

LESSON 1 SURFACING IDEAS

Choosing the right surfacing material for your lawn, work or access areas (such as paths and driveways) can not only save you a great deal of time and effort in future maintenance requirements, but it can also contribute greatly to the overall appearance of your garden design. Surfacing materials can be grouped into two major types, known as 'soft' and 'hard'.

SOFT MATERIALS

These materials have some degree of 'give' in them. They have a softer feeling for walking, sitting or playing on. Soft materials are generally less durable than the harder types, particularly to heavy foot or vehicular traffic. Soft surfacing materials are widely used in play areas to reduce the likelihood of injury.

Lawns

Growing a lawn is perhaps the first, and most common idea people have when starting a new garden. Lawns have a natural, pleasing appearance and are popular to play and walk on. They are a living, oxygen producing, surface that allows water to penetrate into the soil where it can be reached by the roots of larger shrubs and trees.

The front lawn of an average house has the equivalent cooling effect of around two average-sized air conditioners. An area of 250m² of lawn (approximately) generates enough oxygen for the needs of a family of four.

Lawns require fairly regular maintenance, particularly in growing season where they may require mowing every two to three weeks or even more regularly for high quality lawns. They are generally

quite cheap to install, although costs will rise if in-ground sprinklers are installed. This will help reduce watering time and keep the lawn in good condition.

Turf grasses fall into two main groups:

- 1) Tussock forming grasses (which grow into a clump, but don't spread very much).
- 2) Creeping grasses which spread.

Tussock grasses grow tall and look good, but alone they rarely make a good lawn. Inclusion of creeping varieties is needed to bind the lawn together.

Your lawn can consist of either a single variety or be a mixture of different varieties. The advantage of a single grass variety lawn is that it is easier to maintain. If you know the ideal conditions for growing that variety, you only need to create those conditions and the lawn should grow well. When you use a mixture of several different varieties the picture becomes more complicated. Each variety has different requirements, and you need to find a compromise between the needs of each.

It is very important to not only choose the right grass varieties for a lawn, but also to have them blended in the right proportion.

Suggested Tasks: ▼

Throughout this course you will be provided with suggested tasks and reading to aid with your understanding. These will appear in the right hand column. Remember: these tasks are optional. The more you complete, the more you will learn, but in order to complete the course in 20 hours you will need to manage your time well. We suggest you spend about 10 minutes on each task you attempt, and no more than 20 minutes.

The following tables provide a generalised comparison between different turf varieties.

Table: Turf Varieties Selection

VARIETY	HABIT	USE	AESTHETICS	CLIMATE	TIME & PLANTING REQUIREMENTS
Common Couch	C	Hard wearing	Natural effect	W DT	Sprigs/sods in spring/summer: or seed in spring
Perennial Ryegrass	UT	Hardy & establishes quickly	Informal	CC	Seed in spring/autumn
Chewings Fescue	U	Hardy - light or shade	Informal/semi-formal	CC DT PS	Seed in spring/autumn
Red Creeping Fescue	C	Hardy - light or shade	Informal/semi-formal	CC DT PS	Seed in spring/autumn
Kentucky Blue Grass	UR	Finer leaf - more tender than above varieties	Semi-formal	CC	Seed in autumn
Browntop Bent Grass	UT	Fine - not hard-wearing & susceptible to diseases	Formal	CC - good drainage & light soil	Seed in spring/autumn
VARIETY	HABIT	USE	AESTHETICS	CLIMATE	TIME & PLANTING REQUIREMENTS
Creeping Bent Grass	UT	Fine - not hard-wearing & susceptible to diseases	Formal	CC - good drainage & light soil	Seed in spring/autumn
White Clover	C	Fairly hard-wearing	Informal/natural	CC - also, heat tolerant	Seed in spring/autumn
Kikuyu	C	Hard-wearing - thick stems	Natural	W (OK in CC but less vigour)	Runners in spring/summer
Annual Ryegrass	T	Hardy - establishes quickly but only lives 1 year	Semi-formal/informal	CC	Seed all year - best in spring/autumn

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Suggested Tasks

Contact a local garden centre or turf supplier, or investigate a turf or lawn seed supplier on the internet. Find out what varieties of grass they sell, either as seed or as turf.

Also, find out what blends they offer and what the options are for a shady lawn. Make notes.

Key

C	Creeping	W	Warm Climate
T	Tussock	CC	Cool Climate
UT	Upright Tussock	DT	Drought Tolerant
UR	Upright with Rhizomes	PS	Part Shade

Table: Turf Maintenance Requirements

VARIETY	WATERING FREQUENCY	MOWING	DISEASE RESISTANCE	FEEDING	WEED RESISTANCE
Common Couch	Low	Medium	V High	Medium	V High
Kikuyu	Medium	Medium	V High	Medium	V High
Perennial Rye	Medium	High	High	High	Medium
Annual Rye	Medium	High to V High	High	High	Medium
Chewings Fescue	High	High	High	High	Medium to Low
Red Creeping Fescue	High	Medium to High	Medium to High	Medium	Medium
Kentucky Blue Grass	High	High	Medium to Low	High	Low
Browntop Bent	V High	High	High	V High	V Low
Creeping Bent	V High	High	V Low	V High	Low
White Clover	High	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium

Non-Grass Lawns

You can also try something a little different and create a lawn without grass. Non-grass lawns are generally less hardy, but they do have other advantages - perhaps being scented or more tolerant of shade or waterlogged conditions. Non-grass lawns can be successfully grown with the following plants:

- **Kidney grass (*Dichondra repens*)**
- this is a low growing native plant often grown as a lawn in shaded areas. It doesn't need much mowing, but it is tender and will not withstand dry soil or heavy traffic.

- Lawn Chamomile (*Anthemis nobilis*)
- sometimes known as the 'Herb of Humility' provides a low growing attractive alternative to grass. It will withstand moderate traffic and will release aromatic oils that deter such pests as flies and mosquitoes.
- Pennyroyal mint (*Mentha pulegium*)
- has deep green foliage which generally creeps close to the surface. It prefers light shade, and moist soil.
- Thyme (*Thymus* sp.) - comes in many different varieties, from ground hugging creepers to low, compact bushes. Many varieties are suitable for a herb lawn. They have a strong savoury scent when crushed, and once established they will tolerate dry periods.

Mulch

You can simply cover the ground with a sawdust, wood shavings or some other mulch. These materials are generally inexpensive and readily obtained. They are lightweight and easily shovelled and therefore easily transported and laid. They are most commonly used to provide a soft surface for play areas (and will not stain clothing like grass or soil) or to mulch garden beds, and are occasionally used for surfacing footpaths.

Be careful that any nails and other carpenter's waste is not present, or has been removed, prior to using sawdust or shavings in play areas. This type of material will break down within a few years. It can then be dug into your garden bed to help improve the soil or used as mulch.

Synthetic Surfaces

There are a variety of synthetic surfacing materials available, usually made from plastics or rubberised compounds. These are commonly used around play areas or sometimes to provide raised walk areas in damp spots or to provide a non slip surface in such places as patios or on steps. These materials are usually durable and often quite versatile - being available in small sections, or tiles than can be clipped or otherwise easily attached to each other making it simple to reduce or expand the surfaced area as required, or to lift the surface for re-use elsewhere.

HARD SURFACES

These are materials that provide a hard, rigid surface. They are generally impervious to water and usually quite durable if they are laid properly. They can be continuous, unsegmented materials such as concrete, asphalt or gravel - or segmented types, as in pavers, tiles or blocks.

Both unsegmented and segmented materials have a few basic requirements to ensure success. These include:

1) Solid Base

This prevents movement once laid. Typically materials such as concrete and asphalt are laid on a base of compacted soil covered with a layer of crushed rock. Pavers and blocks will normally be laid on a mortar base overlying compacted soil. If they are to be subjected to heavy traffic such as on a driveway, then a concrete layer perhaps 5-8cm thick should be laid and the mortar base laid upon the concrete.