

Q: I want to replace my weedy lawn with a more drought tolerant one. Can Buffalo grass be used?

A: Congratulations on deciding to replace your lawn. Lawns continue to be one of the most water and resource intensive parts of our gardens here in the drought prone west. Our love affair with lawns started in the late 1800's, as American travelers returned home imprinted with visions of the verdant meadows of grass encircling British estates. One used to have to keep sheep around to keep the grass mowed, then in the late 1800's lawn mowers were invented, leading to a dramatic increase. NASA researcher Christina Milesi estimates the 128,000 square kilometers (nearly 32 million acres) of the US is covered in lawn, making it our largest irrigated crop.

Many different species of grasses from all over the world have been brought to this country as potential turf material, and some of them proving adaptable to our Mediterranean climate. Buffalograss (*Buchloe dactyloides*) is a Native American grass from the plains. Low maintenance, requiring very little fertilizer or water, it is one of the most drought tolerant grasses available. It grows slowly, needing infrequent mowing, spreads by stolon and seed, it will survive in the summer with no water, but will turn brown and crispy, returning to life with fall rains. If you want the lawn to remain green in the summer, you will need to provide about 1" of water a week. Do you have dogs or children? Buffalograss forms a thin turf that doesn't tolerate much foot traffic. It will not do well in the shade.

If you are planning on planting by seed, the best time of the year is April-May. Purchase seed that has been 'treated', meaning that it has been pre-chilled to break dormancy. You can continue to plant through the summer months if you are irrigating reliably. You will need 4-6 lbs of seed per 1000 sq. ft. of lawn. For more information on lawns for California, check out this web-site hosted by UC Davis; <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.turf.html>