

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas



STEPHEN & KRISTIN PATEGAS

Silly Sod

You may call it lawn, turf, or grass; but when it's grown in teeny tiny nonsensical bits – we call it silly sod. These smidgeons of greenery are found in residential gardens and commercial landscapes. When we see them we wonder how they happen.

Those absurdly puny grass specks are serious energy wasters. They add numerous linear feet of mowing and edging with additional fuel and water use along with air, chemical, and noise pollution. There are extra labor costs too. Watering small areas usually means overspray onto areas that don't need as much water as the grass. Fertilizer is also wasted when it is broadcast onto hard surfaces that drain into the streets and then onward to pollute our lakes. Additional pesticide is required. Aesthetically they look like a zany afterthought and trap the eye. Indeed they usually occur not through design but by default. As the landscape changes and areas of turf are adjusted often stray pieces are left over.

We design many landscapes that include lawns when they are requested by the client and we follow these basic design principles to make sure the grass is being used efficiently in the design.

1. Ensure the grass serves a purpose: child's play area or dog area (hopefully not both in the same space), erosion control, or as an important visual component of the overall design.
2. Choose locations for good growth that provide enough sunlight and have little competition from tree roots.
3. Create large uninterrupted swaths of grass with gentle curves that are easy to mow without trees to dodge or potentially nick. Note that canopies of trees in turf will increase in diameter and ultimately shade out the grass.
4. Use the grass as a strong design element to lead the eye towards the house or to a focal point.

To eliminate silly sod, look at adjacent plantings and expand them to fill in the grassy area. If the low slung look of the grass is important to the design, go for a low groundcover that emulates the lawn.

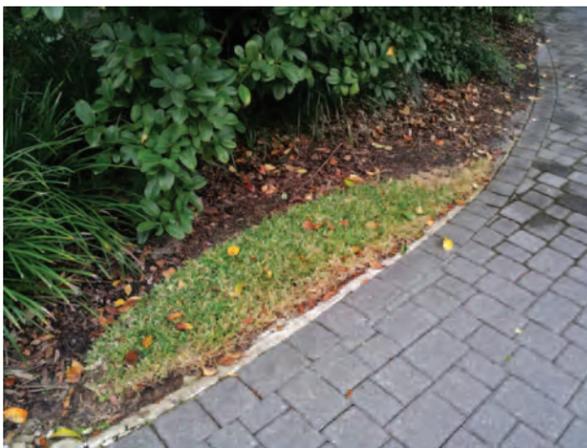
There are a handful of vertically challenged groundcovers that are used as good turf substitutes:

- Perennial peanut - *Arachis glabrata* (rhizomal type) (sun)
- Wire vine - *Muehlenbeckia axillaris* (sun)
- Mondo grass - *Ophiopogon japonicus* (shade/part sun)
- Dwarf mondo grass - *Ophiopogon japonicus* 'Nana' (shade/part sun)
- Dwarf Asian jasmine - *Trachelospermum asiaticum* (sun/part shade)
- Shore juniper - *Juniperus conferta* 'Compacta' (sun)
- Japanese garden juniper - *Juniperus procumbens* (sun)

While these shrimpy bits are too small to be believed, do take them seriously. Eliminate them to reduce maintenance, energy use, pollution, and the visual sharp stick in the eye. ■



A tree in the turf begs for damage from mowers.



How did this scrap of grass happen?



An expanse of lawn draws the eye to the house.

Kristin and Stephen Pategas design landscapes and gardens at their home and business Hortus Oasis in Winter Park. Contact them at garden@hortus oasis.com or visit www.hortus oasis.com and www.pategaionplants.com.

All photography by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis