

Let's Plant a Low Water Use Lawn

Because we live in the high desert, water is a very precious commodity. Did you know that there are low-water use lawn alternatives that are actually hardier and need less care and mowing than the standard Blue Grass lawn?

The trend in landscaping in the Southwest is "Water-wise Landscaping", and one of the primary objectives of a well-planned landscape is to limit the amount of high-water turf grass. Did you know that Kentucky bluegrass requires over 48 inches of water during a typical growing season? That is a lot of gallons of water. By substituting native grasses like Blue Grama or Buffalo Grass, there is substantial water savings.

Here is a comparison of some interesting statistics:

Grass Type	Precipitation Needed Per Year	Supplemental Summer Water When Dry	Frequency of Mowing
Buffalo Grass	15-30 inches	½ inch per week	Monthly
Blue Grama	15-25 inches	½ inch per week	Monthly
Dwarf Fescue	30-40 inches	1 inch per week	Monthly
Kentucky Blue Grass	48-60 inches	2-3 inches per week	Weekly

The above comparisons show how thirsty and high maintenance Kentucky Blue Grass can be. Native grass lawns are often more resistant to diseases, insect infestations, and because they live in their natural environment they are more drought tolerant. Blue Grama and Buffalo Grass are described as short prairie grasses. They are both warm season grasses, meaning that they will be green during the hot months. In the spring, they are dormant until the weather gets warmer and then go dormant again in the cool fall weather. One of the advantages of native grass lawns is that they don't have to be mowed, but can be if a more manicured look is desired. Even if you do mow, the frequency might only be once a month. If you choose to not mow, it is recommended mowing once in early spring to remove the old growth and to allow the new growth to be visible.

If left uncut, the grass will have a soft appearance and can look extra beautiful if planted with native wildflowers to create the appearance of a short grass prairie. You might also consider adding other native grasses such as Mexican Feather Grass, Prairie Dropseed, Little Bluestem, Indian Rice Grass or Switch Grass.

Blue Grama makes a fine native turf when seeded at the rate of 3-4 pounds per 1000 square feet. Seed can be sown when night temperatures reach 60 degrees. Seeding can continue through the summer months until 6 weeks prior to the first average frost date. It is well adapted to poor soils and soil enrichment is not required. However, improving the soil by adding amendments such as compost and fertilizer prior to planting will help the

grass thicken up more quickly. The seed should germinate within 7-10 days if regularly watered. If the seeds have not germinated within a month, it may be necessary to re-sow more seed. Once established, to keep your new lawn green and actively growing, Grama Grass may need extra water during the hottest part of the summer. If you choose not to water after it is established, it may brown out in extended periods of hot, dry weather, but will quickly green up again after a few good rains. Areas receiving less than 8 inches of precipitation annually may need to water every 2-3 weeks during the summer to keep it alive and healthy. Fertilize lightly once in early spring. After two months of growth, mow to a height of 3-4 inches to help thicken up the new lawn. Blue Grama is the easiest of the native grasses to grow. You can see a display of native grass lawns at the Arboretum in Flagstaff.