Why Lawn Alternatives?

- Maintenance
- Grasses are aggressive spreaders that invade planted beds
- Water requirements
- Aesthetics – Boring!
- Bad Neighbors - Grasses deplete the soil of water and nutrients
- Variety – Why look like every other yard?
- Wildlife – diverse plant communities offer better habitat and food sources for insects, birds, mammals, amphibians, etc.
Minimizing Environmental Impacts of Lawns

- Grasscycling – using mulching mowers to return clipping to the soil.
- Compost Topdressing – water retention, less fertilizer
- Aeration – helps build a diverse, resilient soil microbial community.
- Overseeding with deep-rooted, drought resistant species.
- Homeowner expectations - Let it turn brown in July!
Site Factors to Consider

- Sun Exposure
- Soils
- Drainage
  - Wet in Winter?
- Foot traffic?
- Wind exposure
Getting Started

Remove turf, if necessary.

- You can use equipment to strip the sod, but this will result in the loss of some topsoil.
- You can cover the area with a thick layer of newspaper or cardboard for 2 months, which suffocates the existing turf and weeds.
- You can also rototill the area 4 – 5 times over a period of 5 – 6 weeks.
- Treatment with non-specific herbicides like glyphosate (Round-Up®) is a quicker method of destroying turf grass, though somewhat less environmentally-friendly.
Soil Prep

- Test and prepare your soil. Because plants will live in the same area for many years, it is worth the extra effort to provide healthy soil conditions at the start. Have your soil tested and add needed nutrients and lime accordingly.
- Incorporate a 1-2” layer of compost to improve fertility and moisture retention.
Choose a suite of plants. Hundreds of groundcovers are available on the market, but only those with requirements that match your site conditions will offer you a lower-maintenance alternative to turf grass.

Besides being adapted to the climate and soils of your site, groundcovers that are native to the Puget Sound region are a great choice for supporting local birds, pollinators, etc.
Plant Choices

- Ornamental Grasses
- Clover/Alfalfa
- Shrub and Flower Beds
Sedge lawns

- Native, evergreen
- Prefers moist soils
- Texture is unique
- More “hardy” to foot traffic
Alfalfa lawns

- Very deep-rooting
- Fix Nitrogen
- Nice flowers
- Valuable animal feed
- Annual mowing
Clover lawns

- Deep-rooting
- Fix Nitrogen
- Flowers/Pollen
- Foot traffic
- No mowing

Rolling in clover

Once, adding clover to my lawn would have been unthinkable. However, a new microclover with tiny leaves has made me think again. Not only does clover release fertiliser from its roots, which feeds surrounding grass, but it also grows densely to carpet the soil and smother unwanted weeds. For more information, visit www.microclover.com.

You’ll find this new microclover mixed with fine, compact, modern grass seed varieties in Johnsons Easy Lawn – look out for it in garden centres, priced at about £8.99 for 500g. This seed mix can be used to grow a new lawn from scratch, or over an existing one to improve growth. It can be applied at any time between March and October, and promises to produce a hard-wearing, family-fit lawn.
Planting an Ornamental Wildflower Meadow: Species to Consider
Lupine (Native & Ornamental)
Verbena (Ornamental)
Alyssum
Yarrow (Native)
Genus Achillea
Bishops Weed (Ornamental)
Genus *Aegopodium*
(not Yellow Archangel – a noxious weed!)
Juniper (Some Native, Some Ornamental)
Creeping Thyme (Ornamental)
Bunchberry (Native) – Genus Cornus
Low Oregon Grape (Native) – Mahonia nervosa
Strawberry (Native) – Genus *Fragaria*
Kinnikinnik (Native) – *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*
Mixed Ground Covers
SOME NURSERIES NOW HAVE GROUND COVER ‘VARIETY PACKS’
Sedums (Stonecrops) – Some Native, Some Ornamental
Speedwell (Some Native, Some Ornamental) -
Genus Veronica
Veronica repens – Creeping Speedwell
Rupturewort (Ornamental) - Genus *Herniaria*
Mixed Shrub-Flower Beds
Hostas (Ornamental) – Genus Hosta
Establishment & Maintenance

- Water - 1 in per ft. of rooting depth, at least twice weekly during summer
- Weeding – as needed
- Maintain mulch layer
- Relatively maintenance free after 2-3 years
Non-Plant Alternatives – Xeriscaping
Use of stone or rock

https://extension.wsu.edu/chelan-douglas/gardening/generalgardening/native/