

Water Conscious Landscaping for the Cow Creek GCD

Part 1 - Grasses

Turfgrass selection in Kendall County deserves careful consideration, since lawns are typically the largest users of water. The type of grass you choose is important, but the amount of grass is even more important. Many landscapes have way too much turfgrass. In addition to their water consumption, they also require the largest amount of labor to maintain (exhaust from lawn equipment is a significant contributor to air pollution) and the largest amount of fertilizer. If insects and diseases become a problem they need the most intensive treatment.

Plant only the amount of turfgrass that you and your family (including pets) need. Groundcovers and appropriate shrubs and flowers need less maintenance and water and are more attractive. Cover large open spaces with wildflowers and native grasses.

Turfgrass Choices

Bermuda - This is our most common and widely used grass. It requires full sun to do well. “Common” Bermuda as well as many hybrids can be planted from seed during warm weather or from sod anytime. The “Tiff” varieties, often used on golf greens, are planted as sod only.

Buffalo - These grass varieties remain green with the least amount of water. They also require full sun, and are the least resistant to weed encroachment. There are two types of Buffalo grass. Our native type tends to form clumps and can be planted from seed. The “turf” types have longer runners and are planted from sod only.

St. Augustine - Often wrongly called “carpet grass”, this grass has always been popular because it is the only grass that does well in the shade and it does not harbor “chigger” mites. It is sometimes thought of as a high water user, but really takes no more water than other grasses. Unlike other grasses it will die (not just go dormant) if not watered. If you choose St. Augustine, plant very small areas only, and realize that you may lose it in times of drought. “Floritam” is the most sun and drought tolerant variety. Avoid “Raleigh” as it is more susceptible to fungus diseases.

Zoysia - These grasses are popular because they make a dense, attractive turf that is relatively slow growing which means it needs less frequent mowing. However this slower growth rate means that it is not as wear resistant as other grasses (important with children and dogs). Because of its density, it is best mowed with a “reel” mower rather than the standard rotary mower. It needs full sun for best growth. The narrow bladed forms are more disease resistant than broad bladed types. It is usually planted from sod, but there are new varieties that can be started from seed during the warm season.

Grasses to Avoid

Fescue - Although this grass is cheap and easily planted from seed, it requires an enormous amount of water and is inappropriate for our drier climate.

Northern Turfgrass blends - These grasses are also high water users and do not do well in our summer heat.