




From Dead Zone to Healthy Habitat: Options for Replacing Your Existing Lawn

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Why Replace Your (Traditional Turfgrass) Lawn?

- Water is a limited resource, but in a desert lawns require regular watering & are often overwatered.
- Mowing uses fuel & labor. If overwatered or cut too short they need to be mowed even more often.
- Overfertilization can affect soluble oxygen in waterways & add nitrates to water, leading to algal blooms & affecting the quality of drinking water.
- Non-native turfgrasses, which haven't co-evolved with native insects, don't provide habitat or food for pollinators or wildlife in general.

Why Replace Your (Traditional Turfgrass) Lawn?

- Native plants provide food, shelter, & habitat for native insects, birds, and other wildlife.
- Drought-adapted native plants require **far** less water than turfgrass lawns, especially after establishment.
- Aside from weeding, the lawn alternatives we'll talk about need little maintenance.
- Lawn alternatives are more visually interesting than a lawn.



Eco-Friendly Lawn Alternatives

Replace your ecological dead zone with native plants and add paths—crushed gravel, stepstones, pavers, or even mulch—for moving through your yard.



Drought-Tolerant Native Grass Lawns

- A lawn seeded with a mix of native grasses adapted to your site conditions will require far less watering than a traditional turfgrass lawn—weekly, biweekly, or even less--after establishment.
- You can leave your native lawn unmowed or mow it as needed for play or outdoor events.
- Derby Canyon Natives carries several native grass seed blends.
- The Naturalized Turf Blend consists primarily of fescues and other short grasses.
- The other blends are targeted for average annual precipitation: <12", 12-22", and >22". The grass species vary in mature height.
- You can also customize your own blend.
- No matter what option you choose, those species that are best adapted to your site will dominate over time.

Native Grasses + Low-Growing Flowers = Eco-Lawns



- **Yaak (turf-type) yarrow** (*Achillea millefolium* 'Yaak'): A low-growing yarrow that blooms on short stems and works well with native fescues, prairie Junegrass, and clovers.
- **Native clovers:** **Maiden or small-headed clover** (*Trifolium microcephalum*), an annual semi-creeping spring wildflower; **foothill clover** (*Trifolium cilolatum*), an annual tolerant of harsh conditions; and **large-headed clover** (*Trifolium macrocephalum*), a short perennial with 3-4" flowers.

Native Grasses + Low-Growing Flowers = Eco-Lawns



- **Three-week fescue** (*Festuca microstachys*): This quick-growing annual grass is useful for filling in among slower-growing grasses and perennials, helping reduce weeds, tolerates poor soils, and is a host plant for many butterfly and moth caterpillars.
- **Poverty oatgrass** (*Danthonia spicata*): This slow- and low-growing (4-6" leaves, 12" flower stalks) grass tolerates full sun to part shade and coarse, poor soils and won't crowd out perennial flowers. It's also a caterpillar host plant.
- **Path rush** (*Juncus tenuis*): This 6-12" tufted little plant is tolerant of trampling, tough conditions, and mowing and can be interplanted with low-growing wildflowers.

Wildflower Meadows

- Include annuals, perennials, & bunchgrasses.
- Something should be in bloom from spring into late summer/early fall.
- Choose a specific color palette or go wild with a riot of different colors.
- Perennials & summer-blooming annuals should be adapted to your site.
- Spring annuals from regions with more rainfall should bloom but will die in the summer.
- Many annuals will reseed. A few may eventually get crowded out by perennials and grasses while others are more competitive.
- Grasses should be tall enough not to be overwhelmed by the flowers.
- *Photo belongs to NorthwestMeadowscapes.com.*



Tips for Your Wildflower Meadow

- Choose as many species of perennials, annuals, & bunchgrasses as you'd like.
- Your meadow will change over time as some species outcompete others.
- Plan on seeding (almost) everything.
- Include some plants if you can't wait or can't obtain seeds.
- Some species (e.g., arrowleaf balsamroot and lupines) should usually be seeded.
- Annuals should be seeded, preferably in late fall though early spring works for some species.
- Some species require patience & might take 2-3 yrs to break dormancy and germinate.

Wildflower Meadow Ideas for Very Dry Sites

- Annuals will help fill in bare areas as some species go dormant.
- **Perennials:** Arrowleaf balsamroot, silky and sulphur lupine, line-leaved daisy, threadleaf fleabane, barestem biscuitroot, creamy buckwheat, snow buckwheat
- **Bunchgrasses:** Indian rice grass, bottlebrush squirreltail, bluebunch wheatgrass
- **Annuals:** Globe gilia, threadleaf and lacy phacelia, diamond clarkia, elkhorn clarkia, large-flowered collomia, maiden clover, farewell to spring, yellow beeplant, hoary tansyaster

Wildflower Meadow Ideas for Moderately Dry Sites

- **Perennials:** Arrowleaf balsamroot, silky and sulphur lupine, sulphur buckwheat, silverleaf phacelia, yarrow, spreading dogbane, narrow-leaf milkweed, blanketflower, hairy goldenaster, Canada goldenrod
- **Bunchgrasses:** Bottlebrush squirreltail, pinegrass, Idaho fescue, prairie Junegrass
- **Annuals:** Globe gilia, threadleaf and lacy phacelia, diamond clarkia, elkhorn clarkia, large-flowered collomia, maiden clover, farewell to spring, yellow beeplant, Plains coreopsis

Which Lawn Replacement Is Right for You?

If you want to have:

- a play area for kids or dogs; &/or
- the option of hosting large outdoor events.

• Then plant:

- a drought-tolerant native grass lawn; OR
- an eco-lawn and
- mow only when needed.

If you:

- don't want or need designated play space; &/or
 - have enough room on patios, decks, &/or porches for outdoor entertaining.
- Then plant a wildflower meadow
- and include paths, seating areas, &/or small patios to immerse yourself in your landscape
 - OR plant an eco-lawn.

A photograph of a garden bed filled with various plants. In the foreground, there are several tall, thin stems with clusters of small, light purple flowers. To the left, there are clusters of bright yellow flowers. The background features a dark wooden fence with vertical planks. The overall scene is lush and colorful.

Plants



Arrowleaf Balsamroot and Blanketflower



Yarrow and Canada Goldenrod

- Both attract beneficial insects.
- Yarrow attracts ladybugs, lacewings, parasitic wasps, and hoverflies.
- Goldenrod attracts parasitic wasps, syrphid flies, tachinid flies, soldier beetles, butterflies, and bees.



Silky Lupine & Hairy Goldenaster



Threadleaf Fleabane & Line-Leaved Daisy



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Snow
Buckwheat,
Creamy
Buckwheat, and
Sulphur
Buckwheat

- All have long bloom periods and are very drought-tolerant.



Narrow-Leaf Milkweed
& Silverleaf Phacelia



Indian Ricegrass and Bottlebrush Squirreltail



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Bluebunch Wheatgrass & Pinegrass



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Idaho Fescue and Prairie Junegrass

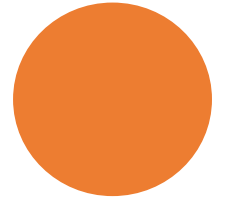


Hoary Tansyaster
& Yellow Beeplant



Globe Gilia & Plains Coreopsis

Diamond Clarkia & Farewell to Spring

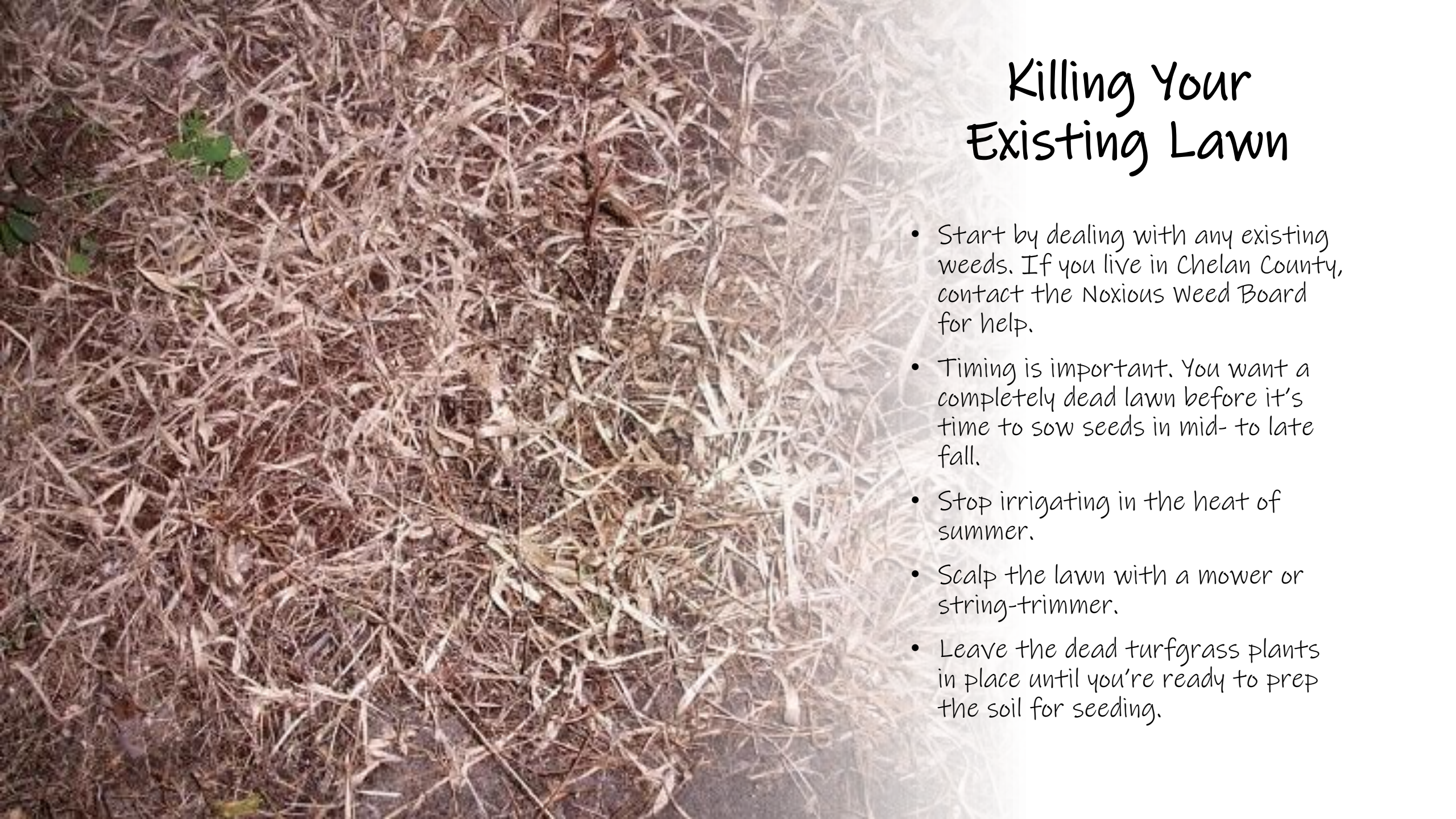




Maiden Clover and Large-Flowered Collomia

Implementation

A photograph of a residential street. In the foreground, there is a lush garden with various plants, including tall stalks with yellow flowers and dense, low-lying grey-green shrubs. In the background, there are houses. One house on the left is light-colored with a prominent brick chimney and a covered porch. Another house in the middle ground is light blue with white trim. To the right, there is a sidewalk, a street with parked cars, and a utility pole. The sky is overcast. The word "Implementation" is written across the center of the image in a pink, cursive font.



Killing Your Existing Lawn

- Start by dealing with any existing weeds. If you live in Chelan County, contact the Noxious Weed Board for help.
- Timing is important. You want a completely dead lawn before it's time to sow seeds in mid- to late fall.
- Stop irrigating in the heat of summer.
- Scalp the lawn with a mower or string-trimmer.
- Leave the dead turfgrass plants in place until you're ready to prep the soil for seeding.

Planting Seeds

- Direct-sow most native seeds in late October or November before it snows. Some species can be sown in early spring.
- Remove the dead grass with a leaf rake, then use a garden rake to loosen the soil surface.
- You might need to bulk up the seeds with vermiculite, sand, or other inert material prior to spreading it.
- Scatter seed by hand or with a seed-spreader, then walk over or lightly rake the area to get good seed-to-soil contact.
- In a dry winter, you might need to water occasionally to keep the seeds moist.
- If you plant in spring, you'll need to water during both the germination and establishment periods.

Watering/Irrigation

- Watering has two different purposes: plant germination or establishment and continued survival.
- To promote more rapid growth in the first season, water young plants a bit more than they need to survive. For drought-tolerant natives, water once or twice a week—or more, during very hot weather.
- If you have an irrigation system, move heads and make other changes before planting or be prepared to hand water.



Keeping Wildlife Happy in Your Habitat

If you plant a bunch of natives but still obsessively deadhead, cut back, and "clean up," the insects that are vital to your habitat will disappear, and so will the birds and other critters.

LEAVES ARE NOT LITTER

THEY 'RE FOOD AND SHELTER FOR
BUTTERFLIES, BEETLES, BEES, MOTHS, AND MORE.
TELL FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS TO JUST

#LEAVETHELEAVES



xerces.org

Landscape Maintenance Tips

- Overwatering can kill drought-tolerant plants.
- Be sure to leave twigs and other litter for shelter for pollinators and small critters.
- Don't dead-head flowers during the growing season--birds will eat the seeds.
- In late fall, you can cut flower stalks at a range of heights, from 8-24", for bee nests.
- Don't cut back grasses in the fall. Insects might be overwintering on them.
- Learn to identify weeds and their seedlings so you can deal with them efficiently.

Seed and Plant Sources



- Derby Canyon Natives, Peshastin, WA (plants, grass seed), derbycanyonnatives.com.
- Northwest Meadows, Port Townsend, WA. Northwestmeadows.com sells native wildflower and grass seeds of the Northwest, including annuals. They even have a section with species for the Inland Northwest.
- Western Native Seed, Coaldale, CO, westernnativeseed.com. Click on the plant name to get detailed information, including water requirements and a map showing its native range.

Resources

- Xerces Society, Washington Biology Technical Note 24 (Revised): Plants for Pollinators in the Inland Northwest
<https://www.xerces.org/sites/default/files/publications/13-004.pdf>
- Derby Canyon Natives, Peshastin, Washington, Plants for Birds and Butterflies
derbycanyonnatives.com/plants/for-birds-and-butterflies/



Resources

- "How Can I Help? Saving Nature with Your Yard," Douglas W. Tallamy.
- "Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard," Douglas W. Tallamy.
- "The Living Landscape: Designing for Beauty and Biodiversity in the Home Garden," Douglas W. Tallamy and Rick Darke.
- "Attracting Native Pollinators: Protecting North America's Bees and Butterflies," The Xerces Society.
- "Using Native Plants to Preserve Birds and Protect Homes Under a Changing Climate Scenario," Kittitas Audubon Society.
- Contact me at SeasonsUrbanHorticulture@gmail.com or 216.952.7750.