



TREEPEOPLE

sustainable solutions

growing greener city

september 2011 • buffalo grass • out-of-the-box • plant of the month • fun workshops



"We've been hiking at TreePeople for years and love seeing the beautiful native plants along the trails. When we realized that we could have similar plants and all that amazing aesthetic in our own landscape at home, we couldn't wait to make the switch. Planting natives was one of the best gifts we've given to ourselves and knowing it helps water quality is really important to our family. We're helping to make a difference."

- Lisa Rinna and Harry Hamlin, Actors



Turf and Surf!

That's right, turf and surf, not surf and turf. We're not planning dinner, we're talking about our yards and ocean. What do those two things have to do with each other you might ask? Well, actually a lot. Our landscape choices impact our beaches. And much of whether that impact is positive or negative on our surf, comes down to our turf.

Traditional lawns not only use vast amounts of water, the dry-weather run-off from sprinklers, flows down our streets and storm drains, carrying pollutants into our ocean. But the run-off issue doesn't stop when the rainy season begins. Turf very often grows in extremely compacted soil. Because the root system is so shallow on traditional lawn grasses, the soil is usually not as healthy and rainwater cannot absorb into the ground. Consequently, stormwater that falls or flows onto turf areas creates significant run-off and pollutes our local waterways. According to the EPA, polluted water run-off is the single largest source of water pollution nationwide. But what if you really want grass? How can you reconcile this dilemma?

Try a native and low water use grass – buffalo grass!

1. Buffalo grass

Native to the United States, UC Verde buffalo grass (*Bouteloua dactyloides*) was bred specifically for the drier parts of California. It thrives on far less water than traditional turf, resulting in up to a 75% reduction in water consumption with a deep root system that grows several feet into the soil. Also, buffalo grass requires far less fertilizer to maintain than traditional turf.

And while we're talking maintenance, with buffalo grass you can mow far less often or skip it all together. A gas-powered lawnmower emits 11 times the air pollution of a new car and if that's not enough, the pollen rating for buffalo grass is exceptionally low, making it a great

choice for both improved water and air quality.

2. What's the catch?

If you live on the coast, there really isn't one. If you are more inland, then from about November to February, buffalo grass goes dormant. It turns a nice golden color. Yes, it is distinctive, but we're not sugar-coating a dead-looking lawn. Some folks think it is really lovely, but if it is not your cup of tea, you can over-plant (depending on your location) with rye or fescue. Another plus, during its dormancy, it needs no watering or mowing. Come spring, it pops right back. What a nice way to celebrate the changing of the seasons!

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TreePeople's Sustainable Solutions Program is dedicated to landscape transformation - turning yards into functional landscapes that are beautiful and sustainable. Our monthly guides and checklists detail an easy, step-by-step process, helping us all create a healthy urban forest where water is valued, air is clean, soil is healthy and trees are thriving.

Next Month: The Edible Landscape

Linda's List

Linda Eremita, TreePeople's Senior ISA Certified Arborist, has the following suggestions for your September gardening fun:

Climate Appropriate Plant of the Month

Mound San Bruno coffeeberry (*Rhamnus californica* 'Mound San Bruno')

A California native, 6-10' tall and wide, evergreen shrub. This is not the coffee that we love and drink. It is however, a wonderful selection of a native evergreen shrub that produces berries which birds love, but not edible for humans. This dense shrub with clean, green leaves makes a great background plant or screen.



Upcoming Workshops

- October 15, 2011 - Rain Garden Workshop
- November 12, 2011 - Community Sustainability Workshop

Go to www.treepeople.org to register

Out-of-Box Parkway Party

Don't have a yard? Can't quite muster the courage or the funds to do an entire lawn conversion? Then convert your parkway. The parkway is that strip of grass between the roadside curb and the sidewalk and it is a prime piece of real estate to show off your sustainable know-how.

What's prettier than grass in a parkway you might ask? Well, quite a few things. In fact, a parkway with compacted turf and overspray from sprinkler heads running into the street, is really not that beautiful at all. So what can you do instead? Lots. Along with buffalo grass, we've got about another 20 plants that will rock your parkway world... from chamomile to thyme; carex to yarrow; beach strawberry to green carpet (yes, that's what it's really called); from dymondia to sea spray...there is a choice that is sure to suit your fancy.

When your curious neighbor asks about your new parkway look, you can share your amazing knowledge of residential parkway landscaping. (Get the complete guidelines here: <http://www.treepeople.org/la-city-parkway-guidelines-cash-grass>) Once they see how lovely sustainable landscapes can be, why not throw a parkway party? Get your neighbors to convert their parkways and hold a frontyard BBQ... now that's something to celebrate!

3. What about artificial turf?

Nope. Our goal is to create healthy soil. The best way to do that is with thriving plants that have a deep root system and lots of mulch. Artificial turf may not use water to stay green, but its positive impact ends there. It still creates run-off and local birds and beneficial insects are not attracted to plastic grass, recycled content or not.

4. What if I just can't afford to redo my entire yard?

Replant your parkway. (See the "Out of the Box" article.) Once upon a time, a parkway conversion required a pricy permit, but no more. Thanks to smart city agencies and TreePeople, plant one of about two dozen climate appropriate plants and you'll be setting a nice example for your entire neighborhood.

Or, just stop watering your yard, and put aside the money you're saving on your water bill. You'll be able to convert your entire yard in no time.

5. Is grass really that terrible?

Hate to say it, but yes. The run-off and pollution issue aside, Angelinos use about 50-70% of our potable water to keep our lawns green. Sure, we can all fall under the spell of the green lawn allure, but honestly, if it uses that much water, you need to be able to eat it.

Need further inspiration? Go to the L.A. River, look at your water bill and reduce it by half. Whether it is water quality or quantity, there is a real, significant cost for grass. And look at it this way, with the money you save, you can treat yourself to a nice steak and shrimp dinner on the beach at sunset... Bon appétit!



Tray of buffalo grass.

Free Rain Gardens

Do you live in the northeast San Fernando Valley? Would you like a rain garden for FREE? Well, you just may qualify for a pilot program to turn your yard from a water hog into a rainwater harvester. Thanks to a partnership between LADWP, Generation Water and TreePeople, LA city residents who live south of the 210, east of Balboa and north of the 101, may either receive rebates up to \$1000 for rain gardens they install themselves, or can arrange with Generation Water to have a rain garden installed for free! See www.laraingardens.org for details.