

Eco-Lawn

A traditional grass lawn requires time, money, and chemical pesticides and fertilizers which can adversely impact the environment. An Eco-Lawn is an extensive use of ground cover plants to replace the traditional grass lawn. It is an ecologically friendly meadow that creates a living tapestry of color and texture. Once established, the Eco-Lawn is drought tolerant, self fertilizing and requires no pesticides.

Traditional lawns take time to maintain, including an average of 40 hours per year just mowing. Approximately 75,000 emergency room visits are due to accidents with lawn mowers and edgers. Spending on fertilizers, pesticides and other lawn/garden consumables is in the billions of dollars every year. These chemicals leach into the groundwater and affect the surrounding ecology. An Eco-Lawn takes minimal time, eliminates chemicals and enhances the local ecology.

Commercially packaged seed mixtures are blended with varieties well adapted to specific regions. Each has components that will perform well from full shade to intense sun to provide a highly adaptive mixture. The seed mix generally runs about \$17.00 for ½ lb (approx. 500 sq ft coverage) and \$30.00 for 1 lb (approx. 1000 sq ft coverage).

One local source for an Eco-Lawn mix is the Nichols Gardens Nursery in Albany, Oregon. Rose Marie Nichols McGee, the owner, developed her mix 22 years ago with the assistance of Tom Cook, an OSU researcher. This mix has colonial bent grass, native grasses and fragrant herbs and wildflowers. Everything tolerates foot traffic and/or provides something essential, such as the clover to return nitrogen to the soil. The Eco-Lawn also increases the soil's ability to absorb water and decreases the amount of runoff.

If you decide an Eco-Lawn is for you, the best time to plant is spring or early fall. The seeds must remain moist and reach a high temperature of at least 50 degrees F. for about 6 weeks. Any existing lawn in the area to be planted must be completely killed. Till and amend the top 6 to 12 inches of soil, incorporating 2 inches of organic material for every 6 inches. Level the ground well and cast the seeds according to the instructions.

The first summer season, water regularly like any lawn to ensure good root development. The Eco-Lawn will be fully established in one or two years. Once established, the Eco-Lawn will only need to be watered once a month in the summer to keep the dormant plants alive and in good health. You can then enjoy your yard and spend the time and money on the garden, not the lawn.