



Want Your Lawn Gone?

*Explore how to transform your yard into something beautiful
and water-wise!*

Why Lawn Conversion?

Lawns use a large amount of water and other resources.

Replacing them with native and climate appropriate plantings conserves water, improves ecological and human health, and creates vital habitat for birds and other wildlife.



Uses 25,800 gallons/year → Uses 2,230 gallons/year
Saves **23,570** gallons of water a year!

What's inside this guide:

- What is lawn conversion?
- How to convert a lawn
- Lawn alternatives
- What we **don't** recommend
- Downsides of lawns

What Does Lawn Conversion Look Like?

Replacing turf

- **Native or climate appropriate plants**
 - Native plants generally use 60 - 80% less water than traditional landscaping plants
 - Native plants can create beautiful, functional habitat gardens



- **Low water-use lawn alternatives/ground covers**
 - A grassy garden can still be achieved by using large water-wise bunch grasses or treadable ones for people and pets

Reducing the size of a lawn

- This option saves water and allows some lawn to stay if needed for play or gathering space. Creating a border of native plants in an existing lawn makes a difference for water conservation and habitat.



Lawn reduction and replacement with [native yarrow](#), coupled with native plant border and ground cover.
Photo credit to Stephanie Morris, Landscape Architect whose work can be found at [NativePlantDesign.com](#).

Removal options

- **Sheet mulching:** a preferred method for soil restoration, Layers of compost, cardboard and mulch work together to retain moisture, build soil, and block weeds.



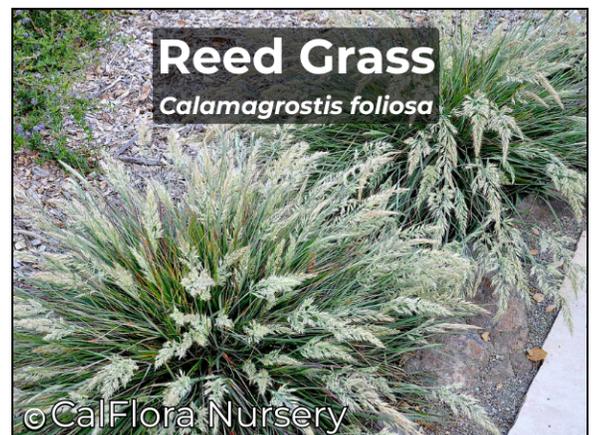
- **Solarization:** opaque/black plastic is set in place for a set amount of time to block sunlight from reaching lawn
- **Manual removal:** manually removing lawn is an option, yet roots may remain for pernicious grasses (i.e. bermuda)



Beyond Lawn Alternatives (Sonoma County Specific)

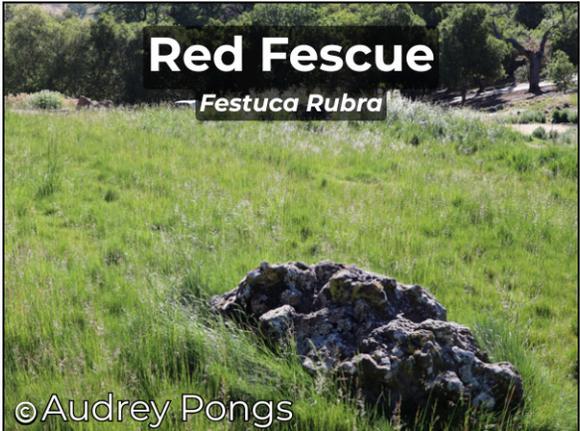
Grass Alternatives

- CA Native Grasses ([click for resource](#))
 - Larger/bunch grasses

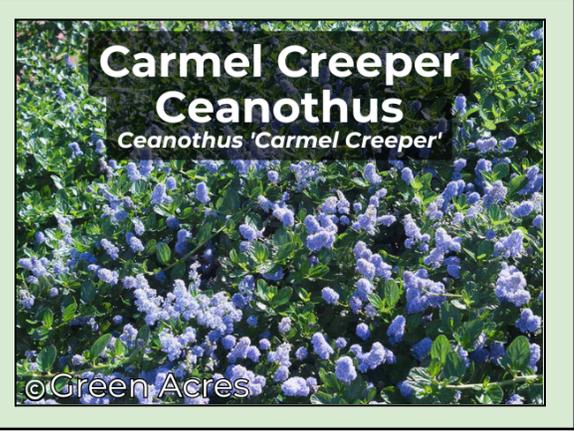
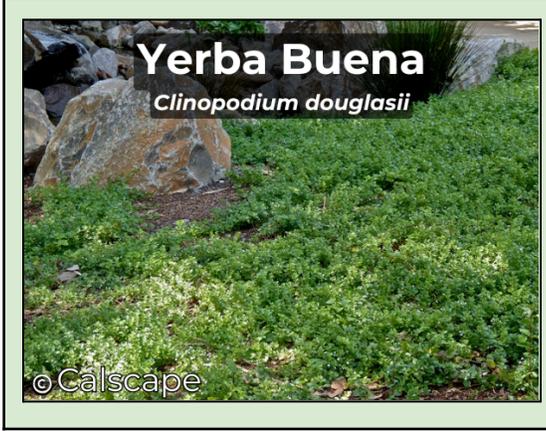


- (CA Native) Walkable Lawn Alternatives





○ (CA Native) Groundcovers



○ (Non-Native) Walkable Lawn Alternatives ([click for resource](#))

Very Low Water Use 	Low Water Use  
<p>Buffalo Grass <i>Buchloe dactyloides</i></p> 	<p>Dymondia, Rock Ditty <i>Dymondia margaretae</i></p> 
<p>Elfin Creeping Thyme <i>Thymus praecox arcticus 'Elfin'</i></p> 	<p>Woolly Thyme <i>Thymus pseudolanuginosus</i></p> 
<p>White Clover <i>Trifolium repens</i></p> 	<p>Turf Zoysia De Anza <i>Zoysia 'De Anza'</i></p> 



● **Climate Appropriate Plantings** ([click for resource](#))

○ A few of our favorite plants for Sonoma County Gardens:

<p>Yarrow <i>Achillea millefolium</i></p> 	<p>Coyote Mint <i>Monardella villosa</i></p> 
<p>California Lilac <i>Ceanothus spp.</i></p> 	<p>California Fescue <i>Festuca californica</i></p> 
<p>CA Grey Rush <i>Juncus patens</i></p> 	<p>Foothill Penstemon <i>Penstemon heterophyllus</i></p> 
<p>California Fuchsia <i>Epilobium Canum</i></p> 	<p>Seaside Daisy <i>Erigeron glaucus</i></p> 

○ Check out our [Wildscaping Resource](#) for more detailed information and inspiration

*Why aren't there any examples of artificial turf, concrete/rock gardens, or succulent gardens?

Why we are not recommending those options:

Artificial Turf (click for resource)

- Contains hundreds of **harmful chemicals** that leach into waterways and can cause health problems for people and animals
- With an average lifespan of 10 years, artificial turf causes additional problems as it breaks down
 - Creates **microplastics** that pollute waterways and groundwater
 - Creates more **landfill waste** (recycling centers generally do not handle this material)
- Surface can **require regular cleaning** (especially with pets)
- In hot seasons, it can reach **scorching temperatures** for skin and **radiates ambient heat**, making for hotter environments

Rock & Succulent Gardens

- Provide little to no habitat for wildlife
- Rocks increases **heat** radiation
 - This can stress or damage surrounding plants and soil
- Difficulty with **weeding**
 - Fewer plants to outcompete weeds
- **Blocks soil water absorption**
 - Unlike organic mulch, which absorbs and holds water for a longer period of time, rocks do not maintain moisture



Rocks are a natural part of ecosystems. Note the difference in habitat between these landscapes.

Concrete/hardscape

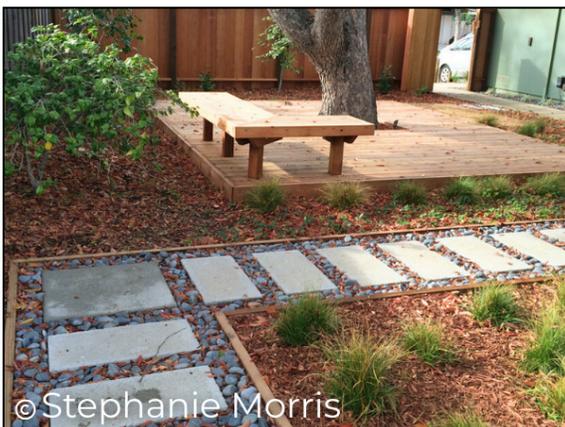
- **Prevents water percolation into soil**
 - Instead of hydrating a landscape, water flows to storm drains
 - Reducing groundwater recharge
 - Increasing possible pollutants in local (and not so local) aquatic ecosystems
 - Permeable landscaping is recommended wherever possible



Leaving space, or cutting in existing concrete, for trees/plantings allows for percolation into the soil and cooling from provided shade

- **Increases heat radiation** (urban heat island effect)
 - Concrete holds heat for long periods of time, causing the nearby environment to be hotter, longer
 - This can stress or harm surrounding plants and soil
- Produces **high carbon emissions**

The process of creating concrete releases carbon dioxide: the concrete industry is responsible for about 8% of the world's carbon emissions



Permeable landscapes can still provide a “clean” look. Reused, broken concrete makes a border and accent in the garden.

Further information on the effects of lawns

- Lawns provide little to no ecological services, like habitat or food, for wildlife.
- Often lawns go unutilized or only exist for aesthetics.
 - Starting January 2027, California law (AB 1572) will no longer permit the use of potable (drinking) water for **nonfunctional turf**, which are *lawns that have no recreational or community purpose*. This is in effect at most commercial, industrial, and institutional (CII) properties, including common areas managed by homeowner associations (HOAs).
 - **Residences can consider the concept of “Nonfunctional Lawn” where they live as well**
- 50% of an average US household’s water use is for irrigation (and lawns require a lot of it)
- Turf grasses cover about 2% of the surface of the continental US (63,000 sq ft), making it the single largest irrigated crop in the country, accounting for a third of Americans’ total water usage
 - These lawns, reimagined as a mosaic of habitats (*see the [Home Grown National Park](#) movement*) could provide food and habitat for healthy local ecosystems and biodiversity
- Lawn mowers use over 800 million gallons of gas per year in the US, contributing to 5% of air pollution
 - Mowers create dangerous levels of noise pollution—measuring a damaging 100 decibels - for people and wildlife
 - Converting lawn reduces water usage and maintenance in the long run— that could mean no more mowing, or less mowing (though weed removal will be necessary for the first few years when the new garden is getting established)
- Common **pesticides and fertilizers** used on lawns are linked to a [variety of health problems](#), for people and pets, waterways and the environment
 - Fertilizers don’t just remain on site: they enter waterways and can cause “eutrophication” in ponds and streams. Excess nutrients promote

extra growth of organisms (like algae) which then block sunlight and deoxygenate the waterways

- Native and climate-appropriate plantings do not require - or thrive in- fertilized conditions



Learn more on the [Lawn & Garden Pesticides](#) fact sheet

Lawn Conversion Resources

- [Sheet Mulching 101](#) & [Solarization](#)
- [Daily Acts' Resource Library](#)
- [Mulch Madness \(Petaluma\)](#)- Free program to support the conversion of currently irrigated lawns. Provides compost, cardboard, and mulch for sheet mulching.
- [Nonfunctional Turf](#) -a *California Water Efficiency Partnership* website and resource offering information, videos, training, and support with lawn conversion.
- [Pros & Cons of Grass Removal Options](#) - *California Native Plant Society (CNPS)*
- [Garden Gallery](#) - Native plant landscapes inspiration from CNPS
- [Homegrown National Park®](#) is full of supportive resources with the mission to raise awareness and urgently inspire everyone to address the biodiversity crisis by adding native plants and removing invasive ones where we live, work, learn, pray, and play.
- [California Flora Nursery](#) (Fulton/North Santa Rosa) specializing in native plants
- [Calscape](#) some information and images courtesy of [Calscape.org](#)