

Tried and True—Our Test Gardeners' Top Picks

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Make the Most of a Little Lawn

With the need to keep chemicals out of the water system, and the chore of routine maintenance (where do all the clippings go?), *lawn* has earned a reputation as a four-letter-word. But for all the debate about America's iconic green stuff, a lawn is still found in most yards and, in

fact, is often part of what people regard as "garden." As a designer, I'm often asked to include turf in a garden plan as a place for children to play (another reason to avoid harsh chemical regimes to keep it green and lush). My approach is that if you are going to have a lawn, use it as a dynamic

garden-design element and not as the main feature—or a way to fill leftover space. Less can be more, and if you design your little rug of grass carefully, it can be a very effective component. It is also one of the lowest-cost items in your toolkit for landscape design. —*Doug Hoerr*

Shape It Up ►

When lawn is used as filler between garden areas, which it often is, it doesn't add to the overall composition of your garden. This lawn, dotted with poorly defined beds scattered in a seemingly random manner, doesn't make good use of the space or the plants. A filler lawn like this one often ends up struggling to survive in shady areas where conditions are stacked against it thriving, because grass generally does best in sun and well-drained soil.



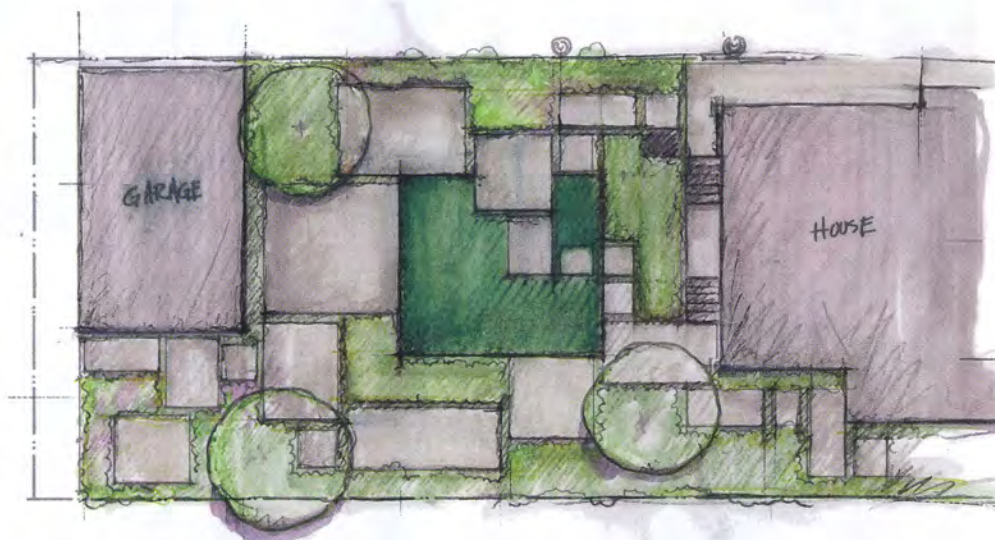
DESIGN DILEMMAS

Keep It Healthy ►

Long before you learn about how to organically care for your lawn, figure out where in your landscape it will be growing. Think of the lawn as a feature personality in the composition of a plan.

It doesn't have to be large and dominating, or even electric green; just a strongly defined shape that is in balance with the other shapes in your garden plan. As a design element, grass needs to be healthy and successful or it will only dilute the strength of your overall garden design.

Some types of grass tolerate light shade (there are seed mixes available, like Pearl's Premium Grass Shady Mix 5), but as mentioned earlier, most turfgrasses prefer sun. In other words, acknowledge the realities of your site conditions and follow good garden practice by using the

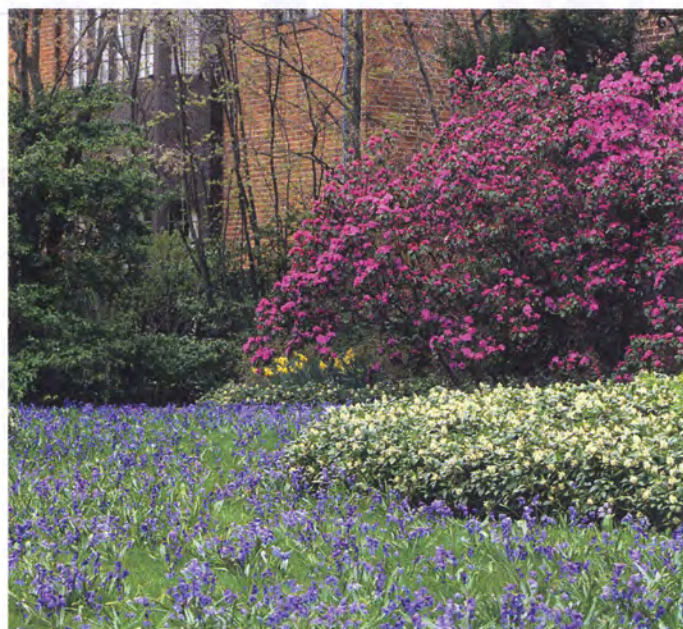


right plants—including grass—in the right spot. Because turfgrass recommendations vary from region to region, a local garden center or botanic garden is the best place to investigate the right types of turf for the sunny and shaded areas in your yard.



▲ Control Edges

Once you have defined the shape of your lawn on paper, it's important to find a way to keep it defined in reality. Edging the perimeter of your lawn with a narrow band of stone that is flush with the ground or surrounding it with a paved area keeps the edges clean, sharp, and neat through the seasons. It also prevents your carefully designed shape from getting eaten away by garden spaces that carve "bites" out of its edge as flowerbeds are reshaped and tidied each year (something I think of as the Pac-Man lawn).



▲ Do Something Unexpected

Now it's time to play. One of my favorite tricks I learned in England 20 years ago is to naturalize spring bulbs through turf. The effect is surprising and delightful. Bulbs do better in turf that is slightly hungry, so keeping lawn a little underfed not only cuts down on the need to feed but also allows the bulbs to thrive.