



# Lawn Care Playbook



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# Kickoff

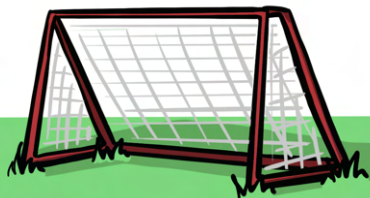
Thinking about making some lawn or landscaping improvements around your home, community, or sports field? Then this guide is for you! Read through this brief reference to make your next lawn project a chip shot. You just might learn something that affirms your actions or completely changes your mind!

This guide will show you how a turfgrass lawn fits into a balanced landscape, why it's so much better for us and the environment than artificial turf, and several strategies and tips for creating and maintaining a beautiful lawn. The Washington Turfgrass Seed Commission developed this reference with you in mind.

**Enjoy!**



# the Washington advantage



The growers of turfgrass seed in Washington voted to establish the Washington Turfgrass Seed Commission to fund research, share information, and develop markets for all things turfgrass.

After all, Washington produces some of the highest-quality turfgrass seed in the country with its ideal soils and climate. From growers to consumers, the Commission works hard behind the scenes to drive the supply chain and provide a high-quality product.



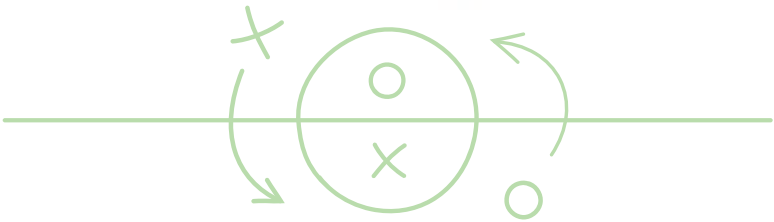
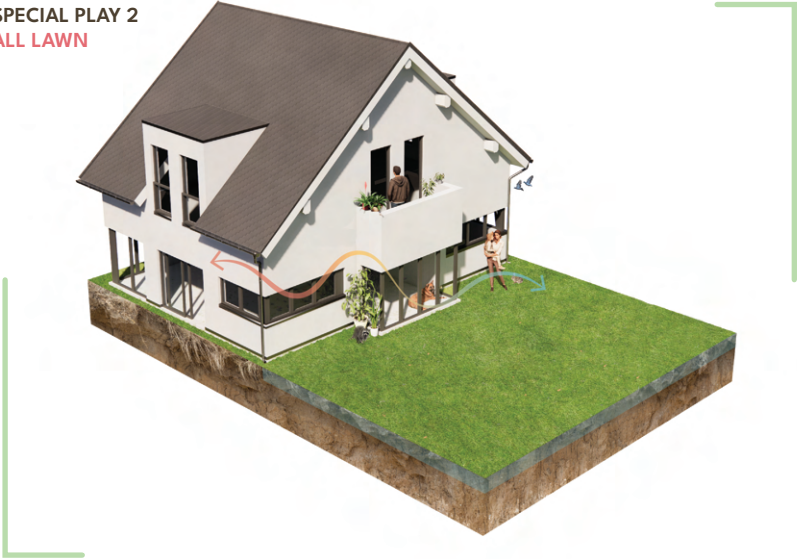
## WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY (WSU)

WSU is a turfgrass veteran, having offered courses on the subject since 1955! The Perennial Grass Breeding and Ecology Farm research site develops new hybrids that are more drought-resistant, higher yielding, and possess other desirable traits. The graphic below is an example of current research from WSU showcasing a specific lawn typology.

SPECIAL PLAY 1  
LAWN & GARDEN



**SPECIAL PLAY 2**  
**ALL LAWN**



**SPECIAL PLAY 3**  
**XERISCAPE**

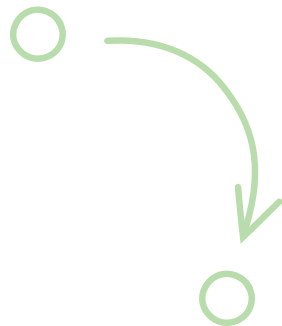




The grass in our lawns is doing more for us and the environment than we give it credit for. Check out this impressive list!

#### GRASS:

- Stores carbon dioxide
- Creates oxygen
- Cleans air and water
- Creates wildfire-defensible space around homes
- Cools communities
- Provides safe recreational areas
- Quiets noise in urban areas
- Anchors soil to prevent erosion
- Contributes to a balanced ecosystem that builds soil health
- Improves mental health and overall quality of life
- Boosts home curb appeal and value



To summarize, grass is good! It's a living thing that contributes to our nutrient cycle, water cycle, and is the basis of the food chain. That's a hat trick! Many of these benefits are often overlooked. This has caused lawns and sports fields to be replaced with artificial turf. As the next section demonstrates, this practice is not only harmful to the environment, but to our own health and well-being.

Reference: Beard & Green. 1994. The Role of Turfgrasses in Environmental Protection and Their Benefits to Humans. Environmental Quality, Vol. 23.



## Artificial turf has been thought of as an eco-friendly alternative — it's not. Check out this alarming list.

### ARTIFICIAL TURF:

- Endangers athletes with high field temperatures and a harder playing surface, leading to more injuries
- Heats up space around the home, putting family and pets at risk
- Discharges harmful chemicals (PAHs, PFAS and 6PPD) from tire crumbs and other components into our air, water, and landscape as they break down
- Costs you more money and time than a real turfgrass lawn, as routine maintenance is still required
- Sheds rubber and plastic pieces all over when replacing/cleaning
- Still requires watering on occasion for sanitary and cooling purposes

### ARTIFICIAL TURF IS **NOT** ALIVE.

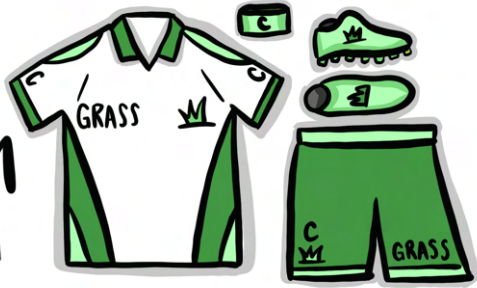
The only things it contributes to the environment are forever chemicals, compounds that are toxic and last for thousands of years. It lacks all of the benefits grass provides while bringing forth a host of unnecessary problems. Artificial turf leads to dangerous play, and it's time it gets the red card!

Visit [saferfieldsforall.org](https://saferfieldsforall.org) to learn more.



Reference: Murphy & Warner. 2022. Health impacts of artificial turf: Toxicology studies, challenges, and future directions. *Environmental Pollution*, Vol. 310.

# GRASS: the team captain



## Real grass lawns are an important player in the back- or front-yard team.

It's a habitat that provides people a place to conveniently gather outdoors and promotes physical and mental well-being, all while supporting a host of ecosystem services. Not many other habitats can lay claim to that.

### WILDFIRE FRIENDLY

Speaking of physical well-being, open grass lawns make an excellent defensible space should a wildfire occur. This space lacks combustible materials and gives firefighters space to work. Keep your lawn clean and green, meaning removing any combustible fuels like dead leaves and sticks within 100 feet of your home, if possible. There's a smart way to incorporate other vegetation, and we'll cover that next.





# a balanced ROSTER



When you think of your yard as a team, what other players are needed for a balanced roster?



## TREES AND SHRUBS

Trees and shrubs possess many of the same benefits as grass. In addition, they provide shade, more wildlife habitat, and privacy. Before planting, do your homework and make sure you allow proper spacing between your home and each plant.



## GRASSES AND FLOWERS

Tall bunch grasses and flowers are other excellent additions to your yard. Again, personal and environmental benefits abound, and the pollinator traffic you'll see from bees and butterflies will amaze you. Just be sure to leave appropriate spacing for maintenance.



## STONE AND CONCRETE

These are smart choices within the first five feet of your home. They aren't combustible, and they provide a nice buffer between plants.

note:

Native species perform the best in your region's climate and offer unique benefits to wildlife. So consider them!



## We've established that real lawns are important, so what are they made of?

Let's go through the primary cool-season turfgrasses grown in Washington State.

**KENTUCKY BLUEGRASS**, the most popular turfgrass, and **PERENNIAL RYEGRASS**, the toughest, are perfect for sports fields and home lawns with heavy traffic. Kentucky Bluegrass also spreads quickly to fill in bare spots. Plant in areas receiving full sun.



**TALL FESCUE** is a well-rounded grass that scores high in both drought tolerance and shade tolerance thanks to a deeper root system.

**SLENDER, HARD, AND CREEPING RED FESCUES** can be grouped together under Fine-Leaved Fescues. These varieties are the most drought-tolerant and shade-tolerant. They also don't require as much water, fertilizer, or mowing as the other grasses, making them a good low-maintenance option. They do best in lower-traffic areas, so it's best to use them in a mix for better durability over time.

note:

More than 90% of the world's bluegrass seed is grown in the Pacific Northwest!

Reference: WSU. 2015. Home Lawns.

# Lawn establishment & Renovation



## You've selected your seed; now it's time to put it in the ground.

Put your game plan together over the winter or summer, as the best seasons to do the work are spring and fall. This should reduce the need for irrigation and take extreme temperatures out of the mix, giving your new grass a chance at victory.

### HOW TO ESTABLISH NEW LAWNS OR REPLACE LAWNS BEYOND REPAIR:

- Smooth out soil with rake and remove unwanted debris
- Firm ground with roller if settling may occur
- Thoroughly water area and allow water to soak in
- After surface is dry, seed grass by hand or with mechanical spreader
- Rake seed into ground no deeper than 1/4 inch
- Water seedbed thoroughly

### HOW TO RENOVATE LAWNS THAT HAVE BECOME THIN AND PATCHY:

- Rake to break up soil surface and remove dead residue to ensure seed-to-soil contact
- Seed grass by hand or with mechanical spreader
- Rake seed into ground no deeper than 1/4 inch
- Water seedbed thoroughly



# Watering



## Real grass requires proper watering to perform its best in your yard.

There are many factors that determine your lawn's ideal watering rate, including grass species, soil type, and climate.

**SANDY SOILS** are more coarse with low water-holding capacity. Use less water but water more frequently; half an inch each time should be sufficient.

**SILTS, CLAYS, AND LOAMS** are finer-textured soils with good water holding capacity; 1 inch of water per watering is recommended to saturate the root zone.

**HOT AND DRY CLIMATES** need more water than cool and wet ones. Only water when necessary to save water, time, and money as well as prevent fertilizer loss. Watering late at night or early in the morning is most efficient and reduces evaporation.

For more specifics on watering rates and methods, check out the reference at the bottom of this page.



Reference: WSU. 2021.  
Watering Lawns in Washington to Save Water,  
Save Money, and Have a Healthy, Green Lawn.



**Make a plan**  
**Mower maintenance**  
**Relax!**

# fertilizing



## Fertilizer is like a vitamin for plants.

It supplements the nutrients they need but can't get from the soil. Before fertilizing your lawn, it's smart to take soil samples from your yard to learn your soil's current nutrient levels. Knowing this, you can purchase and apply the right fertilizer.

The three primary nutrients in lawn fertilizers are nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, or N, P, and K. Sulfur (S) is also important and can reduce weeds and disease in lawns. Apply the difference between WSU/local professional recommendations and your soil test results for a great-looking lawn.

### FERTILIZERS COME IN TWO PRIMARY FORMS:

1) Granular, which is most often slow release, and 2) liquid, which is primarily quick release. A steep slope or sandy soil benefits most from a quick release, whereas a slow release works better on flatter areas and loamy soils.

Fertilizer can become a pollutant if it leaches or runs off into water bodies, so be sure to apply the Four R's of nutrient stewardship: the right source, at the right rate, at the right time, at the right place.

Learn more about rates and timing of fertilizer application by visiting the reference below.

Reference: WSU. 2015. Home Lawns.





Once the lawn has been watered and fertilized, it will grow quickly under the right weather conditions.

That means it's time to prep for mowing so that we can maintain a visually pleasing and functional lawn space throughout the season.

Prepare the mower by fixing any fuel or gas leaks, sharpening or replacing the cutting blade, and setting the desired mowing height.

Mowing too short can damage the grass, making it susceptible to insects and disease. Mow too tall, and thick residue will blanket the soil surface, reducing water, nutrient, and air movement. Two inches is a good universal height to start with for most cool-season grasses, and limit cutting to 1/3 of the grass height each time.

SUMMER

**Mow**

**Water**

**Fertilize**

**Check for pests/disease**



Under adequate moisture conditions, most lawns will need to be mowed once a week. If your climate is cool and wet, more frequent mowing might be required. If your climate is hot and dry, less frequent mowing is recommended to promote deeper root growth and reduce grass stress.



## Common lawn invaders throughout the season are diseases, insects, and weeds.

Knowing what to look for and taking timely action is key to keeping them under control.

### DISEASES

Diseases like red thread, fairy rings, and powdery mildew can harm your lawn. Look for areas that appear dead, moldy, or where the grass is losing its dark green color. If you see something, consult a professional to learn the exact disease and develop a program to have it treated — the sooner the better!

### INSECTS

Cutworms, lawn billbugs, and sod webworms are just a few of the insects that can damage a lawn if not properly managed. Most insecticides work well, and proper aeration may be needed to assure proper soil penetration.

### WEEDS

Weeds take advantage of any open space, so try to prevent them by maintaining a thick and uniform lawn. If a few pop up, just pull them. If there are too many to pull, then consider a herbicide. Always follow label instructions, and only spray on calm days below 80 degrees.



**PREVENTION IS KEY!** Most of these problems occur when lawns are overwatered, overfertilized, or neglected. Follow the recommendations in this booklet and use the listed references for more in-depth guidance.



Look for us  
ONLINE AND ON SOCIAL MEDIA

