

BEST IDEAS

★ Turf and Groundcovers ★

This criterion covers quality of turf as well as use of naturalization, groundcovers and wildflowers, good turf management practices, sport fields, athletic parks, and other active and passive recreation areas.



Elfin Forest, CA. Residential garden.

★ The Importance of Turf and Groundcovers ★

By Norm Kleber, AIB Judge

The quality of turf and groundcovers your entire community chooses makes a definite statement to visitors, residents and business owners. Everything you lay on top of the earth is a groundcover. Plan to make a large percentage of it plantings; more importantly, turf or another live groundcover. Whatever you plan, keep aesthetics, economics, sustainability, and the environment in the forefront.

When you think of turf and groundcovers, you instinctively think of a well manicured, professional lawn. Why is that? To tell you the truth, there is no set answer to explain what you might use. Consider aesthetics, economics, and the environment when choosing the best turf and groundcover options for your landscape. Today, there are proponents and opponents to a well manicured weed-free lawn, but there will never be a 50/50 balance of opinions. Choice of turf or groundcover species could be as simple as considering the end use.

Keep this thought in mind: when you plan to create a floral display in your hanging basket, flowerpot or bed, you start by searching for the optimum potting soil. Shouldn't turf and groundcovers get the same attention? Do we just take groundcovers for granted? Before considering any species to plant, take a soil sample and have it evaluated by a professional lab or by your local Extension Service office. That will help determine the next course of action; for example, soil amendments, fertilizers, and choosing the right species for the location.

Because we travel often, we may see new species of turf and groundcovers that look terrific but may not necessarily be a good choice in your climate zone. More species are being developed to be kinder to our environment—they may use less water and be resistant to disease and insects. If you have an area that is visible but not usable except for the time spent maintaining it, a different variety could be introduced to reduce the environmental impact of overall maintenance. If manicured, weed-free turf is your preference, then practice proper integrated pest management and always apply the safest sustainable products. Consider all groundcovers (turf included) as the earth's filter and erosion control. Without it, harmful chemicals and by-products can be funneled directly to your water source.★



Population 5,000 and under

★ **Allegan, MI**

- Allegan has encouraged the city's large corporations to make it a top priority to have pride in their landscapes, lawns and gardens.

★ **Echo, OR**

- The golf course uses sand and grass seed dispensers made from recycled coffee creamer containers for repairing divots by shaking a couple of sprinkles on the spot. A repaired divot heals much faster.
- Because of the very dry climate, Echo is starting to use rock on rock groundcover. Some plants are used as accents at major intersections.

★ **Elfin Forest, CA**

- Volunteers are trained to help with regular mowing during the spring at the local nature preserve. This is necessary to create fire breaks.

★ **Frankenmuth, MI**

- A 4' mowed edge around all undeveloped lots is enforced by the city. The Department of Public Works mows and bills property owners when limits are exceeded.

★ **Shipshewana, IN**

- Gravel is placed under fence lines to create a neat appearance and minimize maintenance.



Echo, OR. Sand and seed dispensers.



Elfin Forest, CA. Volunteers handle mowing.



Shipshewana, IN. Gravel keeps the fence line neat.



Oberlin, OH. Thyme "lawn."



Oberlin, OH. Lawn replaced with a meadow.

Population 5,001–10,000

★ **Camp Hill, PA**

- The borough uses compost they create for top-dressing the town's athletic fields.

★ **Horseheads, NY**

- The village and school share the care of ballfields and parks.

★ **Logan, OH**

- A demonstration plot of ground-cover plants with identification labels in Worthington Park helps residents identify groundcovers for use in their home gardens.

★ **Middlefield, OH**

- The Rotary Club sent 30 of its members to help mulch trees in a park to reduce mowing needs.

★ **North Manchester, IN**

- At the sports complex, various turf areas are mowed to varying heights according to the need.
- A weed abatement ordinance is posted on the town's website.

★ **Oberlin, OH**

- Some residents have eliminated turf lawns in favor of groundcovers.
- The department of public works planted wildflower seeds along some of the roads to eliminate the need for mowing. When fields of colorful coreopsis bloomed, staff received letters from residents telling them how much they appreciate the new look.