



Transform Your Thirsty Bermuda Lawn



Each summer, residents with lawn areas watch as their monthly water bills grow faster than their grass. A lush green lawn is almost always the largest consumer of water in a home. Typically, a Bermuda (common Bermuda or hybrids – Tifgreen, EZ Turf, Midiron, Bob Sod, etc.) lawn area requires 1 ½” of water every week in the summer. If we tally a years’ water requirement for Bermuda grass it would equal more than 40 inches!! This is despite its dormancy throughout the winter. There are also maintenance issues to deal with. This includes mowing once per week, fertilizing once per month plus edging, dethatching, and aerating. A weekly check of the sprinkler system is recommended to catch leaks or misaligned sprinkler heads. Whether you care for your lawn yourself or pay someone else, it can be costly and time consuming.

Lawns typically use twice the amount of water than the same size area planted with colorful desert landscaping. Think of how much you could save on maintenance and water costs by replacing turf areas that aren’t used for recreation by adults, children or pets with a more water-efficient landscape of plants that thrive in our desert soils and climate.

The goal of a water efficient landscape (called Xeriscape) is to create visually attractive landscape with plants that provide color, fragrance and interest. A Xeriscape should not look like a sea of gravel or barren rocks. Instead, it should be full of beautiful green plants compatible with the environment of our Sonoran Desert. Properly maintained, these plants can easily use less than one-half the water of a traditional landscape. Once established, a xeric garden also should require far less maintenance than turf landscape.

How much will you save? Converting to Xeriscape saves money both in water and maintenance costs. The City of Chandler offers up to \$3,000 for removing unwanted grass and replacing it with low-water-use plants. Why, with the money you save on water and maintenance costs, you may be able to vacation in Bermuda!

Before you start. Creating a plan will help you tailor your landscape to meet your needs, your tastes, and your checkbook. It will help you stay focused and help you avoid time consuming and costly mistakes. Need some help in planning your new landscape? **Water Wise Landscaping** <http://www.chandler.watersavingplants.com/> includes a Garden Gallery with more than 30 categories highlight front yards, back yards, patio areas, walkways, shady spaces, entryways, benches and seating areas, and much more. **The Garden Tour** features 24 distinctive landscapes, each with dozens of photos in each section to help you solve your landscaping needs by showing local landscape combinations and solutions.

Getting rid of the grass. Summer is the best time to remove Bermuda grass because, when it’s actively growing, products applied to the leaves also kill its underground stems. This is very important when dealing with Bermuda grass because it vigorously regrows from any vegetative parts not killed. Removing an established Bermuda grass lawn takes persistence and there are initial expenses, but it is well worth the effort.

How to apply. For the best results, you almost have to trick the Bermuda by pampering it before using a product to kill it. Killing it involves the following steps.

1. One week before application of the herbicide, water the lawn daily. This makes the grass grow actively. You can even use an inexpensive fertilizer like ammonium phosphate to stimulate growth. Follow all product label directions.
2. Do not mow. The more leaf surface, the more herbicide is absorbed.

3. Apply an herbicide when the grass is actively growing and the turf is a bright green color. Use herbicides that contain glyphosate (gly-fo-sate) as the active ingredient. The best time to apply the glyphosate is from early to mid-morning. The grass will absorb the product and transport it internally down to the roots. It is a systemic that is absorbed through the leaves and is **not** effective when applied to the soil. Be patient! It sometimes takes a few days for the chemical to move into the roots and do its job. This usually kills between 85 to 95 percent of Bermuda and other turf grass species.
4. Irrigate the turf area a second time approximately one week after the initial herbicide treatment to stimulate regrowth of the surviving grass.
5. Retreat the remaining green turf.

After you've successfully killed the grass, remove any of the dead turf that remains on top of the soil. If grass reappears in irrigated areas around desirable ornamentals, spot treat the grass with a glyphosate-containing product, being careful to avoid contact with leaves or stems.

Now you're ready to prepare the site for planting and installing an irrigation system. Most sprinkler systems are easily converted to drip systems with just a few modifications. To convert, simply remove existing sprinkler heads and install drip adapters on the risers. A pressure regulator and filter are also recommended. Remember that sprinklers and drip emitters must not be controlled by the same valve. If necessary, ask your local irrigation supply store for assistance.

You may want to wait until cooler weather this fall to do your replacement planting. This will give you time to review the hundreds of plant choices available. Contact Chandler's water conservation office for free information. They can provide a copy of the FREE booklet, *Landscape Plants for the Arizona Desert*, featuring full-color photographs of over 200 water efficient trees, shrubs, groundcovers, perennials, vines, cacti, succulents and wildflowers. A new on-line version with a searchable database and added photos is not available at <http://www.amwua.org/plants/> .

Tips

1. Turning off the water to your lawn is not a good way to kill the grass. Bermuda lawns can have very deep root systems, which can continue to live for years on rain alone.
2. Do not use a soil sterilizer or complete vegetation killer. These chemicals can travel through the soil and kill desirable plants.
3. Use a water-soluble colorant so you can detect where you have already sprayed. Walk backward while applying herbicide to avoid tracking to unintended areas.
4. The use of plastic, landscape fabric or felt papers under gravel are not recommended. Some prevent rain from penetrating into the soil. Most prevent or restrict oxygen exchange which is crucial for roots. Over time, all seem to develop holes (which weeds grow through) and work their way to the surface becoming unsightly.
5. Before installing your new landscape, dig out two to four inches of grass and soil next to hardscaped areas (sidewalks, patios, decking, driveways, etc.) to prevent crushed rock or decomposed granite from falling onto patios or walkways.
6. Using the appropriate adapters, grass sprinkler systems can be easily converted to drip systems.

Alternative methods

Remember Bermuda grass is invasive and very persistent. Other methods such as solarizing, vinegar sprays, smothering, digging out, tilling or use of sod cutters will have limited success.

City of Chandler offers a great "how to" class on removing grass. Look for Basic Yard Makeovers offered in spring and fall. Details can be found on the water conservation web site at www.chandleraz.gov/water Register on line or email conserve@chandleraz.gov.

