STEP BY STEP

How to do an effective turf conversion

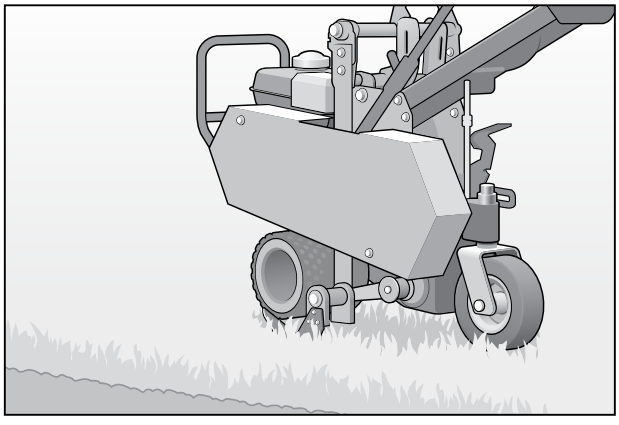
As droughts continue to plague regions throughout the country, more contractors face the challenge of keeping their clients' lawns green and healthy while using less water. Landscape watering can account for nearly 30 percent of the average residential water bill, and performing a turf conversion is one way to reduce water use. Turf conversion is replacing selected sections of turfgrass with drought-tolerant, native plants or other landscape materials. Some municipalities offer rebates or other benefits for reducing turf areas on both residential and commercial properties.

The average client is accustomed to the look of lush, green grass, and turfgrass makes sense in areas where people will sit or play. Contractors should ask themselves and their clients if it's necessary to have turf in areas such as parking strips, islands or on south-facing slopes. Is it worth it to retain turf in these hard-to-maintain areas? In some regions, it's not.

Contractors should start with a design that includes drought-tolerant, native plants that attract pollinators and beneficial insects and create wildlife habitats. It's common to include rain gardens and water features. Next, contractors should modify or replace the property's irrigation system, using the most efficient techniques to accommodate the site's current and future needs.

Follow these steps to perform a basic turf conversion.

Source: EcoLandscape California; Terracare Associates

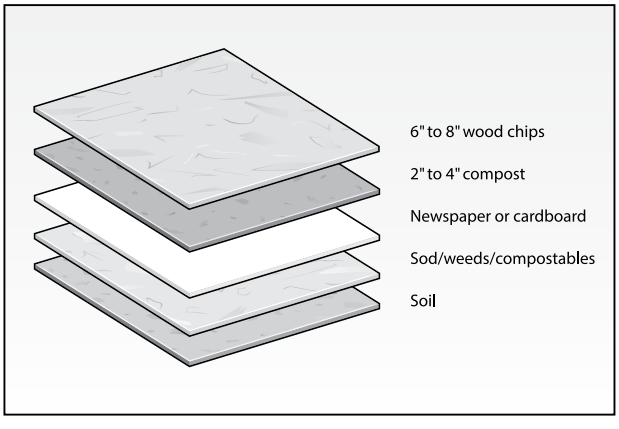


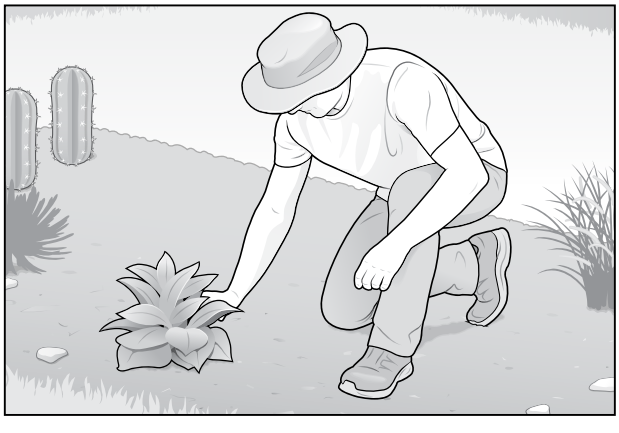
STEP 1

Remove the sod using hand tools or a sod cutter. If working with a flat surface, use this opportunity to regrade the landscape, building berms and swales to capture and infiltrate stormwater into the soil.

STEP 2

Sheet mulch the soil to kick-start its development and kill any remaining turf or weeds. Saturate the area and cover it with a ½ inch of corrugated cardboard or newspaper and 2-4 inches of compost. Top it with 6-8 inches of mulch. Water the area and keep layers moist.





STEP 3

Take note of the different hydrozones (i.e., shady, full sun, moist, dry) in the landscape and install appropriate plantings and other landscape elements. Maintain the new landscape as necessary.

ILLUSTRATIONS: DAVID PREISS