



AN EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY GARDEN AT SIERRA NEVADA COLLEGE

THE NORTH LAKE TAHOE DEMONSTRATION GARDEN IS AN EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY GARDEN WHICH PROMOTES LAKE-FRIENDLY LANDSCAPING TO HELP PRESERVE OUR UNIQUE AND FRAGILE ALPINE ENVIRONMENT.

## Free BMP Workshop

*Will focus on TRPA requirements, options and creative solutions for area residents*

The North Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden, Incline Village General Improvement District WasteNot and the Nevada Tahoe Conservation District are hosting a free, half-day workshop designed to provide practical, hands-on methods for property owners to complete required Best Management Practices (BMP's). The workshop will also highlight general landscaping techniques to improve the financial and aesthetic value of your home. Experts in the field of BMPs, defensible space and invasive species will be present to provide information and answer questions.

The 4-hour class will be held on Saturday, January 26 from 10:00 am – 2:00 pm at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences (291 Country Club Drive, Incline Village) on the Sierra Nevada College campus.

The classes will review what the BMPs are, explain TRPA guidelines, offer methods to conduct in-the-field evaluations, and present designed BMPs that will meet TRPA standards. The class will also explain how to select native plants and avoid unwanted invasive species, as well as provide ideas on how to incorporate defensible space on your property to protect your home.

Homeowners are encouraged to attend. Class size is limited to 20. Please RSVP by calling the WasteNot Hotline at 775-832-1284.

For specific class information, please contact the instructor, Gretchen Huie at the Nevada Tahoe Conservation District at (775) 586-1610, ext. 25.

## Combining Defensible Space and BMPs

*By John Cobourn, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension*

Many homeowners are asking how they can have a landscape that is fire safe, good for preventing water pollution, and aesthetically pleasing. Since the tragic Angora Fire in South Lake Tahoe, scientists and fire protection experts have been working on potential modifications to landscaping and BMP recommendations. With a little thought and planning you can meet all of your landscaping objectives.

First of all, the recommendations in the *Home Landscaping Guide for Lake Tahoe and Vicinity* (HLG), and the Lake Tahoe version of "Living with Fire" are already consistent and fairly complete. Both publications describe how it is possible to integrate these practices.

What may change somewhat is the treatment of the "Lean, Clean and Green Area"—that space in your landscape within 30 feet of your house, described on page 44 of the HLG. By following the HLG's instructions, you will greatly reduce your wildfire risk. If you have many native shrubs and trees, firewood piles, or stacks of lumber within 30 feet of your house, *you need to take action*. Make this 30-foot zone:

- < Lean—Remove most drought-tolerant trees and shrubs, leaving small groups or individual specimens that are pruned to reduce fire fuel. Most shrubs can be pruned to the ground, leaving roots intact. If they re-sprout, prune different patches in alternate years. Prune each patch to the ground when it gets 18 inches tall.
- < Clean—Move woodpiles out of the 30-foot zone. Cut down and remove dead vegetation. Remove tree litter such as pinecones, fallen branches, and excessive leaves and needles.
- < Green—Replace flammable, drought-tolerant shrubs with low-growing, herbaceous (non-woody), low-fire hazard plants that are irrigated and kept green during the fire season. When grasses or perennial flowers dry out in August, they should be mowed down and the dead stalks removed.

Within the "noncombustible zone" 5 feet out from your house, mulch should be inorganic—river rocks, gravel, or local stones and boulders. Remove shrubs or other woody plants within 5 feet of your structure.

Turf that is kept green and mowed is acceptable, but only within 30 feet of your house. To properly maintain your turf, mow properly, fertilize according to the recommendations on page 119 of the HLG [sparingly, during late spring and late summer, and using conventional fast-release fertilizers], and audit your sprinkler system to ensure you're not over-watering.

The HLG provides a list of recommended native and adapted plants for Tahoe, together with their fire hazard rating (many with photos). Erosion control (non-turf) grasses should be mowed down when they turn brown in late summer. Many native and adapted perennial flowers and groundcovers are also low fire hazards, unless they are tall and densely spaced or turn brown.

With all your fire-safe choices to cover bare soil and control erosion, you can create a beautiful and functional landscape in your Lean, Clean and Green Zone. Base your choices on how you like to use your landscape and how much maintenance you can manage. The combinations of ground covers, flowers, and shrubs are virtually unlimited.





## Beautiful, Defensible Groundcover

by Ronda Tycer

Dirt rarely rises to consciousness unless we're cleaning the house or planting the yard, but lately lowly dirt has become an ecological issue around Lake Tahoe because it is crucial to lake clarity. Dirt is bad when it runs off barren land into the lake and carries with it dirty things like auto residue and fertilizer. Dirt is good when it stays in place and provides a habitat for plant roots that filter rainwater runoff en route to the lake. Our current challenge as Tahoe gardeners is to stabilize dirt—more properly called soil—with an artful combination of rock mulch and low flammability ground cover.

In the past, Tahoe gardeners often covered bare soil by leaving pine needles where they fell to provide a natural groundcover. Because Jeffrey Pine needles are—for good or bad—a free, available, and constantly renewing resource, they are a favorite groundcover around and over plants to provide protection from winter cold. Unfortunately, pine needles are, like pine trees themselves, extremely flammable. Firemen recommend that pine needles be used sparingly around plants, but even this use is currently under scrutiny. Roofs and eaves should be cleaned of needles, as should a protective 5-foot space around the edge of the house, which is preferably filled with pebbles, rocks, or turf grass.

Beyond this 5-foot space, we can plant low-flammability groundcover. In Chapter 7 of the *Home Landscaping Guide for Lake Tahoe and Vicinity* (HLG), tables present the common and scientific names of recommended native and adapted plants, a rating of moisture requirements, and a rating for fire hazard (flammability). Pages 70-78 of the guide focus specifically on turf grasses and other groundcovers we can use. Fortunately, because groundcovers are low, they are by nature less flammable than taller plants. "Ground covers, due to their low height and low fuel volume, are desirable plants for use in the defensible space" (p. 52). Yet even groundcovers need to be carefully managed so that they contribute to defensible space. Fire danger is highest in the summer, so groundcovers need to remain green through the summer and into late fall (October). Dried groundcover needs to be mowed (which can be tricky on steep slopes).

According to the HLG:

- "Well-maintained lawns that are kept green during the fire season can be effective in reducing the wildfire hazard when planted within 30 feet of the house. Lawns have their drawbacks, such as higher water use and maintenance requirements" (p. 52).
- "On gently or steeply sloped areas the guide recommends non-turf grasses and groundcovers. The HLG says, "Clover, such as the 'White Dutch' variety, is a good defensible space plant and lawn substitute. It has lower maintenance and water requirements than lawn but does not withstand foot traffic, and attracts bees" (p. 52).
- "On disturbed slopes, use erosion-control grasses such as 'Durar' hard fescue, 'Covar' sheep fescue, 'Tegmar' intermediate wheatgrass, and 'Luna' pubescent wheatgrass. If the grasses can't be irrigated and kept green during the fire season, they should be cut down once they start drying out" (p. 52).

The adjacent table shows the most common groundcovers used around Lake Tahoe. The table lists Non-Turf grasses, Turf grasses, and Groundcovers. The table indicates which of these are useful on slopes for stabilization and erosion control; which grow well in sun, part shade, or shade; the amount of moisture they need, and specific cautions or benefits.

Flat landscapes should include an artful combination of different groundcovers that help stabilize soil without needing lots of fertilizer, water, or other maintenance. Relative to slopes, a ground cover is most attractive that combines different plants taking into account characteristics such as clumping, creeping, controlled reseeding, and maintenance needs.

Ed Kleiner of the Comstock Seed Company in Gardnerville emphasized that most seeded turfs do better as a mix than as single-species because seeds germinate and establish at different rates, turfs have different growth patterns (deep versus shallow roots; spreading versus clumping; sod-forming or not; etc.), and of course they have different maintenance requirements. He created the following seed mix for a Tahoe resident with a very steep slope: Sweet Woodruff, Kinnikinnick, Sheep and Hard Fescue, Snow in Summer, and Creeping clovers.

Eric Winford of the Nevada Tahoe Conservation District provided information on different types of turfs being planted in the Demonstration Garden. He mentioned that non-turf grasses are taller bunch grasses that most often appear in meadows and other wet areas. They typically do well with heavy watering at the beginning of the growing season in order to establish their roots. Once established, they are practically maintenance-free and require little watering or fertilizer, but they should be cut back at the end of the growing season.

Eric Larusson of The Villager Nursery in Truckee provided information about the following turf mix for flat lawns:  
*The Villager Turf Mix* contains: 80% Kentucky Bluegrass and 20% Perennial Ryegrass.

Ed Kleiner provided the following information about two additional turf mixes:

*The Reno Turf Mix* contains:  
50% Kentucky Bluegrass; 30% Creeping Fescue; and 20% Perennial Ryegrass. Kentucky Bluegrass has shallow roots so requires frequent but not intense watering. It takes time to establish but wears well. The ryegrass will appear first, then the fescue and bluegrass will fill in later. The creeping fescue will lie down after it reaches a certain height. It also fills in well.

*The Meadow Turf Mix* contains:  
30% Sheep Fescue, 30% Sandberg VNS Bluegrass, 15% Mountain Bromar Brome, 10% Slender Wheatgrass, 10% Tufted Hairgrass, and 5% Blue Wildrye. This mowable native grass mix may be combined with additional hard and red fescues to increase coverage. White Dutch clover, white yarrow, and wildflowers may also be added to give the appearance of a meadow.





## Groundcovers For Tahoe

<i>Type of Cover</i>	<i>Slope/Flat</i>	<i>Sun/Part Shade/Shade</i>	<i>Moisture Needs</i>	<i>Cautions/ Benefits</i>
<b>Non-Turf Grasses</b>				
Bluegrass, Big	both	sun	med-dry	Slow germination, needs combining with sod-forming grasses to create a well-armored slope
Fescue, Blue	both	sun	med-dry	Deep roots, drought tolerant, a blue-grey, decorative bunch grass
Fescue, Hard	both	both	med	Slow germination, low maint. Bunch grass works as turf grass when seeded heavily 2 lb/1000sqft. Drought tolerant
Fescue, Sheep	both	sun	dry	Similar to Hard Fescue, loose, low growing
Ryegrass, Blue Wild	both	both	med-wet	Grows tall 2-3 feet in Tahoe's meadows. Prefers disturbed areas
Ryegrass, Creeping	both	both	med	Competitive, sod forming
Ticklegrass	both	sun	med	Beautiful 2-foot tall, purple groundcover. Fast growing
Tufted Hairgrass	both	sun	med-wet	Low tolerance to drought
<b>Turf Grasses</b>				
Fescue, Chewings	flat lawn	both	med	Spreads, works as filler
Fescue, Red (Creeping)	both	shade	wet-med	Can be mowed. Germinates slowly
Fescue, Tall	flat lawn	both	med	Low traffic, soft, green meadowgrass. Not well adapted to high altitude.
Kentucky Bluegrass	flat lawn	both	wet-med	Can be mowed. Deep roots
Ryegrass, perennial	lawn	sun	med-dry	High maint., bears traffic well
<b>Groundcovers (No/Low Foot Traffic)</b>				
Bearberry/Kinnikinnick	both	both	med	Establishes quickly, low traffic. Only in combination with Kentucky Bluegrass sod mix.
Cinquefoil, Spring	both	both	wet-med	Beautiful low growing evergreen
Candytuft/Iberis	both	both	med-dry	Invasive, bright green tufted creeper
Lupine, Brewers	both	sun	dry	Early spring white lowers
Manzanita, Pinemat	both	sun	dry	Beautiful flowers, may attract aphids
Penstemon, Whorled or Sierra	both	both	med-dry	Difficult to establish
Scotch Moss	both	sun/p.shade	med	Tubular flowers, attract hummingbirds
Stoncrop/Sedum	both	both	dry	Needs good soil, good between pavers
Snowberry, Creeping	both	both	med	Rock gardens, ground or bank cover
Strawberry, Mountain	both	both	wet-med	Several varieties, drought tolerant
Strawberry, Wood	both	both	wet-med	Attractive low edging plant
Squaw Carpet	both	both	med-dry	Rock gardens
Sweet Woodruff/Bedstraw	both	shade	med	Difficult to establish
Thyme, Wooley	both	shade	med	Early summer, tiny white flowers
White Dutch Clover	both	both	dry	Slow growing
				Invasive, but hardy





# GARDEN

## From the President's Plot

by Mimi Komito

Ever since we started planning the move of the Demonstration Garden to the Lake Campus we have been discussing a more illustrative defensible space demonstration. Part of this demo was some kind of mock structure to better be able to illustrate the various vegetation zones around a home. As fate may have it we found out last spring that we needed to relocate our garden shed. The garden shed is now the structure for our defensible space demonstration. We have installed some of the BMPs around the shed and come next spring we will finish up the BMPs and also arrange proper vegetation and hardscape around the shed together with zone markers for a clear display of the various fire safe requirements.

One of our most exciting new demonstrations is our turf beds. The hardscape was put in place late this fall and come spring we will seed many different grasses (see related articles in this issue), both native and adapted grasses. Some of the grasses will be seeded at different ratios to illustrate the difference in appearance. For example, when bunch grass (often used as a slope stabilizer) is seeded at the recommended ratio and watered sparingly and not mowed, it takes on a meadow like quality. When the same grass is seeded more densely, mowed occasionally and watered more often, it takes on a lawn like appearance and a more manicured look. We are all very excited about this new demo and can hardly wait for spring to come and the first tender blades of grass to sprout.

On behalf of the entire Demonstration Garden board I wish you all a Very Happy Holiday Season! When life quiets down somewhat after the Holidays, it's time to crack open the seed catalogs and garden magazines and start planning for the coming growing season - this is truly one occasion when getting there is half the fun! Hope to see you all on the garden path next year!

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We hope you enjoyed this newsletter and will help to ensure the educational efforts of the **North Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden** by becoming a *Friend of the Garden*. The NLTD Garden is a nonprofit organization and your donations are tax-deductable. A donation of \$25, or more, will make you a *Friend of the Garden* and will help maintain free community education classes, purchase replacement plants and tools, support our newsletter, and encourage our efforts to teach responsible gardening techniques that preserve the fragile environment of Lake Tahoe. Clip and return to PO Box 5387, Incline Village, NV 89450.

Membership Acceptance and/or annual renewal: \$25  \$50  \$100  Other

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone and/or email: \_\_\_\_\_

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Yes, I would like to participate in the garden in other ways as well. I would be interested in helping with:

The Newsletter  Garden Maintenance  Special Events  Teaching/Mentoring

*The North Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden is an educational community garden which promotes lake-friendly landscaping to help preserve our unique and fragile alpine environment.*

