

Features

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More Plants, Less Lawn

Kathy Jentz



The horticultural industry trends over the past decade have been pointing to lawn alternatives for the aging Baby Boomers/Generation X and busy Millennials who are looking to downsize and spend more hours pursuing creative hobbies and less time on boring chores. The ecologically minded folks, especially Generation Z, are also embracing groundcovers and other alternatives to turfgrass lawns as they purchase their first homes and look for better ways to maintain their landscapes that are Earth-friendly and an investment in their futures.

The display for groundcover plants at Botanic in Opelika, Alabama, affectionately calls them “Toe Ticklers” and highlights their benefits.

Your customers have likely been peppering you for years with questions about how to have a low-maintenance landscape, but they don't know exactly how to achieve that. This spring, give them the solution they've been searching for by introducing them to the concept of groundcovers and

tying it into the Reduce Your Lawn Day movement.

Why Reduce Your Lawn Day?

After I wrote my book, “Groundcover Revolution,” I gave talks at the Philadelphia Flower Show and to many other groups and organizations about using groundcovers to replace lawns. The reactions were overwhelmingly positive, but I could tell many in the audiences felt some hesitation in beginning to replace their own lawns. It occurred to me that some kind of kick-start event could really galvanize interest in lawn reduction and groundcover use. I came up with the idea for Reduce Your Lawn Day and registered it as a national holiday on May 20 each year.

To help get the word out, I partnered with American Meadows, who designed the logo and created a webpage for ReduceYourLawnDay.org where individuals and organizations can pledge to reduce their lawns and be entered for a prize package each year. The first Reduce Your Lawn Day took place in 2024 and more than 3,100 people signed the pledge to convert a portion of their turf lawns into sustainable alternatives. Those pledges totaled in 10.5 million sq. ft. For 2025, we hope to get 10,000 pledges and to at least double that square footage.

Notice that we're using the wording “reduce” and not “eliminate” or “remove.” The turfgrass lawn is a status symbol for many and serves a purpose for those with pets and children. We're not saying get rid of all your lawn tomorrow, but to look at where lawns are failing and better-suited plantings could replace it.



Pictured: Valley View Farms Garden Center in Cockeysville, Maryland, features a variety of eye-catching color for groundcovers, perennials and other options to help customers reduce lawn area.

In my opinion, if the only time you set foot on your lawn is to mow, water and fertilize it, it can go. That space could be a tapestry of groundcovers, a pollinator meadow or even a vegetable garden. I'm a firm believer, though, that a little change is better than none. I also think baby steps are more realistic and doable than all-at-once conversions, so our messaging is all about expanding perennial beds and installing shrubs or trees to eat up that lawn space a little bit each year.

Create a Groundcover Plant Display

In the months leading up to Reduce Your Lawn Day, you can create a groundcover display in your store that helps educate your customers about the numerous possibilities available to them. At independent garden centers that I've visited in the last few years, I've noticed that most groundcover choices are mixed in amongst the perennials and often there's nothing on the label to indicate they can be used for groundcover purposes.

Signage and displays can explain the many benefits of these low-growing, spreading plants from limiting weed growth to stabilizing slopes to adding texture as an under-layer to your garden. Moreover, let folks know that groundcovers can provide many ecosystem benefits from tree root protection to erosion control to wildlife food and shelter. Point out the attributes of these beautiful, hard-working plants and share some of your staff's favorites with stories on your social media.

Make the groundcover display unique and eye-catching. Add a touch of whimsy and fun to catch your customers' attention. One independent retailer that does a great job of this is at Botanic in Opelika, Alabama—they display their groundcovers under the banner of "Toe Ticklers" and define that as plants to "fill in, spill over, walk on." The vertical outdoor displays maximize space and invite customers to browse through the many choices.

Valley View Farms Garden Center in Cockeysville, Maryland, does a wonderful job in late winter-early spring of lining up their groundcover selections on raised benches by type and then offering several colorful variations. For instance, their Coral bells (*Heuchera* sp.) selection looks like the deliciously eye-catching display of a candy store or bakery. Their signage is also thorough and helpful, with a special designation for local native plants.

An additional way to assist your customers in their groundcover selections is to group them by their growing conditions. For instance, those that thrive in dry shade versus those that need full sun. It's also a good idea to add some stickers or tags to alert them to those that are deer-resistant.

Keep in mind your lawn department as well, where you can create a display with seeds for alternative lawn choices such as clovers, local wildflower mixes and no-mow lawn mixes. Let your staff know that lawn renovation questions are a good opportunity to ask your customers if turfgrass is the best plant choice for that location and if they've considered other options.

Create a Before & After Display on Your Grounds

Do you have an expanse of turfgrass lawn on your property that can be converted to a groundcover? I bet you have at least 10 x 10 sq. ft. in a highly visible area that could serve as a demonstration of a lawn conversion. Invite your

customers to follow along on the process. Let them know what you're planning and why.

Be sure to take lots of photos before, during and after the process. Share it across all your social media and track it weekly to let folks know how it's going. A video or slideshow of the lawn removal and then resulting planting will get lots of engagement. The Reduce Your Lawn Day webpage has free signage that you can download and print out to let others know about your lawn conversion.



Pictured: Materials for free signage like this one can be found at ReduceYourLawnDay.org.

You'll get lots of questions about the transition and many will want to know if you can do this for them. Is this a resource you can add to your store offerings? Maybe you rent sod cutters or provide a sod removal service? You can calculate the amount of plugs needed to establish an area of groundcovers and offer to order them for customers from wholesale growers.

Partner with a Nonprofit

Create an event for the actual date of Reduce Your Lawn Day or the weekend before or anytime during the month of May. It could be as simple as partnering with a nearby church or other nonprofit organization and removing some of their turfgrass lawn and planting a native pollinator meadow. Place a sign with your logo on it and a message such as, "This lawn alternative project sponsored by your friendly neighborhood IGC."

The event could also include tables from local wildlife, ecology, master gardeners and green groups to display their information. Publicize it to local media and invite elected officials to participate. Have one of your expert staffers speak or hire a professional garden speaker to talk about lawn alternatives and answer questions.

Once your event is over, keep sharing the message across your social media channels and ask customers to post their before-and-after images of their own lawn removal projects as inspiration. Build on the success by hosting the event annually and expanding your offerings and partnerships each time.

By celebrating Reduce Your Lawn Day and tying in your product inventory and plant choices, you create wins all around for your business, customers and community. **GP**

Kathy Jentz is the host of the GardenDC Podcast, a garden book author and is editor/publisher of Washington Gardener Magazine, the publication for Mid-Atlantic home gardeners. She can be reached at KathyJentz@gmail.com.