water quality by eliminating irrigation runoff, improve air quality by less mowing.
- Increase color and seasonal interest.

# Cool season turf is the thirstiest landscape material you can use



- Replacing lawn with any other plant material will result in immediate water savings.
- Mediterranean climate plants use 50-75% less water than lawn.
- California natives require less water and fewer garden chemicals than other Mediterranean climate ornamental species.

# How to kill your lawn



# Options for removal vary by speed, cost, and chemical use

- Herbicide treatment, typically using glyphosate (Roundup<sup>®</sup>, etc.). Determine if lawn is a cool season fescue-type or warm season hybrid Bermuda/St Augustine grass before treatment.
- Strip and flip, using a sod-cutter.
- Smother by mulching; only effective for non-rhizomatous grasses such as fescue.

# Considerations before removal

- Rebate programs for turf removal: time limits and pre-approval requirements.
- Irrigation: preserve, modify or replace your existing system for maximum irrigation efficiency. Rebates may also be available.
- High priority lawn areas for removal: slopes, parkways, shaded, unhealthy and other hard to maintain zones.





Remove turf first  
from problem areas

- Slopes
- Dry shade
- Narrow beds,
- Under trees
- High traffic zones



# Keep 'recreational turf'



# I killed it, now what?

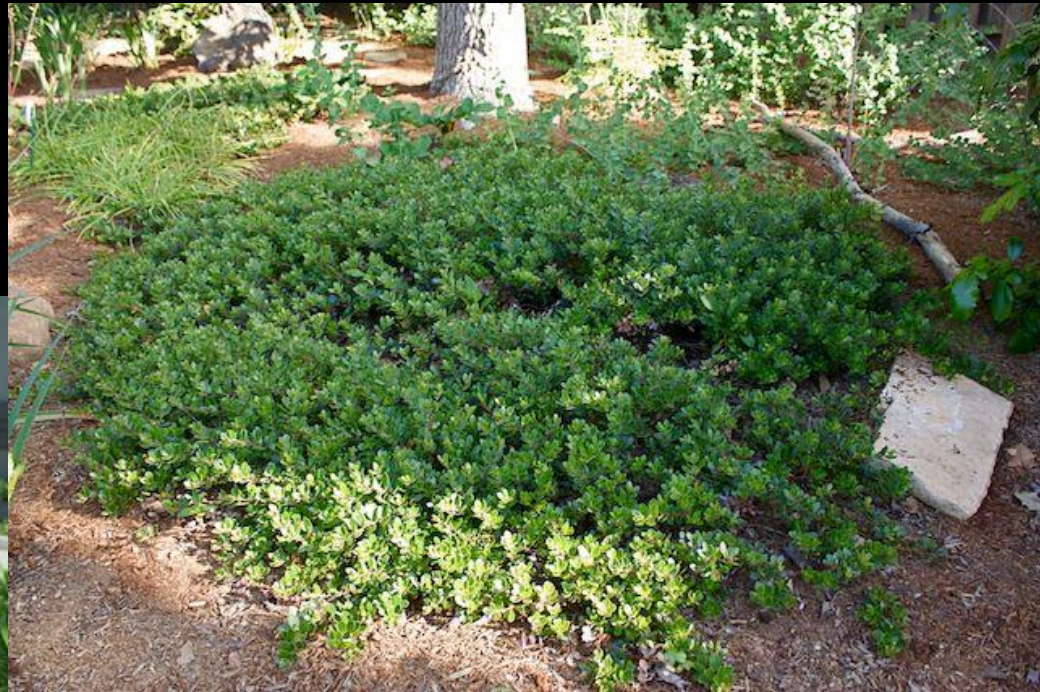
Popular design alternatives; select based on budget, architectural theme, landscape use .

- Green Carpet: flat, green, and tidy.
- Naturalistic: mixed shrubs, ground covers, and flowers.
- Riot of Color: perennials and colored foliage.
- Pavers, flagstone or other pervious, non-plant options.

Green  
Carpet/manicured  
vs.  
Naturalistic / informal







*Arctostaphylos*, Manzanita

Two good 'green  
carpet' options

*Fragaria*, Ornamental Strawberry

Some native 'green carpet' plants:

- *Baccharis* 'Pigeon Point' or 'Twin Peaks'
- *Arctostaphylos* 'Point Reyes'
- *Arctostaphylos* 'Carmel Sur'
- *Fragaria chiloensis* (sun),
- *Fragaria vesca* (shade)
- *Ceanothus* 'Heart's Desire', 'Yankee Point'
- *Salvia* 'Bee's Bliss' or 'Mrs. Beard'



# *Baccharis* 'Pigeon Point'





## *Ceanothus*, California Lilac

An excellent evergreen shrub or ground cover for dry areas and poor soil.



# *Ceanothus* 'Heart's Desire'



No fertilizer required,  
deep roots and minimal  
irrigation for *Ceanothus*



# *Ceanothus* 'Yankee Point'



Ornamental grasses are a low-water  
alternative to turf grasses



*Aristida purpurea*, Purple Three Awn





*Muhlenbergia rigens*, Deer grass

# Naturalistic gardens





Naturalistic designs are low water, low maintenance, and long-lived.





Riot of Color: low water, high impact,  
moderate to high maintenance





Use accent plants in high visibility areas.

Rely on lower maintenance shrubs and ground covers to create a low water, low cost permanent landscape



Consider year-round effect, and remember,  
green is a color, too!





Select plants with seasonal color from flowers and fruit, and varying shades of green



*Salvia* 'Mrs. Beard'



*Arctostaphylos* 'John Dourley'



# Combine California natives and other Mediterranean climate plants





Use pervious hardscape to replace lawn or impervious surfaces and protect water quality.



# Design Resources

- [www.californianativeplants.com](http://www.californianativeplants.com)
- [www.sunset.com/plantfinder](http://www.sunset.com/plantfinder)
- California Native Plants for the Garden  
Bornstein, Fross and O'Brien
- Reimagining the California Lawn  
Bornstein, Fross and O'Brien

# Planning + Preparation = Success

## SAGE ADVICE...



www.CaliforniaNativePlants.com

## The front yard non-lawn.

Think about it. What do you really use your front yard for? In fact, do you even use your front yard? The typical answer... "The front yard is here to make the house look more appealing from the street." And the standard fall-back design has persisted: a patch of green grass surrounded by a few shrubs. That tired old "lawn" look is not very interesting, and certainly not viable (sustainable) in southern California's dry Mediterranean climate. It's a lot of work, water, fertilizer, chemicals and green waste transport, with no local habitat value. A big environmental negative. Not much return on your investment.

Consider the no-lawn alternative if you have not already. The front yard is a great place to start. If there are kids at home, you might be utilizing a back yard lawn for play or you may need it for entertaining or for pets. For now, you could concentrate on improving your home by replacing just your front yard lawn with native plants for beauty and wildlife. Many people, after experiencing the workings of a mini-ecosystem in their own front yard, will extend their pleasure to the back yard, by reducing the size of the turf or eliminating it altogether. They replace boring shrubs with herb gardens, fruit trees, raised beds for veggies, and natives for habitat. They build attractive patios for entertaining. But that's another subject.

Let's start in the front for now. Get your camera, because the changes will be drastic.



### CHOOSE A THEME.

Take into account the architectural style of your home, your growing conditions and soil type, the kind of mini-ecosystem you would like to see everyday. Do you have a favorite natural area? Is it a forest, a mountain meadow, the desert, a dry stream through chaparral, or a coastal bluff? Start by matching your house with your lifestyle and your likes. Whatever you envision, it will be unique to you and your house and will definitely make your whole neighborhood more interesting.



### OUT WITH THE OLD.

Now this will get the neighbor's attention. Dig up the shrubs, kill the lawn, remove whatever cannot be turned into mulch, get it all down to bare earth. Address any drainage or soil concerns at this time. Make it a clean slate.

### HARDSCAPE.

If you plan to improve old walkways or install new ones, build planters, a patio, deck, fountain, or birdbath, now is the time. Match the materials and style to your new garden theme.

### IRRIGATION.

Presumably, if you had a lawn sprinkler system, it will not work well on the new landscape; wrong area, too much water, or improper heads. Tear it out. You can plan and install a new system, get the place ready for drip irrigation, or leave it without a permanent system.

### IRRIGATION - MANUAL.

One of the most effective ways to water a habitat-style native plant garden is with a single hose-end manually operated mini-sprinkler. You just set it, irrigate a section, move it around bit by bit until you finish the whole garden, and store it away until its next use. If you plan on using manual irrigation, make sure you have hose bbs conveniently located to hook up the sprinklers.

### IRRIGATION - AUTOMATIC.

You have many options if you desire a new sprinkler system, customized for your native plant garden. You can find



## REPLACING YOUR LAWN WITH NATIVE PLANTS I:

### Kill Your Lawn!

Removing or reducing the amount of turf you have on your property to make way for a native landscape is a wonderfully rewarding experience! Say goodbye to the maintenance headache, high water use, and lawnmower hum of your tired lawn and prepare to welcome the sound of songbirds and the sight of hummingbirds and butterflies in your landscape.

#### STEP ONE, (WHICH CAN BE A CHALLENGING ONE), IS KILLING THE LAWN.

Why should you 'Kill Your Lawn'?

By removing some or all of your turf you will:

- Reduce water use dramatically
- Reduce or eliminate fertilizer and associated polluted runoff
- Eliminate weekly maintenance labor and expense
- Free up square footage for more attractive and beneficial native plants!

#### 2. HOW TO KILL YOUR LAWN

Identify the type of turf you have

- Cool season grass: Fescue, HardTurf, Bluegrass and grass blends that stay green in the winter
- Warm season grass: Bermuda, St Augustine, Zoysia and any rhizomatous grass that is brown in winter

#### 3. DETERMINE A STRATEGY FOR REMOVAL BASED UPON THESE FACTORS

- Grass type
- Season of removal
- Timeline



#### 4. COOL SEASON GRASSES: HARD TO GROW, EASY TO KILL, QUICK TO REPLACE

- Smother with mulch, no plastic
- Strip and flip using a sod-cutting machine, mark and avoid sprinkler heads that may be retrofitted for the new garden.
- Rototill, only if no rhizomatous weedy grasses are present
- Herbicide- typically not necessary with cool season grasses

#### 5. WARM SEASON GRASSES: EASY TO GROW, HARD TO KILL, SLOW TO REPLACE

- DO NOT ROTOTILL
- Hand removal by weeding, digging out roots (difficult)
- Herbicide- controversial but effective, each gardener needs to make their own cost/benefit analysis of this method

#### 6. GROW AND KILL.

- Glyphosate-based herbicides (Roundup, Rodeo, others) low toxicity, short residual
- Non-selective herbicide, tailor application method to site conditions to avoid damage to desirable plants
- Seasonal- most effective and fastest when plants are metabolically active, warm season for these grasses
- Exhaust stored food reserves in their extensive root systems by repeated cycles: water, grow, spray, kill.
- Dormancy resembles death. Premature planting of your new garden will mean years of follow-up hand pulling. Patience and diligence are required to eliminate these types of grasses.



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# But we can't take out the lawn....

- We have kids and dogs
- My neighbors will hate me
- My property value will plummet







Kids ✓



Dogs ✓  
Neighbors ✓  
Property value ✓

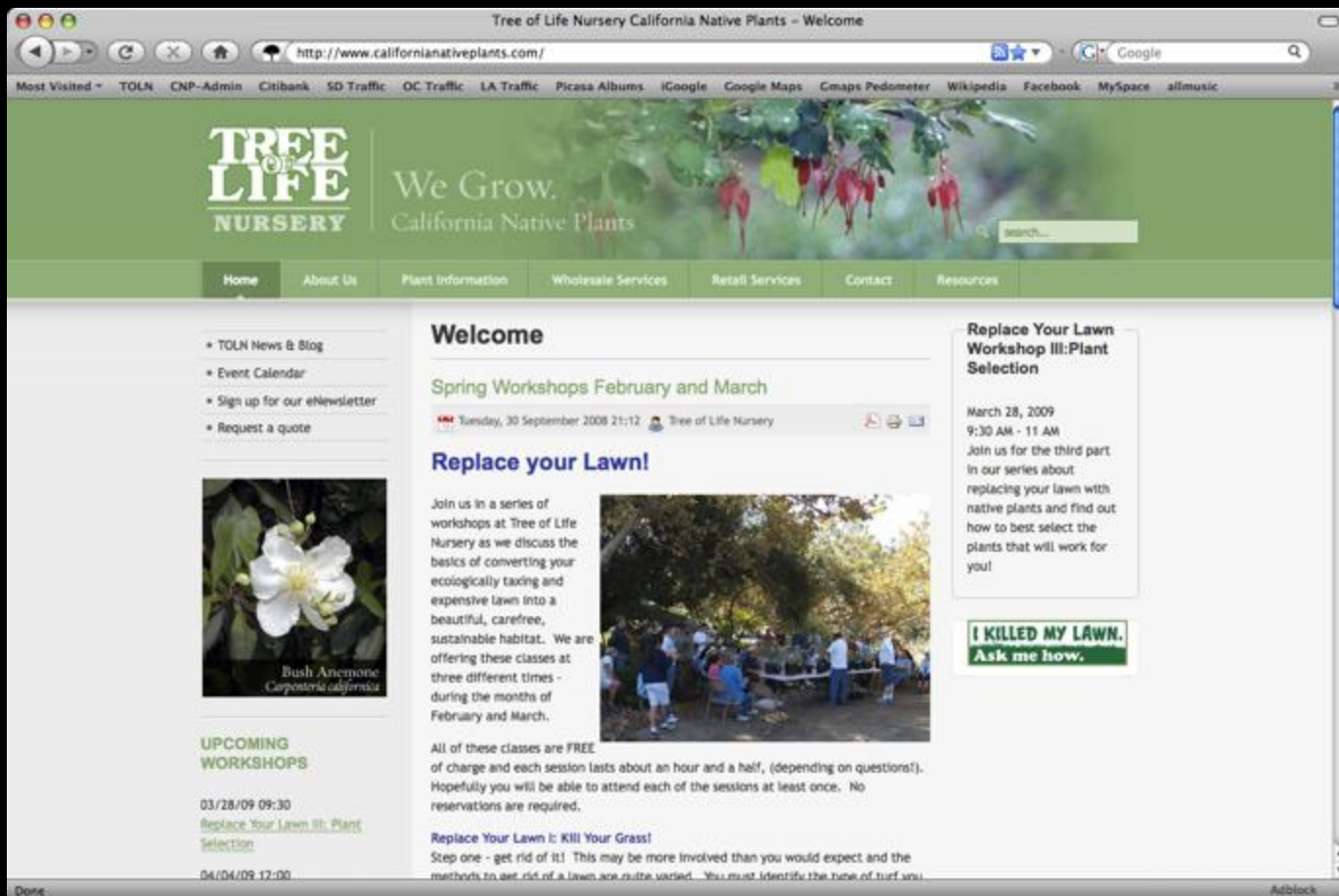




# So Long, Lawn

- Save water and money
- Reduce maintenance costs
- Improve local water  
quality and air quality
- Create a distinctive and  
beautiful landscape

Thank You



[www.CaliforniaNativePlants.com](http://www.CaliforniaNativePlants.com)

