

Is grass or artificial turf the right choice for your yard?

You can significantly reduce your outdoor water use with a desert-adapted landscape. Drought-tolerant plants and trees require less maintenance and water than lawns, especially when appropriately irrigated. If you have grass or are thinking of installing some - natural or artificial - it's vital to have all the facts to ensure you make the right decision. With increasing attention on outdoor water use, grass remains a focal point for many looking to make practical water-wise changes that will positively impact their community's water future.



IS YOUR GRASS FUNCTIONAL?

First and foremost, any grass area should be functional. Functional grass is actively used as a recreation space for people and pets and is often found in backyards, side yards, and residential common areas. These areas tend to be flat with straight edges, making it easy to irrigate and limiting water waste. Functional grass is also easily accessible, usually by a sidewalk or pathway.

If your grass serves no practical purpose and is difficult to water, it is probably non-functional. Those areas are ornamental or for looks only and are typically found in front yards, along streets, or entrances to HOAs. Non-functional grass areas have lots of curves and unique angles, which makes it hard to irrigate efficiently, which causes unwanted runoff or overspray that can lead to damaging paint, walls, asphalt, or other infrastructure, in addition to water waste.

SHOULD YOU REMOVE YOUR GRASS?

Some of the questions you should ask yourself are:

- Would you like to lower your water bill and do less yard work?
- Do you have an old, tired lawn that requires far too much effort to maintain?
- Is the only time you walk on your lawn when you mow it?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you should consider switching to a low-maintenance water-saving desert-adapted landscape or xeriscape.

How Much Water Will You Save?

Did you know that majority of water use occurs outdoors in your yard? Converting to a xeriscape can save 50% or more on outdoor water use. A Bermuda or Bermuda hybrid lawn requires more than 55 inches of water per year (with winter overseed) and over 40 inches per year (without winter overseed). The average xeriscape requires less than 18 inches per year. Compare that with our average rainfall of eight inches, and you will have a better idea of

precisely how much water your grass requires.

IS ARTIFICIAL GRASS A REASONABLE OPTION?

Before determining if synthetic turf is the right choice for your yard, consider the following other factors:

- **Will kids and pets play on the artificial turf?** Artificial turf will never be as cool to the touch as real grass, and it can become too hot for children and pets to play on, so research the turf material you are considering.

Artificial turf does not necessarily behave the same way as living grass, such as not always returning to its upright position after activities. Therefore, infill must be added between the blades to help them spring back. Different types of infill have various benefits and tradeoffs; however, adequate risk assessments have not been performed to assess their safety for children and pets.

- **How much maintenance are you willing to perform?** Artificial turf is not [maintenance-free](#). It must be brushed and rinsed off with water (and sometimes soap) to keep the area clean and avoid staining. Additionally, you need to regularly remove debris, like leaves and pet waste, to prevent mold buildup or other containments. You will also need to pull weeds from the surrounding areas because they can invade your artificial turf landscape. Artificial turf doesn't allow water to permeate, creating runoff/pooling concerns, so be especially mindful if the area has a slope or is next to a pool.
- **What will go on the artificial turf?** Patio furniture with sharp legs can puncture and damage artificial turf. Keep grills, fire pits, fireworks, and other combustible heat sources far from your artificial turf, as embers can also cause serious damage.
- **Do you have living plants in the same yard?** Artificial turf has artificial components that can negatively impact your soil quality, making it difficult for living plants to thrive in the surrounding areas of your yard. In addition, the heat from the surface of the artificial turf affects the air temperature and can create microclimates that some plants may not tolerate.
- **What is the longevity of your investment?** Artificial turf does not last forever. Different products have different lifespans, but regardless of your chosen product, it will eventually need to be [replaced](#) because the Arizona sun is tough on plastic. When the time comes, you will also need to consider how and where you dispose of your artificial turf.

After considering these questions, revisit the idea of installing a [desert-adapted landscape](#), which is naturally low on maintenance and water use.

YOU HAVE GRASS, BUT ARE YOU WATERING IT EFFICIENTLY?

Your functional lawn can provide you and your family with an attractive recreational area. However, it can require considerably more water and care than desert-adapted plants, so consider limiting the size of your lawn. Follow these practical steps to maintain a healthy, beautiful, and [water-efficient lawn](#).

When to Water:

Water at night or during the cool morning hours to minimize evaporation. The peak water consumption hours (4 - 9 pm) and the peak evapotranspiration hours should be avoided.

How Often to Water:

An established ryegrass lawn should be watered about once a week during the winter and every three days during the spring. The time between irrigations will depend on the weather, grass, and soil type. Water lawns no more than once every three days during the summer.

How Much to Water:

Plant watering needs vary from month to month. Regularly adjusting your irrigation schedule is an easy way to save water and money and helps ensure your plants get the right amount of water to thrive.

Being wise with our outdoor water use is essential, regardless of the time of year. A water-efficient landscape requires less maintenance and will save you time, water, and money. We are fortunate to have access to [safe and reliable water supplies](#) daily. Once it arrives at our homes, we must use it carefully and efficiently because saving water in the desert is everyone's business. Together we can make a difference.

To learn more, visit AMWUA's new [Grass Webpage](#).

For over 50 years, the Arizona Municipal Water Users Association has worked to protect our member cities' ability to provide assured, safe, and sustainable water supplies to their communities. For more water information, visit www.amwua.org.