

# Permaculture in Practice

## Noble lie in the desert: plastic grass

You might be horrified to discover what a fan of grass I am. Living here in the desert, I like a little sod, as long as no one has to water it. Leading a typical, super-busy life, I'm happy to have a lawn, as long as no one has to mow it. Having seen how busy my chiropractor can be, I'll encourage turf, as long as no one has to bend over to weed it. With all of the nasty chemicals on the market these days, I support nice green play areas for kids, as long as no one is poisoning our children with fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides.

The good news is that seed and sod are not all that expensive. The most hardy turf grass seed around is Plants of the Southwest's Summer Lawn Blend. For under a hundred dollars you can buy plenty of seed for 1,000 square feet of lawn. Sod is about 10 times more expensive.

But that's only the beginning. If you want your grass to last and withstand foot and

animal traffic, you'll spend more money (or at least labor) amending the soil than you will sowing seed or installing sod. A typical, hard-packed, post-construction, caliche-filled landscape will require compost (and a slew of other amendments and conditioners like green sand, alfalfa meal, cottonseed meal, and rock dust) mixed into the existing soil at a minimum of 12 inches deep.

Unless you want to drag hoses around your property and pay attention to exactly how much water your lawn is getting day in and day out, you'll also need to install an automatic system of pop-up sprinklers. This requires deep trenching, pressurized pipes below the frost line, backfilling the trenches, at least a few valves, a valve box, a back-flow prevention device, a filter, a pressure regulator, and a computerized timer, and electricity. Most people also need a professional, not only to turn their

systems on and off every year but also to fix the maintenance issues that inevitably arise.

Ahhh, there's nothing quite like the great American lawn - at least when it comes to job creation. That's why the sod we suggest to our friends and clients is fake. Often made out of recycled tennis shoes, various synthetic products are on the market these days. Call Synlawn (890-8889) or Real Turf (473-9797) to discuss prices and products.

By the time you consider all of the above factors, you'll see that faux turf, at about \$10 per square foot installed, is a bargain.

My wife and I installed some Synlawn at our home not too long ago. So far we are very happy with it. It's not as soft and cool as regular grass. It will need an occasional sweeping. Sure, it'll be a little freaky in the dead of winter. But think of all the water, money, and time we'll save.

Horrified, yet? In a land where a



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majority of congressmen fall for a war based on lies, the fact that an ecological landscaper falls for plastic grass should be the least of your concerns.

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