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## Fall - A Great Time for Reevaluating Grass Areas

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## GARDEN NOTES

# FALL - A GREAT TIME FOR REEVALUATING GRASS AREAS

*By Dennis Hinkamp*

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High water bills, sprinkler repair, lawn mower tune-ups and grass stains on the kids clothes. Aren't lawns wonderful?

Fall is a great time for reevaluating grass areas and other places in the landscape, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. Large areas of turf can be removed and new grass planted to improve the condition. Cooler fall temperatures are great for starting a lawn and planting any shrubs, trees and perennials.

There are many reasons for having lawn, Goodspeed explains. One is to beautify the landscape and cool the surrounding areas. If the area is used mainly to play on, grass may be the best option. But, if the only thing the grass does is cause ulcers and eat up your money, time and energy, then there may be better options.

Lawns can be a waste of time, water and other resources, he says. Many people plant a large lawn because they believe it will be a low maintenance, easy alternative to "real" landscaping. Consider a few things before planting a whole half acre in grass.

Grass plants are the worse offenders of wasted water in the landscape. They consume more water, and are harder to keep healthy, than most other plants. Keeping a lawn healthy also consumes more fertilizer, specifically nitrogen, and can use more pesticides than other plants. Think about the time and money spent mowing, fertilizing, watering, controlling pests and weeds, edging and fretting over a healthy lawn.

"I'm not suggesting that we eliminate all lawn areas, but we should look at why we have a lawn," Goodspeed says. "Consider alternatives. A smaller turf area or some ground cover may provide what we need in the landscape and save natural resources that are likely to be limited in the near future."

One concept to consider is using grass as an oasis or bed area in the landscape, he suggests. Instead of a large area of lawn surrounding a small patch of shrubs, try planting a small patch of turf surrounded by trees, shrubs and a few perennials. Cover the planting beds with a weed barrier and bark or some other material, thus reducing the amount of maintenance required.

This method of planting conserves water because the trees and other plants can be watered with a drip system every 7 to 10 days, he adds. Even existing sprinkler systems can be

modified to save water. Trees and shrubs thrive when they are watered correctly. A small lawn's sprinkler system can be set to water every four to five days, and it may only take 15 minutes to mow the entire area.

If an oasis is not a possibility, consider shrinking the grass area and adding ground cover or other plants to reduce the amount of grass, Goodspeed says. Other alternatives include using ground covers to fill in areas around the yard. Many ground covers can tolerate some foot traffic and other abuse. They make nice fillers between rocks and stones, softening yardscapes and requiring less maintenance and time than a lawn.

Make lawn alterations by late September so the seed is established by the time the water is shut off and the first hard freeze comes, he says. This allows the roots to keep growing and spreading throughout the fall.

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