



GARDEN DESIGN

PART 2

John Mason

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As such, the publisher and author do not accept any liability for actions taken by the reader based upon their reading of this book.

PREFACE

This book brings together a collection of articles on Garden Design written by John Mason over several decades of visiting and photographing gardens, writing and teaching; and creating gardens.

The first volume (part 1) provides a strong foundation for garden design.

Over time, it is planned to continue adding further volumes, to expand on the ideas presented in this first volume; building your knowledge of landscape design and providing more ideas and inspiration.

About the Author

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Mr Mason has had over 35 years experience in the fields of Horticulture, Recreation, Education and Journalism. He has extensive experience both as a public servant, and as a small business owner. John has held positions ranging from Director of Parks and Recreation (City of Essendon) to magazine editor.

The author, John Mason, at Monet's Garden in Giverny outside Paris.

John is a well respected member of many professional associations, and author of over thirty five books and of over two thousand magazine articles. Even today, John continues to write books for various publishers including Simon and Shuster, and Landlinks Press (CSIRO Publishing).



CHAPTER 18 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 to suit your individual needs. The following tables give you a brief summary of the characteristics of some of the more commonly grown lawn 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

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			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.