



# NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

## Create a Water-Wise Yard (August 5, 2023)

By Sue Schieferle, Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardener

Although we had the gift of rain this year, officially, we are STILL in the middle of a drought. We are still under water restrictions and water-saving advice. We are still required to cut back on watering our lawns. What do we do? We ADAPT! We CAN save huge amounts of water by removing all or a large part of our lawns and re-landscaping. It just takes a plot plan that includes drought-tolerant trees, shrubs, and perennial flowers coupled with optional hardscapes such as river rock, boulders, pavers, flagstone, etc.



When you decide to remove your lawn, consider these three factors before choosing one of four recommended removal methods:

- **Budget:** Will you perform the lawn removal yourself, or will you hire a professional?
- **Time:** How big of a hurry are you in to finish your project? Method 1 is the quickest, while the others take at least 4-8 weeks.
- **Type of grass** (also referred to as turf or turfgrass): Lawns are classified as either cool-season or warm-season grasses, although some residential lawns are a mix of both types.
  - Cool-season grasses include fescue, ryegrass, and bluegrass. Use any of the four methods listed below.
  - Warm-season grasses include Bermuda, St. Augustine, and Zoysia. These grasses are more difficult to kill and require that you use either the Solarization or Herbicide method.

### METHODS:

1. **Sod Cutting** is the quickest method. A sod-cutting machine (rented from a machinery rental company) efficiently separates the layer of turf (sod layer) from the soil. Cutting the lawn horizontally and then vertically (into small squares) will allow for easier pick up and disposal. Let the sod dry out a day or two after cutting to make it lighter to lift. You might need to rent extra green waste cans or a dumpster to dispose of the sod pieces.
2. **Sheet Mulching or Sheet Composting** is a chemical-free method to remove turf which adds organic matter to the soil with minimum labor. Mow the lawn as short as you can; cover with large pieces of cardboard, overlapping each piece; wet down the cardboard; add a layer of compost; and cover with 2-3 inches of mulch (e.g., shredded bark, bark nuggets, humus,). This method takes 6-8 weeks. Afterward, you will be able to plant directly into the resulting soil without removing any turf!
3. **Solarization** is an effective method to kill the turf in high summer temperatures like we have in Tulare-Kings Counties. The solarization process begins with 2-4 ml thick clear plastic sheeting laid tightly over the lawn, extended 6-8 inches beyond lawn edges, and then anchored down with heavy rocks or bricks. The top six inches of the soil will heat up to 140 degrees over the next 4-8 weeks, killing the turf. For hard-to-kill warm-season grasses, be sure that hot temperatures were reached to at least a 6-inch depth or you may see regrowth. Remove the plastic but not the dead grass as it will compost in place. Add a fresh layer of soil or compost before planting.
4. **Herbicide application** typically involves the treatment of herbicide on the lawn. Be sure to **follow the manufacturer's directions carefully**. Basically, you water the lawn, don't mow for a week, apply the herbicide, cut off water for 2 weeks, reapply water, wait for new growth, and reapply herbicide. Repeat this cycle until no more new growth is detected.

Whichever method you choose, your lawn is going to look like it is going through a transformation, which it is. People passing by will ask you questions, and perhaps they will transform their landscapes as well!

In the next article, we'll focus on what to do after lawn removal, including converting sprinklers to drip irrigation, preparing the site and soil, planting, mulching, and adding hardscape.

### The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:

Visalia Farmer's Market- 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8-11 am, 2100 W. Caldwell Ave (behind Sears)

Hanford Farmer's Market – 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday, May – Sept, 5:30 – 9:00 pm, 219 W. Lacey, Hanford

**Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:**

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

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