

Cutting Down on Lawn -- Alternatives to Grass

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Lawns are green in color only, and the odds are good that you're sick of mowing. You could save time by ignoring [lawncare myths](#), and there are ways to reduce the [water](#) and [energy](#) you waste on your lawn, but even the most eco-friendly lawn is still a lawn.

Here are some tips for reducing the amount of the lawn in your yard even if you're not an avid gardener.

Shrubbery

There's a good chance that you have at least a few trees and bushes planted around the edges of your lawn. Add to the existing woody plants in your yard to create deep shrub borders. Plant [native species](#) and mulch them all the way to the [drip line](#) to reduce the need for water and protect trunks from lawnmower damage. Once established, native shrub borders can survive without supplemental water most years, and need pruning no more than once a year.

Berry Beds



Fill a raised bed that gets plenty of sun with blackberries and you'll be rewarded with fresh fruit. Image: [pixel2013](#), Pixabay

Raised beds create a sense of structure in the landscape that looks tidier than shrub borders. They also keep [cane berries](#) like raspberry and blackberry from spreading.

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Filled with flowers or vegetables, raised beds can be just as much work as lawn. But filled with berries, all they need is sun and water and you'll be rewarded with fresh fruit. But don't be surprised if you get inspired to take up [beekeeping](#) to keep those harvests going.

Unmown Grasses



Ornamental grasses like this pink muhly require minimal care. Image: [paulbr75](#), Pixabay

Lawn grass is not the only kind of grass, in fact, it is one of the least interesting or useful forms.

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Ornamental grasses can be used to create sophisticated planting designs or to recreate native prairie. If you choose native species, you can free yourself from both watering and mowing, so you'll have plenty of free time to sit back and enjoy the butterflies and other wildlife attracted to your [certified wildlife habitat](#).

But research horticultural varieties before planting — many ornamental grasses are invasive species. If a grass doesn't belong in your region, don't plant it.

Ground Covers



Sempervivum, a succulent commonly known as “hens and chicks” is just one of many resilient ground covers. Image: [Hans](#), Pixabay

There are probably areas of your lawn that don't get very much — if any — foot traffic. For those areas, other ground covers may be more appropriate than grass, especially in shady areas. As with grasses, many ground covers can be invasive. Consider native plants like kinnikinnick or wild ginger — find out what grows in your region.

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Few ground covers are as hardy as lawn grass. But clover, herbs like creeping thyme, and even moss can tolerate some foot traffic. The benefit, though, is groundcover that requires relatively little water compared to the traditional lawn.

Unplanted Areas

Although [permeable pavers](#) can reduce the amount of grass you have to deal with while still allowing rainwater to drain through the gaps, an entirely paved yard is probably too much. Gravel, on the other hand, can be a lawn substitute without making your yard look built over. Combining large areas of gravel broken up with a few drought-tolerant plants is best suited to dry climates and desert landscapes.

There's no need to rip out your entire lawn if you don't want to. But you can save time, energy, and water by reducing the area of your lawn. Try one or more of these strategies to chip away at the edges of your lawn. You might find yourself with a prettier yard and more time to enjoy it.

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