

## Is Artificial Turf Right For Your Lawn?

First seen in the 1960's, artificial turf used to be installed only at football fields, putt-putt courses and tacky backyard patios. Synthetic grass has come a long way since then and is gaining more respect. When water bills are high and water conservation is top of mind, many homeowners are questioning whether artificial grass may be right for their yard. According to the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension's Water Wise program, turf can be the most water intensive planting in a landscape. They suggest that if you don't need turf, replace it with lower water use landscape options (such as natural desert landscaping). If you need turf, consider a synthetic lawn or a native grass turf. Let's take an un-biased look at natural and artificial grass:

### Natural Grass...

Improves air quality. The grass blades and extensive root systems capture pollutants such as dust, ozone and sulfur dioxide. Like other living plants, grass lawns absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen.

Acts as an evaporative cooler and lowers surrounding air temperatures. In 2004, Salt River Project (SRP) conducted an 18 month research exhibition on select grass varieties, synthetic turf and xeriscape. Natural grass was the coolest at 100 degrees.

Requires maintenance. Lawns need regular watering, mowing, fertilizing and weeding, as well as occasional aerating, dethatching and the optional overseeding.

Lower install costs. A natural lawn can cost about \$1 per square foot to install, while artificial turf averages around \$6 to \$8 per square foot.



A natural lawn that is properly maintained at a community in the Phoenix area.

### Artificial Grass

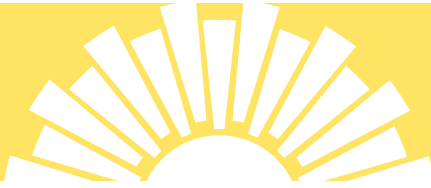
Easy to maintain – artificial grass only requires an occasional hosing to remove dust and raking to maintain appearance. You can create grass where it would otherwise be difficult to grow and maintain.

Has a hot surface. In SRP's temperature test, synthetic grass topped the charts at an unbearable 165 degrees. However, it did cool off quickly when shaded and did not radiate heat like asphalt. See Figure 4 on pg. 2.

Synthetic grass is hypo-allergenic and won't aggravate your allergies.

Long term water savings may outweigh the install costs. Most companies offer a 9-10 year manufacturer's warranty and the average life span is 15-20 years. Dan Levy of XGrass® states, "Artificial grass can save a homeowner up to 60% on their yearly water bill. That's a lot of water to conserve over the turf life span."





### Another Alternative

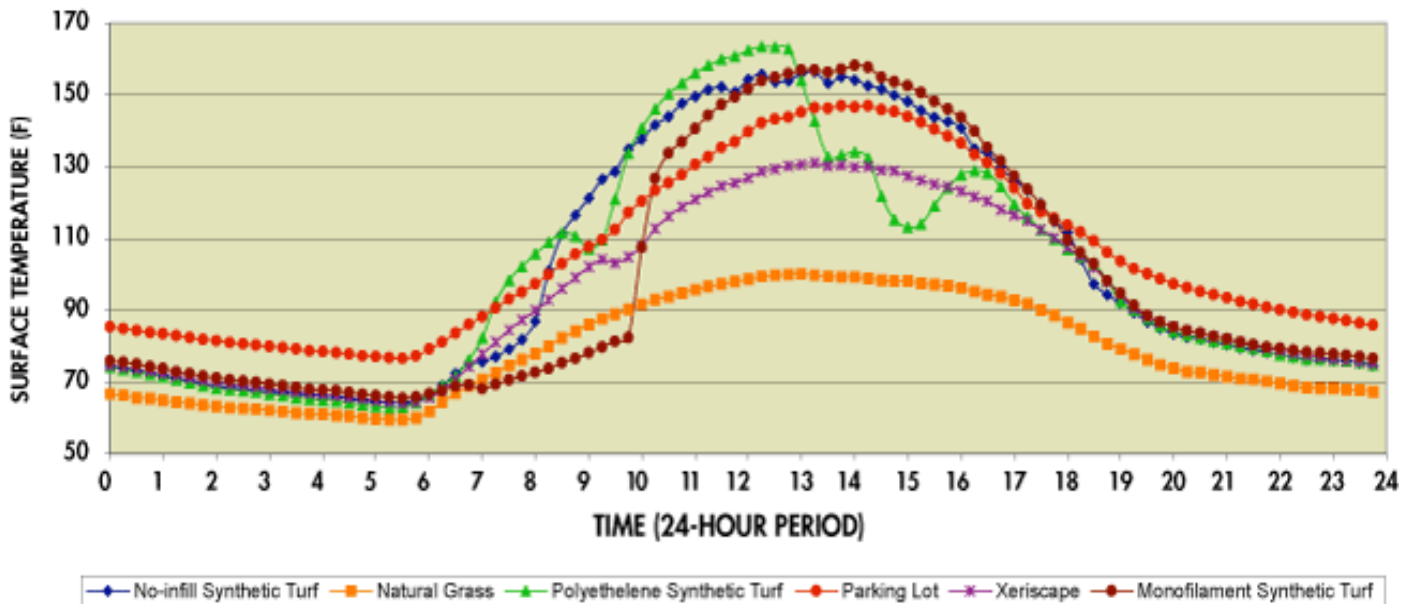
If you aren't sure that grass – real or synthetic – is what you want, consider another alternative: xeriscaping. Xeriscape is a landscaping method that employs drought-resistant plants in an effort to conserve resources, especially water. According to SRP's study, the xeriscape demonstration garden used 12 times less water than would have been needed to maintain a similar-sized area of turf. A xeriscape landscape also requires little maintenance compared to turf.

We encourage you to do your own research. Find out what your Community Association allows and if your city offers rebates for landscape conversion. Compare artificial turf companies, as each will have different costs, warranties and life spans. Your lawn is just that, yours. Make a decision that is best for your property and that has the most appeal for you.



Xeriscape highlights plants that are native to and thrive in the Southwest region.

FIGURE 4: LANDSCAPE SURFACE TEMPERATURE COMPARISON



Source: SRP® DesertWise Landscape Research Exhibit

Source:  
SRP Desert Wise Landscape Research Exhibit,  
[www.srpnet.com](http://www.srpnet.com)  
University of Arizona Cooperative Extension's Water  
Wise, [www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/waterwise/](http://www.ag.arizona.edu/cochise/waterwise/)

