

# OUTDOOR WATER USE EFFICIENCY

## TURF TYPES



Although all grass is green, there are many different varieties of turf that will grow in Southern California. These types can be placed in two main categories: Cool season and Warm season turf.

### COOL SEASON TURF

Tall Fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*) is the most common type of grass used in California. Cool season grasses characteristically endure cooler weather better than other types of grass. For instance, a Tall Fescue grass lawn will stay green later in the season when temperatures begin to cool off. However, cool season grasses do not tolerate the heat of summer very well. If left to their own devices, cool season grasses will go dormant during the hottest months of the year.

### WARM SEASON TURF

Warm season turfs are most common in Southern California. These grasses include Bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*) and Zoysiagrass (*Zoysia japonica*). These grasses can tolerate the extremely warm temperatures common in Southern California. Because these grasses are heat tolerant, they will not go dormant in the summer. However, because they are heat-loving grasses, warm season turfs have little tolerance for cold weather. A warm season grass will normally go dormant when temperatures begin to chill considerably.

One beneficial aspect of warm season grasses is that they generally use less water than cool season species.

### ALTERNATIVE TURF

There are several good alternatives to the standard warm and cool season turfs found in California. These include:

- Buffalograss
- Tall Fescues
- Groundcover

#### **Buffalograss**

Buffalograss (*Buchloë dactyloides*). Is a warm season turf that can be planted in any area in California, and it has many positive attributes. For instance, its color is a rich gray/blue that compliments many landscape plants. It does not grow very tall, making mowing completely optional. When it goes to seed, a quaint little bell-shaped seed head hangs from many of the stalks, making a decorative statement in your landscape.

One drawback to Buffalograss - it's not very cold tolerant. It takes longer in the spring to green up, and is among the first plants to go dormant in the fall. However, the dormant color of the Buffalograss is a uniform gold color- not the brown, dead looking color of dormant Kentucky bluegrass.

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## Tall Fescues:

Other alternative turfgrasses of note are the cool season turf-type Tall Fescues. This type of grass uses notably less water than conventional Kentucky bluegrass, and can tolerate as much wear. The texture of the grass is somewhat more coarse than other lawns, but the actual difference is negligible.

## Groundcovers:

Of course, another 'alternative turf' is no turf at all! Using a low water use groundcover such as Woolly Thyme (*Thymus psuedolanuginosdus*) with its beautiful color and fragrance or Trailing Fleabane (*Erigeron flagellaris*) with its delicate white flowers is a great way to save water and keep your landscape green.

## Resources



## GENERAL LAWN MAINTENANCE

**Did you know that most lawn problems are a direct result of over watering? Maintaining your lawn properly will help you save time, money and water!**

### Mowing

Is your lawn shorter than your carpet? Mowing your lawn at such a short length hurts the grass, wastes water and encourages more green waste.

By raising your lawn mower height another ½ to 1 inch, you are promoting the conservation of water in grass. Grass will shade itself as it grows longer, reducing its overall water need. This, in turn, reduces the growth rate of the grass- meaning less frequent mowing! Experts recommend cutting grass to a total length of 3 inches, and removing no more than one-third of the leaf blade per mowing.

### Stressing

Ever heard the expression "What doesn't kill you only makes you stronger"? In order to make your grass heartier, try stressing it out! By going an extra day without water here and there, you are promoting deeper root growth. The deeper the roots are allowed to penetrate the soil, the better overall health of your lawn. Roots will only grow as far as they need to in order to get water. If you are always giving them water up near the surface of the lawn, the plants have no incentive to grow deeper. You can easily check your root depth by using a soil probe or screwdriver.

Try waiting as long as possible in the spring to water your grass. The longer you wait, the healthier your lawn will be in the summer months. And don't worry it's virtually impossible to kill your lawn. The lawn may turn brown in areas, but it is just the plant going DORMANT, not dying. Adding water will make that spot spring back to life!

### Fertilization

Fertilizing your lawn encourages healthy plant growth. In this case, however, MORE IS NOT BETTER! Fertilize sparingly, as you can actually over stimulate plant growth, making the lawn more susceptible to dry conditions and disease. Additionally, the more fertilizer applied to a lawn increases the likelihood of harmful chemicals running off into streams or seeping into groundwater. The combination of over-watering and over-fertilizing can be dangerous to both plants and humans!