

Piedmont Lawns and Lawn Alternatives

Review the presentation and learn more:

<http://go.ncsu.edu/lawn-resources>

Sustainable Landscapes

Lawns can be part of sustainable landscapes when appropriately sited and adapted turf species or turf alternatives are selected.

The most important thing you can do to increase the sustainability of your lawn is to minimizing turf to areas where it is an appropriate choice based on site conditions and intended use of the area.

Site Conditions:

- Sunny—at least 4 hrs of sun per day
- Well drained soil
- Relatively flat to gently sloped
- Smooth, graded surface
- Relatively large block with curving edges

Usage:

Turf is the appropriate choice when a:

- Wear tolerant surface is needed, for play or recreation
- Very low (2-3") surface is needed for view or line of site
- Access route is needed to other parts of the property

Allowing lawns to go dormant during drought and tolerating some weeds also increases sustainability.

Reducing Maintenance

Reduce the amount of time and money you spend on your lawn by reducing its size. Easy ways to reduce lawn size include:

- Eliminate difficult to maintain areas such as narrow strips, tight angles, or under trees—expand mulch or plant groundcovers
- Don't try to grow turf in shady or wet spots—instead plant groundcovers, trees or shrubs adapted to the site
- Turf will not survive in areas that receive daily heavy traffic—replace with a path

Turf Options for Piedmont Landscapes

There are three main turf grasses used in Piedmont lawns:

- Tall fescue
- Bermuda
- Zoysia

Which is the best for your lawn depends on the amount of sun your site receives, your preferences for appearance and wear tolerance, and how much you are willing to spend to establish and maintain the lawn.

Tall Fescue

Tall fescue is a cool season (CS) grass. CS grasses grow roots and shoots in spring and fall. They stay green during winter and persist through summer but may go dormant during drought.

Tall fescue is the most heat tolerant CS grass. It has wide, dark green leaf blades and should never be mowed lower than 2.5" (preferably 3").

Tall fescue is the easiest grass to establish from seed, which should be sown in mid-Sept—mid Oct. It is a bunch grass—each seed produces one plant that grows larger but does not spread by underground roots.

When individual grass plants die (due to disease or drought) the lawn can become patchy, allowing weeds to establish. Tall fescue lawns typically need to be overseeded every 2-4 years. When purchasing tall fescue seed check the label for names varieties recommended by NC State.

Adding mini- or micro-clover to tall fescue lawns reduces the amount of fertilization needed by up to 25%. Mix clover seed with tall fescue seed at a rate of 0.2—0.3 lbs clover seed per 6lbs of tall fescue seed, to cover a 1000 sq. ft. area.

Other Cool Season Grasses

Other cool season grasses include annual and perennial ryegrass, Kentucky bluegrass and fine fescues such as chewings and creeping red. These are not good choices for Piedmont lawns.

Warm Season Grasses

Zoysia and Bermuda are warm season turf grasses. They go dormant during winter and grow roots and shoots from spring through fall. Both spread by rhizomes and stolons (underground and aboveground roots). As a result, they can fill in (heal) damaged areas but also invade garden areas and landscape beds.

Bermudagrass—Most bermudagrass varieties were developed for golf courses and sport fields. They need full sun, are extremely wear tolerant but also require frequent mowing and fertilization.

Bermuda lawns have a grey-green color and should be mowed low, 1-2". Some types of bermudagrass can be seeded but they are inferior in quality to sodded varieties.

Zoysiagrass—Zoysia is a medium green, moderately vigorous and shade tolerant turfgrass. It is less maintenance intensive than Bermuda and more suitable to residential landscapes.

Newer, wider bladed varieties of zoysia are the best choice from home lawns. They should be mowed at 2-3". Compadre and Zenith are seed strains, but zoysia is slow to establish from seed. Crowne, Empire and El Toro are sodded varieties.

Turf Alternatives

There are no living turf alternatives that tolerate regular wear but several different types of plants can be grown in place of turf. Paths can be added to provide access through the area. The right choice for your yard will depend on the site conditions and

your needs and preferences for appearance and landscape use.

Trees are the best option for **steep slopes**, but shrubs and mass plantings of ornamental grasses can also work.

In wet areas, plant moisture tolerant trees, shrubs and perennials. For a grass like look, try sedges (*Carex*), common rush (*Juncus effusus*), rain lilies (*Zephyranthes*), or sweet flag (*Acorus*)

For shady spots, allow moss to grow or plant shade tolerant groundcovers such as low growing sedges or dwarf mondo grass for a grassy look. Other shady groundcover options include woodland stonecrop (*Sedum ternatum*), green and gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*), foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) and ferns.

Groundcovers for sun include moss pinks (*Phlox subulata*), cheddar pinks (*Dianthus gratianopolitanus*), low growing sedums, creeping juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*), shore juniper (*Juniperus conferta*).

Meadows, composed of native grasses and perennials, are an alternative to large turf areas. Meadows can be seeded in fall with seed for the local region.

Before planting grass, meadow seed, or groundcovers, cultivate the soil, add lime and nutrients based on soil test results and eliminate weeds.

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Gardening questions?

Contact Chatham County Extension Master

Gardener Volunteers—Mon and Thurs, 1-4 pm,

- Call 919-545-2715
- Email: chathamemgv@gmail.com



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