

Ripping Out Your Lawn and Putting in a Garden, part 1

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Objective: Learn about why you might want to rethink your lawn.

Learn ways to remove or reduce your lawn. Inspire you to use natural lawn care practices to improve what lawn you already have.

Get ready to plan, design and plant your new garden.

Make a plan for the first three years to get your new garden off to a great start.

Rethinking your Lawn

Why remove? Why keep?

Improve your lawn

Grasscycle or mulch mow, leave grass clippings

Aerate and fill with sand/compost

Topdress with 1/4" to 1/2" of compost in fall

Oversow with alternative lawn seed

Rethink your weeds, they are telling you something

Let it go dormant

Water lightly and more frequently and only if needed

Make a Plan to Remove or Reduce your lawn

Will it be a big landscape project or sections at a time

***These recommendations are for a typical residential lot that is mostly level with decent drainage. If you have a steep slope, drainage or ponding issues, or live next to a stream or waterway, seek out professional advice before removing your lawn. Check with HOA, city or county for any restrictions. Without turf, you may create a bigger more serious issue like flooding, landslides or extreme erosion. Work with a professional landscaper to develop a plan and draw a design. This is money well spent and can prevent a disaster.

Goals for Your Yard

What do you want your yard to do? How much time and money do you have for this project? Will you do it yourself or hire landscape professionals? What conditions exist in your yard – sun, soil, water, air? What plants will work for your vision?

Budget

Digging tools

Water tools

Soil amendments and compost

Plants

Water

Fertilizer

Professional services, rentals,
 delivery fees

When will you plant?

We have two planting seasons – Spring and Fall

Spring is ok early, while plants are still dormant. Care and watering through the summer. Can be hard on new transplants. Fall is a better time to plant, the weather is mild and roots can develop underground during the winter and rain provides the water.

For Fall planting, consider this timeline

Winter -- design and plan

Spring -- remove turf, amend soil

Summer -- build features, dig swales, layout irrigation lines

Fall -- plant and mulch

Planning and designing your garden take time – it will make a difference. It can seem overwhelming but you can do this. Think about the design process in three steps

Assess – Plan/Design – Install/Plant

Assess Your Site

First, you'll need to create a site map. To scale; rough sketch; Google sketch

Assess sun, soil, water and air to identify the different unique microclimates around our yard. Match your conditions with plants that thrive there.

Draw your maps

I use a different map for each thing I'm assessing – then I can transfer to a single map.

Sun Assess May to August. Check area every hour and tally sunlight and shade. full sun – 6+ hours sun; part shade – 3-6 hours sun; full shade – 0-3 hours sun

Soil Most plants like fertile well-drained soil. Dig around. Is your soil – hard, loose, wet, dry, rich, soggy?

Water How will you get water to your plants? Where are hose bibs and downspouts?

Air On a calm day, notice wind channels around your yard, especially between buildings.

Now you have a better idea of your yard's microclimates and you can match these conditions to plants that like to live there.

Landscape Zones

Identify your landscape zones. To find the best place for our garden, gathering space and other elements, we need to understand how people and animals use your space. Landscape zones tell us how people and animals use the space and where to locate garden elements so they work for you. Zones are based on how frequently you use the space and what you do there.

Get out a blank site map and mark out your landscape zones

Zone 1. Outdoor living space. Places you go several times daily without thinking. These are great places for high needs plants. Great for container gardens, seedlings in pots, kitchen gardens, annual herbs and flowers. a gathering space or outdoor kitchen.

Zone 2. Outer edge of outdoor living space. This area is visited several times a week. Great place for edible perennials like fruit trees or shrubs, rhubarb, berry vines, artichokes. chicken coop or rabbit hutch, your compost bin and garden shed.

Zone 3. Large scale farming or perennial flowers. Further out it takes effort to visit great place for perennial flower beds, orchards, canes and vines.

Zone 4. Minimal care. Visited a couple times a year and only if there is a reason. The place for native and drought tolerant plants. perennial flowers and pollinator patches

Zone 5. Seldom if ever used. Hard to access or behind the shed or outer corners of your yard. great place for a wild, untended area for wildlife.

Time to Design

After you assess for the elements and landscape zones you will have a better idea about what kind of garden or planting goes in each location. Use your site map to sketch out all the possibilities.

Get Inspired

A blank site map is intimidating. Get inspiration and fresh ideas by walking around your neighborhood to scout plants and design ideas. Visit demonstration gardens, take classes, read books. Visit nurseries – gather up some plants and find a place where you can arrange them – to see how they look together. Keep in mind plant shape, color texture and size. Go on garden tours, join clubs or associations. Tap into social media to find like-minded folks. A plant share group in your neighborhood is a great source of free plants and seeds and local wisdom.

Sketch up Your Design

Try to arrange things so you don't see the whole yard at once. Make your design and landscape more interesting by using curved lines and plants that block the view. A winding path invites discovery as it leads to hidden garden rooms and verdant spaces. Make many sketches then walk around your yard and sketch some more. Street appeal is over rated. Design from the inside out. Look at your yard from inside the house, what would you like to see? Place a chair around the yard, what would you like to see?

Here are some elements you might want to include

Pathways	Kitchen gardens
Water feature	Arbors
Outdoor living area	Pet and Play spaces
Storm Water feature	Pollinator Patches

Design a Wet, Shady Garden

The Shade Plant List

Make a list of plants that love part to full shade and moist soil with decent drainage. You'll want plants of difference sizes and shapes that create layers of foliage from the ground to the tree canopy. Look for a couple trees and large shrubs, several perennials and grasses and a few ground covers. Make note if they are evergreen or deciduous, native, drought tolerant, edible/medicinal and pollinator favorites. Make notes about size – height and width, fast or slow growing -- any special considerations.

Plant Layout

Arrange the plants in your bed.

- Think about size and growth habit – fast growing, deciduous or evergreen
- Arrange so that there are plant layers from groundcover to canopy.
- Provide space for plants to grow how wide, how tall
- A tree that has a 12-foot mature height could grow to 24 feet ultimate height.
- Planting area may look sparse but plants will grow and fill in the spaces.
- Draw stems or trunks as a circle and the expected canopy size.
- Avoid planting in straight lines or arrangements that look like interior design. These formal arrangements are less attractive to pollinators, birds and other wildlife.
- Plant in clumps or drifts rather than straight lines or predictable patterns.
- Group two or three different species in clusters but vary the arrangement and number of plants.
- Leave gaps between clumps to imitate natural landscapes.

TURF OUT!

Dig it out – remove it all at once

By shovel

By sod cutter

Sod Composting

Flip sod pieces and stack into a pile or berm

Water each layer

Cover the sod

with plastic, black landscape tarp for composting

with 8" of soil or 10" of wood chips for garden bed

Remove Turf Slowly

Here are three ways to kill your grass slowly over time.

-You can **solarize** it with sheets of black plastic, then peel back and remove the plastic when you're ready to plant.

-You can **sheet mulch** it with layers of paper covered by mulch. All this organic matter will suffocate the grass then decompose and become part of the soil

-You can **deep mulch**, skip the paper sheets and shave the grass to the ground and then cover the area with at least 12" inches of wood chips.

-These work in **small or large areas** to get rid of your lawn with little work and a lot of time. Once your grass is dead, you are ready to plant your new garden.

-It **takes time**, about 6 – 9 months so put that into your planning. You could put down the layers in Winter/Spring and plant in the Fall or you could put layers down in the Summer/Fall and plant the following Spring.

Resources

Books

Maritime Northwest Garden Guide, 2nd ed. by Lisa Taylor, 2014.

Your Farm in the City, An Urban Dwellers Guide to Growing Food and Raising Animals by Lisa Taylor, 2011.

Living with Wildlife in the Pacific Northwest, Russell Link, 2004

Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades by Steve Solomon, 2007.

Edible Landscaping. Creasy, Rosalind, 2010.

How to Grow Perennial Vegetables: Low Maintenance, Low Impact Vegetable Gardening. Crawford, Martin, 2012.

Drip Irrigation for Every Landscape and All Climates by Robert Kourik, 2009

>Plant lists and Native Plant Resources

<https://www.gardenwithlisa.com/freebies.html>

>Great Plant Picks from Elizabeth Miller Botanical Garden

<https://www.greatplantpicks.org/>

>Burnt Ridge Nursery and Orchards

<https://www.burntridgenursery.com/text/plantselectionsuggestions.pdf>

>Plants For A Future Edible Plant Database

<https://pfaf.org/user/>

>USDA Plant Database

<https://plants.sc.egov.usda.gov/home>

>King County Plant List

<https://green2.kingcounty.gov/gonative/Plant.aspx?Act=list>

>King County Dept. of Natural Resources

https://kingcounty.gov/~media/depts/dnrp/solid-waste/natural-yard-care/documents/when_to_water.ashx?la=en

>Washington State University

<https://foodsystems.wsu.edu/crops/irrigation/>

>Climate Friendly Lawn Care, Oregon State University Extension

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/lawn/through-thoughtful-practices-lawns-can-be-climate-friendly>

>Eco-lawn and alternative lawn seed

<https://ptlawnseed.com/collections/eco-and-alternative-lawns>

>King County RainScapes: Natural Rainwater Solutions

<https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dnrp/nature-recreation/environment-ecology-conservation/yard-garden/rain-gardens-barrels-cisterns/green-stormwater-incentive-program>

>Cascade Water Alliance

<https://cascadewater.org/>