Alternative Lawns

Grasses

Using native grasses that are slow-growing or drought tolerant can give you the lush, durable green lawn you want that is more economical and environmentally friendly. Most require little to no mowing, very little watering, and infrequent fertilization.

Buffalo Grass
Height: 4-6"
Habitat: dry, clay soils
Pros: tolerates drought, cold, and foot traffic
Price: $36 per 1000 sq. ft.

Fescue
Height: 5-10"
Habitat: moist, well drained soil, can handle part shade
Pros: tolerates foot traffic
Price: $30 per 1000 sq. ft.

Pennsylvania Sedge
Height: 6-8"
Habitat: adapted to different environments
Pros: tolerates foot traffic
Price: $18 per 1000 sq. ft.

Purple Lovegrass
Height: 12-18"
Habitat: adapted to a range of soils
Pros: tolerates foot traffic
Price: $100 per 1000 sq. ft.

Groundcover

Groundcovers work great in areas that have light to medium foot traffic. With no substantial watering, mowing, or fertilizing requirements, these plants will provide the cover you want with very little maintenance.

Prairie
Height: wide range
Habitat: well-drained soils
Pros: attracts many different species
Price: $5-15 per lb.

Wildflower
Height: wide range
Habitat: fertile soil
Pros: Improves ecosystem, increases pollinators
Price: varies

Clover
Height: 4-8"
Habitat: clay soils
Pros: tolerates drought and is nitrogen-fixing
Price: $1 per 1000 sq. ft.

Moss
Height: 4-8"
Habitat: acidic soils
Price: 1 handful+1 can of beer+1/2 tsp. sugar and spread=minimal cost.

Native Plant Nurseries

To find a native nursery close to your area in Michigan, visit the the website:

Michigan Native Plant Producers Association
www.mnppa.org

**Note: Price estimates are for seeds only. Plugs tend to be more expensive, however for some species more available.*

MATTHAEI BOTANICAL GARDENS

Do-It-Yourself Guide

Alternative Lawns

A step-by-step guide to planting your own alternative lawn, with some earth friendly and time-saving tips…

The best time to renovate a lawn is when the temperature cools and rain is plentiful, so between mid-August to end of September. This allows the existing grass to die throughout the winter allowing for spring plantings.

1. Remove all existing grass either by digging up grass, tilling, or spraying the lawn with non-selective herbicide. An alternative method to applying chemical treatments is to smother your lawn. Cover your old lawn with black plastic bags or old newspapers (10-12 pages thick) using rocks to secure it to the ground. With newspaper smothering, it helps to water the newspaper and to only use black and white pages. Keep the covering over the lawn for a growing season, or about two months. Once all the grass has died, remove plastic bags. The newspaper will decompose with the dead grass providing a nutrient rich top layer.

2. Assess the fertility of the soil. If lacking nutrients, add 4-6 inches of organic matter, such as compost to enrich the soil. Also, regrade your lawn if you have steep slopes or uneven surfaces.

3. Wait a few days until the soil settles and rake the area smooth (reserve some soil to spread lightly over seeds after planting).

4. Choose method of propagation (plugs or seeds) for type of alternative lawn. Plant accordingly.

5. Mulch with straw which has been cleaned, chopped, and is weed-free (do not use hay).

6. Use a fine sprinkler head to water the area. It is best to water deeply, keeping the soil moist until seedlings emerge. It may be necessary to irrigate newly planted lawn until it becomes established (usually in 1 year).

7. Check lawn often and hand-pull weeds immediately.

Tips

Mowing:
If you must mow, cut only to a height of 3 to 3 1/2 inches high-this will shade out competing weeds and retain moisture.
Keep grass clippings on the lawn-they will provide the soil with nitrogen and reduces fertilization requirements (up to 50%).

Watering:
Water deeply but less often, and water at daybreak.

Lawncare:
Mixed species lawns are better able to resist pests and tolerate drought.
Avoid traditional pesticides and herbicides, use organic alternatives such as milky spore powder and corn gluten.

Resources

www.eartheasy.com
Information on alternative lawns and natural lawncare, plus additional info on living a more sustainable lifestyle

www.bbg.org
Has excerpts and books for sale on alternative lawns

www.gluten.iastate.edu
All about corn gluten

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