

Conservation Landscaping for the Lake Tahoe Basin



How To: Remove Turf

For Water Conservation

There are many benefits to replacing your water hungry lawn with Tahoe-friendly landscaping. You will use less water, reduce runoff and save time and money associated with maintaining a lawn. To make room for a low water use landscape you will first need to kill your lawn.

Prior to turf removal you will need to mark and prepare the area. Follow these steps:

1. Outline the area that you want to remove. If you're developing a square or rectangular area, establish straight edge lines by stretching a string between two sticks. Leave the string in place or mark the line with a trickle of white ground limestone, spray paint, or flour. For curved portions of the garden, use a garden hose or rope to lay out the line. Adjust the hose position until the curve looks smooth.
2. If you are digging up the turf by hand or using a sod cutter water the area 2 days prior to removal makes stripping it easier.
3. Use a flat spade to dig a small trench to establish the outline of the area.
4. Use the recommended methods below to kill your lawn!

Mulch Smother

Pros: inexpensive, adds nutrients to the soil, uses recycled materials

Cons: time consuming



This is a good option for those who plan ahead and can wait several weeks before replanting the area. You can

kill your lawn by excluding all light. Cover the area with layers of newspaper or cardboard then a layer of mulch. You can plant new vegetation any time after conversion. Refer to the [How to: Convert Lawn by Sheet Mulching](#) tip sheet for more information. Be conscious of defensible space measures and do not place flammable materials (i.e. cardboard, dry grass, etc.) within 5 feet of structures.

Solarization

Pros: fairly inexpensive

Cons: mulch smother is just as effective and doesn't involve using yards of plastic, time consuming, requires heat and sunlight, easily punctured by animals and pinecones, sandy soil loses moisture easily slowing the solarization process, the area will be covered with plastic for 4-8 weeks

Using plastic to kill unwanted grass is another option.



Plastic is affordable and available at most home and garden centers. Black plastic blocks out light slowly smothering grass roots and preventing new growth while clear plastic steam-sterilizes the soil trapping sunlight under the plastic. For the Tahoe Basin this should be done when the temperatures are warmest as it works best with a daytime temperature of over 80 degrees Fahrenheit.

1. Mow the area and/or till the area and then rake the area smooth. Make sure to mark and avoid irrigation lines.
2. Water to a depth of 18 inches
3. Cover the area with plastic. You can secure the plastic with large rocks, U-pins or trench edges and secure with soil.
4. Allow the plastic to remain in place for 4-8 weeks or longer
5. After 4-8 weeks check if turf is dead. Once dead, remove plastic and till the area. Irrigate, wait two

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weeks to see if there is any growth. Shallowly till in new growth. Repeat irrigation and shallow tilling until regrowth is minimal. You are now ready to plant your new vegetation.

Sod Cutter

Pros: fastest method of removing turf



Sod Cutter

Cons: most expensive option, can be hard to maneuver on slopes and can damage landscape tree and shrub roots, turf needs to be disposed of, usually in a landfill

This is a simple, quick and easy method, but it can be expensive.

A sod cutter can be set to cut at multiple depths, ensuring a quick and efficient removal of unwanted turf. It is helpful to irrigate the soil thoroughly two days prior to removal. Most gardening centers and do-it-yourself stores offer the option of renting equipment. Before you rent any equipment, consider the following:

- How long will you need the piece of equipment?
- What is the weather report- you don't want to rent a sod cutter on a rainy day.
- How will you transport the equipment home?

Strip and flip: Using a sod-cutting machine, or by hand, cut and flip the sod over. Make sure you mark and avoid sprinkler heads. This is a highly recommended method for the Tahoe Basin. It retains the nutrients of the turf and improves soil health. You can form mounds with the removed sod to add interest to your landscape. Cover the flipped soil with a planting medium. Replant and mulch.

Hand Removal

Pros: free

Cons: very labor and time intensive

This option is easier on the pocketbook but is more time consuming and labor intensive.

1. Irrigate soil thoroughly two days prior to removal.

2. Precut the turf into square or rectangular sections and then loosen each section with the spade. Don't dig too deep; you want to remove merely the turf and an inch or two of roots.
3. Starting at one side of the plot, slip your spade under the grass and slide it under the turf.
4. Pivot the tool up, letting the turf flip up over the spade. Slice off the turf section. Once loose, flip it over or toss it into a wheelbarrow for your compost pile. If your lawn has been chemically treated don't put the turf into the compost pile. Some herbicides don't break down during the composting process.
5. Continue in this manner until the area is free of turf.

Herbicides

Pros: quick and easy

Cons: bad for the environment and water quality, can kill desirable vegetation, safety protocols and directions are often not followed

Herbicides are typically not needed for removal of cool season grasses. Glyphosate-based herbicides such as Roundup®, Touchdown®, Zap-It Ultimate are systemic herbicides that are absorbed by green foliage and then translocated throughout the plant. They are effective on all types of turf grass. Grass needs to be actively green and growing for the herbicide to work. You can begin landscaping in about 10-20 days after the application. Due to the sensitive watershed of the Tahoe Basin, herbicide use is discouraged when other options are available. Learn more about herbicides at <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/>.

Be sure to check all of the types of sod cutters and tillers available. Some are intended for heavy use, and may be more difficult to manage, while others are more lightweight. Never rent a piece of equipment without having someone thoroughly explain how the equipment works and any safety concerns.