

## Is Artificial Turf Right For You?

Appearing for the first time in the 1960's, artificial turf was used for three purposes mainly: football fields, putt-putt courses, and backyard patios. Thankfully though, synthetic grass has come a long way since then! When water bills are sky high in the summer – and water conservation is top of mind – many Arizona homeowners question whether artificial grass is right for their yard. According to the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension, turf is the most water-intensive planting in any landscape. If you have turf areas that don't serve a function (recreation for children, pets, etc), one option is replacing that turf with lower water-use options, such as natural desert landscaping. If you need turf areas, a synthetic lawn might be best for you. Let's take an unbiased look at natural grass versus 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, the Salt River Project (SRP) conducted an 18 month research exhibition on select grass varieties, synthetic turf, and xeriscape. Natural grass remained the coolest at 100°.
- **Requires routine maintenance.** Lawns need regular watering, mowing, fertilizing, and weeding, as well as occasional aerating, dethatching, and the optional overseeding.
- **Involves lower installation costs than artificial grass does.** Laying down seed can cost about \$2 per square foot to install, and installing sod costs anywhere from \$1 to \$4, while artificial turf can cost anywhere from \$10 to \$20 per square foot.



Natural grass that is properly maintained, even, and healthy at a Phoenix Community

### Artificial Grass

- **Is easy to maintain.** Artificial grass only requires an occasional hosing to remove dust or raking to maintain its appearance. In addition, you can install grass where it would otherwise be difficult to grow and maintain, including under shade or on sloped areas.
- **Gets hot.** In SRP's temperature test, synthetic grass topped the charts at an unbelievable 165°. However, it does cool off quickly when shaded and does not radiate heat like asphalt does. For more information, see Figure 4 on page 2.
- **Is hypo-allergenic and won't aggravate your allergies.**
- **Involves long-term water savings that often outweigh the install costs.** As we know, artificial turf doesn't require regular watering, meaning that the water savings throughout the year are significant. Plus, many companies offer a 5-15 year manufacturer's warranty on artificial turf, and the average life span is 15-20 years.



Artificial turf works well for small or oddly-shaped areas like the area next to this sidewalk





## Another Alternative

If you really don't want grass at all, another great option is xeriscaping. The xeriscape landscape method involves installing 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 a similar-sized area of turf would need. A xeriscape landscape also requires much less maintenance than turf does.

Remember:

- Do your own research!
- Check the landscape guidelines for your Community Association first to see what they do and do not allow.
- Find out if your city offers rebates for landscape conversion projects (and irrigation upgrade projects). You may qualify for a rebate!
- Compare artificial turf companies to get a sense of costs, warranties, and turf life spans.
- Your lawn is just that, yours. Make the decision that is best for your property and you.



Xeriscapes include plants that are native to and thrive in the American Southwest

Sources:

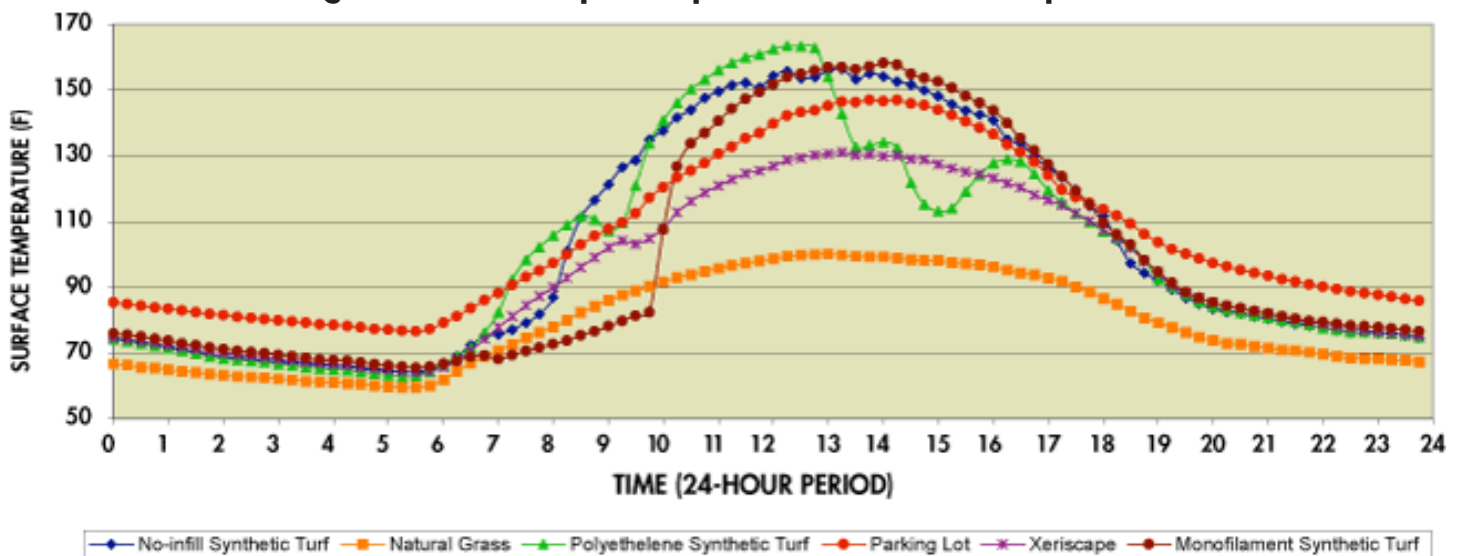
SRP DesertWise Landscape Research Exhibit, 2004

[www.srpnet.com/](http://www.srpnet.com/)

The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension

[www.caes.arizona.edu/](http://www.caes.arizona.edu/)

### Figure 4: Landscape Temperature Surface Comparison



The results from the SRP DesertWise Landscape Research Exhibit, 2004

