

Top 7 Mistakes Made By Landscapers and Garden Designers when Installing and Caring for their Lawns

1. Installing The Wrong Turf Grass
2. Unaware of Turf Grass varieties that can make their Landscape Projects shine
3. Unsure how to care for all the different Turf Grass varieties
4. Being Jack Of All Trades and Master of None
5. (In)Correct Lawn Maintenance Procedures
6. (Not) Choosing the right Contractor to help in caring for your Lawns
7. (Not) Understanding the structure, biology and Pests of Turf Grass species

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One of the important jobs completed in any Landscape Construction is the new Lawn...

Yet all of your good work can be undone with unsightly clover, oxalis and winter grass invading the lawn, not to mention the ravaging effects of Army Worm, Curl Grub and Black Beetle on your lawn in Spring and Summer.

The problems for many people with a weed infested lawn are:

- They don't know what they should spray the weeds with
- They are unsure what Selective Herbicide they should use on their Lawn (especially if it's a Buffalo lawn)
- They don't want to spend the money on all the different herbicides and fertilisers
- They don't have the time (or the ChemCert licence) to fix this problem
- They don't know how to deal with all the different Buffalo(s) – Did you know there are over 10 different Buffalo varieties, and the ST Buffalo varieties are intolerant of the broadleaf weed herbicides
- And they are unsure what type of lawn insect problem they have

If you have a Lawn problem, then LawnGreen would love to provide the solution – call Gerry on 0412.766.955

1. Installing The Wrong Turf Grass

After the house construction, house reno or when a new garden is completed, the landscaper is keen to finish the project as quickly and sometimes as cheaply as possible. The mistake often made here is in installing the cheapest grass which may well be the wrong turf grass.

Quite often you see building sites (in residential situations and also a lot in commercial developments) where the builder has installed kikuyu grass. Although kikuyu grass (*Pennisetum clandestinum*) is an attractive grass (when cared for properly), it is one of the cheapest grasses available. Whilst the builder is happy with the new (cheaper) Kikuyu Lawn the builder is unaware that kikuyu grass is extremely intolerant of shade. Over time as garden plants and trees grow, shade becomes problematic for the kikuyu grass. Other grasses that are intolerant of shade include Queensland Blue Couch (*Digitaria didactyla*) and, to a lesser degree, green Couch (*Cynodon dactylon*).

Generally, gardens mature over time and grow to a point where shade becomes a problem for most lawns, however, the best grass for Australian conditions is any one of the Australian Buffalo grasses (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*). For the sake of simplicity, we tend to recommend the Buffalo varieties that everyone is familiar with such as Sir Walter DNA Certified and so on.

The Australian buffalo grasses are recommended because of their herbicide tolerance. It is well documented that the American buffalo grasses such as ST26, ST85 and ST91 suffer terribly when sprayed with herbicides (that are) registered for use on Buffalo grass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*). You will see a note on the label of retail herbicides saying unsafe for use on ST buffalo grasses

Contractor ignorance is a huge problem when it comes to turf grass knowledge. Most landscapers will admit that their knowledge of turf grasses is limited to the 1 subject they did at TAFE years ago. Then there is the big problem with all the unqualified Lawn Mowing and Gardening contractors who have no turf grass knowledge at all. What Grass is that? – This is a question that many Lawn Mowing Contractors, Gardeners and Landscapers should know the answer to. You only have to have to read some of the “Forum” websites for lawn mowing and gardening contractors to realize how ignorant many contractors are in regard to their knowledge of lawn and turf grasses. This ignorance only adds to the bad reputation these contractors have in the eyes of their customers and home owners. This contractor ignorance is also compounded by the incorrect knowledge passed through these so called “professional knowledge forums”. Many of these contractors tell out and out untruths regarding turf characteristics and herbicide tolerances (and intolerances) of the different grasses being discussed.

A quick lesson on Turf Grasses:

It is important to understand that turf grasses are classified in 2 broad categories. These categories being Cool Season and Warm Season turf grasses. The difference between these is as follows.

Of the COOL SEASON GRASSES, there are 2 main species. They are Rye Grass and Fescue Grass. These are mostly single stem plants. Lately turf growers have developed

Fescue with Rhizomatous features. This is good as all previous repair work was done with regular over-sowing with Fescue seed, now the RTF (Rhizomatous Tall Fescue) can repair itself. Cool Season grasses are those that propagate from seed (not runners) only, and generally only grow into a single stem plant (tufted). However, there is a new cool season grass with rhizomes called Rhizomatous Tall Fescue. This new grass is a fairly recent innovation.

Rye Grass is used effectively in sports field situations like The SCG or MCG. These fields are established with Green Couch Turf Grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) which is the playing surface for cricket over the Summer. However, as Green Couch goes dormant over the Winter and subsequently suffers from the high use of Winter sport, the Groundsmen/Curators oversow the Couch with Rye Grass to get the beautiful green appearance all Winter. As the ground gets continuous wear and tear, the Curators continue oversowing with Rye Grass seed. At the start of the Cricket season in Spring (October), the Rye Grass is selectively sprayed out of the Green Couch in readiness for the Cricket season.

So if you have seen the lovely colour of Rye Grass over the winter at the SCG then you will see the benefit for a home lawn situation.

Cool season turf grasses (common and scientific / botanical / latin names) include:

Perennial Rye grass - *Lolium perenne*

Creeping bentgrass - *Agrostis palustris*

Tall fescue - *Festuca arundinacea*

Kentucky bluegrass - *Poa pratensis*

Warm Season grasses are those that propagate from both seed and runners, and exist with Stolons (above ground runners). However, there is also a large group of Warm Season grasses that exist with BOTH Stolons (above ground runners) and Rhizomes (below ground runners).

Warm season turf grasses (with common names and botanical names) with both Stolons and Rhizomes include:

Couch - *Cynodon dactylon*

Centipede grass - *Eremochloa ophiuroides*

Kikuyu - *Pennisetum clandestinum*

Zoysia - *Zoysia japonica*

Durban - *Dactyloctenium australe*

Seashore Paspalum - *Paspalum vaginatum*

Warm season turf grasses (with common names and botanical names) with Stolons only include:

Queensland Blue Couch - *Digitaria didactyla* – Stolons only

Buffalo (in North America this is also known as St Augustine) - *Stenotaphrum secundatum* – Stolons only

In Australia, most recreational domestic lawns are Warm Season Grasses.

In the warmer parts of North America (that is, the southern states including Georgia across to Arizona), most lawns are warm season grasses.

In the UK, most lawns comprise rye grass and fescue.

If ever you don't know "What Grass Is That" at your customer's place...then a good resource is the LawnGreen website - and for common and botanical names specifically you can refer to [http://www.LawnGreen.com.au/what turf grass is that](http://www.LawnGreen.com.au/what_turf_grass_is_that)

When referring to particular plants (and animals) we may use common names or we may use scientific names. Common names are the names given by local people to refer to plants and animals. So common names may be totally different from one country to another, from one state to another, and even from one county to another.

The way we effectively distinguish one type of grass from another is with the botanical or latin name. The botanical name of a lawn type is the same anywhere in the world.

In the group of warm season grasses, there are many different varieties of each grass species. For example, in the Buffalo (St Augustine grasses) group, there are as many as 20-30 varieties world wide.

Turf grasses have different common names depending on which country you are from. Buffalo turf (including Sir Walter buffalo) is called Buffalo grass in Australia, however, the American common name equivalent is St. Augustine grass. Interestingly, there is another grass in North America called Buffalo grass which is not the same as Australia's Buffalo grass.

2. Unaware of Turf Grass varieties that can make their Landscape Projects shine.

Garden and landscape designers and landscape architects are all looking for plants that will make their Landscape Projects shine.

There is no shortage of beautiful Turf Grasses for Designers to choose from to achieve the best design outcome.

For example, Queensland Blue Couch (*Digitaria didactyla*) is an attractive grass, however, it performs terribly in shade and goes off in hot dry summer heat.

So some Landscape Designers are going for other interesting looking grasses that are more shade tolerant, like the different Zoysia varieties like Platinum Zoysia, Empire Zoysia and Sir Grange Zoysia, to achieve an interesting "textural look or colour" they want in a grassed area.

You would never have two (2) different species of grass growing side-by-side, however, you could plant different species in areas that are separated by paths or borders to create an interesting look. This scenario could work where you want to have a shade tolerant grass (like Buffalo) planted near a tree and a garden separating the Buffalo from another lawn area which is in full sun in winter.

Landscapers would do well in visiting a Turf Farm (turf supplier) where the turf grower can show you the different species of grasses grown. At www.GreenLineTurf.com.au, they have 6 or 7 small Turf sections of 2 by 1 metres each for 6 or 7 different species of Grasses to look at and compare side by side. It is best to view these in Summer and Winter to see the best and worst of the grass species.

To understand the range of grasses available go to <http://LawnGreen.com.au/what-grass-is-that-a-guide-for-lawn-mowing-contractors-gardeners-and-landscapers-lawn-green-lawn-care/>

In the category of Cool Season grasses, you may be interested in planting Rye Grass or Fescue Grass in shady areas. The only problem is these grasses thin out in the summer heat unless the water is kept up to them.

Another grass that does not get much publicity is Durban Grass (*Dactyloctenium australe*). Durban grass is a fantastic grass for extreme shady areas, however, due to its structure, it needs to be mowed very high at around 75-100 mm (3-4 inches). It is most probably best planted in an area that is not used much but when viewed from a distance looks good. Durban Grass is grown and sourced from Queensland and northern NSW turf growers.

3. Unsure how to care for all the different Turf Grass varieties

The biggest problem faced by contractors when caring for the different species of Turf Grasses is knowing which herbicides are safe to use on the different Grasses.

Even though the labels on different herbicides say they are safe for use on Buffalo (Stenotaphrum secundatum), this is not fully correct! There are over 10 different varieties of Buffalo Grass sold in Australia, however, there are 3 that are intolerant of the selective broadleaf weed herbicides. These 3 are the American Buffalo Grasses called ST 26, ST85 and ST91 Buffalo.

At www.LawnGreen.com.au we always test the herbicides on the Buffalo Lawns of our NEW customers. After 2 weeks we re-visit the site and when we see there has been no damage then we know we can safely spray all the weeds in that lawn.

The different broadleaf weed Herbicides (retail and professional products) have been tested on different grasses including buffalo grasses. However, the Labels on these products are not very clear what effect they have on the ST Buffalo varieties.

The Retail herbicides available at Bunnings are limited in their capacity to control most weeds, however, we have access to the full range of Professional Turf Products that deliver a 100% top notch job.

The knowledge of the different Turf Grass varieties is staggering and knowing what can and cannot be used in each Turf situation can be a challenge for the regular Landscaper.

Interestingly, LawnGreen's owner, Gerry Faehrmann, is consulted regularly by others in the industry (turf growers, fertiliser & herbicide suppliers, landscapers, contractors) regarding the effect of herbicides on different grasses. LawnGreen's target market comprises mostly residential homeowners and the range of turf grasses dealt with is broad. Needless to say, LawnGreen's experience with the broad range of Turf Grasses is more than greenkeepers and bowling green keepers as they really are only dealing with kikuyu and couch. However, to give credit where it is due, greenkeepers and bowling green keepers have to take care of their grasses in a more intense way.

4. Jack Of All Trades and Master of None

A wise businessman I knew once said, "It is best to stick to the knitting!", meaning you cannot be all things to all men.

If landscaping, gardening or design is YOUR thing then do that very well and outsource the more complicated stuff like the Weed & Feed Lawn Care (ie. the lawn spraying and fertilising).

If you start branching out into a new area of expertise you need to be ready to handle all the customer related problems that come with it including all your after sales calls. The moment you let the customer down in this regard they will drop you like a hot potato and they will tell everyone of the bad experience with you. The point here is not "to spread yourself thin", it just isn't worth it!

With Lawn Care you not only need to know your turf grasses (there is over 50 different varieties of over 12 different species of turf grasses), you also need to understand what herbicides, insecticides and fungicides work with the many different grasses.

In our LawnGreen vehicles we stock every selective herbicide, insecticide & fungicide for any possible lawn pest situation. At www.LawnGreen.com.au we provide a very specialised service of Weed & Feed Lawn Care, and nothing else. That is, WE DO NOT DO ANY MOWING or GARDENING.

If you decide to do your own weed spraying you need to be prepared to stock all the products that will give you a top result. Also, you will need to conform with Government licencing regulations, that is, you need to get the ChemCert licence or similar. Refer to www.ChemCert.com.au

Interestingly, LawnGreen works very well with some successful Landscaping companies in Sydney NSW. These companies refer their customers with problematic lawns to LawnGreen.

Contractors should be proud of the Service they provide to their customers. However, what pisses us off is the amount of mis-information put out by many lawn mowing and gardening contractors.

Impress the customers with your knowledge of turf grasses and associated turf problems, but don't make stuff up just because the customer may not know or you just feel you have to say something. You do NOT want to advise your customer about a lawn issue if you are not ABSOLUTELY sure the advice is CORRECT.

Many times we have heard customers and prospects tell us some of the following:

1. "My lawn mowing guy told me the brown spots in the lawn was caused by heat stress." - The correct answer might be the lawn has suffered from Curl Grub damage or dog urine over the lawn. Don't say it is heat stress if you are not sure. If it was heat stress, then by all accounts the whole lawn would be off-colour.

2. "The lawn needs to be de-thatched." - This depends on what type of grass it is. Buffalo vs couch or kikuyu - the type of grass will dictate whether you can or should de-thatch the grass.

You can be really proud of yourself providing you give out GOOD information. Otherwise, if you are not sure, admit it and tell the customer you will come back to them with an answer.

Once again, make sure you rely on good sources for your knowledge of grasses.

5. (In)Correct Lawn Maintenance Procedures

In our travels we see the evidence of Landscapers' lawn mowing and maintenance. Sometimes we see lawns cut too short or too long, and the correct mowing height depends on the type of grass you are looking after.

In summary, you need to mow the lawns as follows:

*Buffalo grass likes to be mowed around 25 mm in Summer as it is growing vigorously and maintains a nice thick and dense appearance.

*Buffalo grass likes to be mowed higher going from Summer into Autumn and Winter. So as you leave the Summer, mow the Buffalo lawn higher at around 35-50 mm. We like to do this as it compensates for the reduced sun light hours in Winter. The higher the grass, the more surface area of leaf, therefore, the grass photosynthesises more, therefore, the grass stays greener for longer.

*Buffalo grass hates being scalped, so never cut it short like couch or kikuyu grasses. Buffalo Grass is built differently to your Couch and Kikuyu Grasses. Buffalo is built only with Stolons (above ground runners), whereas Couch and Kikuyu are built with both Stolons (above ground runners) and Rhizomes (below ground runners). So when you see couch or kikuyu scalped in Summer, they repair pretty quickly as the rhizomes can pop through the soil to begin repair. Whereas, the buffalo grass has to repair itself from the above ground runners only.

*Consequently, when mowing any grass you need to be careful in using a whipper-snipper for trimming around the lawn edges and around trees. Make sure you keep the whipper-snipper (brushcutter) cord at least 30mm above the ground to avoid lawn scalping.

Lawns require different watering to garden plants. It is really important to water your lawns heavily and infrequently. This is pretty much similar to what the local Sydney rainfall provides. The only time you may need to supplement the watering is in the hot dry periods of Summer. So if we are not getting any rain for a week then make sure to water once or twice a week for an hour at a time.

It is really important to NOT water frequently as this is not helping the lawn (can stunt root development) and can waterlog the soil (depriving oxygen to the lawn roots).

For more information, go to <http://LawnGreen.com.au> and subscribe to "The 5 Secrets To A Great Looking Lawn" Report. It's free.

6. (Not) Choosing the right Contractor to help in caring for your Lawns

If you want to hire a contractor to look after the Weed & Feed Lawn Care side of things then you need to consider the following:

*Be sure the Lawn Care contractor is experienced. Experience: Check a list of their existing customers and make sure you see a variety of lawn species they look after.

*Be sure the Lawn Care contractor is qualified. Qualifications: Make sure they are ChemCert qualified

*Check the contractor's knowledge of All-Things-Grass

*Does the contractor stock all the turf products in their vehicle. At LawnGreen, we stock the very expensive and less used herbicides like Destiny. Destiny is a herbicide that is mainly used for the control of Onion Weed and Onion Grass on all Warm Season Grasses except Queensland Blue Couch. Destiny cannot be used on Cool Season Grasses like Rye Grass. Destiny is sold in 250gram boxes containing 5 by 50 gram sachets. We pay over \$700 for this product which is used fairly sparingly, that is, at about 1 gram per 100m². We are serious about our Lawn Care!

If you are after a Lawn Care contractor, then refer to <http://LawnGreen.com.au/why-choose-lawngreen/>

7. (Not) Understanding the structure, biology and Pests of Turf Grass species

Without this understanding it is difficult to get the best result for your Lawn Care.

Broadly, the 3 main pest problems for Turf Grasses are:

- a. Weeds
- b. Diseases
- c. Insects

Landscapers and designers are limited in their knowledge of turf grasses especially as they only cover 1 subject on Turf Grasses at TAFE.

In the case of lawn mowing contractors, they have zero knowledge.

OFFER TO Landscape Industry members:

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- They are unsure what Selective Herbicide they should use on their Lawn (especially if it's a Buffalo lawn)
- They don't want to spend the money on all the different herbicides and fertilisers
- They don't have the time (or the ChemCert licence) to fix this problem
- They don't know how to deal with all the different Buffalo(s) – Did you know there are over 10 different Buffalo varieties, and the ST Buffalo varieties are intolerant of the broadleaf weed herbicides
- And they are unsure what type of lawn insect problem they have

All these problems can be fixed with 1 phone call direct to Gerry (at LawnGreen) on his mobile at 0412.766.955

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Kind Regards,

Gerry Faehrmann, Managing Director, LawnGreen Pty Ltd www.LawnGreen.com.au © 2020