

Idea overload stalls sod replacement project

Publisher's note: *This is one in a random series of stories about what it's like to go through the South Tahoe Public Utility District turf buyback program.*

By Kathryn Reed

Brittle. That's my front yard. It's a yard, but definitely not grass.

Friends have come by to offer advice about how to transform it, others have emailed, called or told me in person what I should do. All of this has been welcome. The problem is I'm overloaded with information and ideas. Thank goodness I have two years to finish this endeavor.

The best advice I've received is just start – and start it in small sections. I still need to take that advice.

One friend suggested having a girls' turf removal party to get it all done quickly. I'm worried I wouldn't have any friends to enjoy the finished product with. Others said look into using a sod remover device. Why aren't home improvement-machine rental stores open seven days a week in Tahoe?

Grass has some serious roots that I took for granted when all I did in the past was set the automatic sprinklers and mow. My yard is uneven, so that will take some leveling. I still need to mark the sprinklers – sort of like the call before you dig campaign used for utility line identification.

While no turf has been removed as I write this, I have bought plants. The master gardeners' sale at Lake Tahoe Community College earlier this month was fantastic. All of these experts were milling about, suggesting what works well where. And the

plants were so cheap.



The local master gardeners group has an annual plant sale in South Lake Tahoe in June. Photo/LTN

I was told to get there early for the best selection. Those in the know were not kidding. I thought it meant “Tahoe time” early. Wrong. I missed out on the trees.

The \$50 worth of plants I have are mostly sitting along the edge of the house in shade. One looks dead. The edibles are out back in more permanent containers. I’m pretty sure those containers will find their way to the front in the final design.

Design. More procrastination. While Coleen sketched out what the front could look like, I have yet to do a final version.

I’m likely going to take Lisa’s advice and put in gutters. I have someone coming out in July to give me an estimate. This will render the current TRPA-designed (rather ugly) drip line a moot point. I want to add a rain barrel. (Who knew there were so many types – this just added to my sense of being overwhelmed.) The irony of tweaking the drip line is that it plays no role in the turf buy back; it just has a lot to do with the yard design.

I've figured out the work involved isn't just the grass area. Yes, it's my choice – but it's part of the whole scheme. If money and coverage were not issues, the driveway, walkway and kitchen expansion would be occurring. This is because the front yard ties into all of that. Oh well, another day for those improvements.

I have split the wood that was in the way. I've been taking dog walks on streets I don't normally travel on so I can get more ideas. I'm sure people think I'm nutty taking picture of their plants, color, design and yard art. I'm going to steal one idea of having two rounds of wood and making them into a bench. This will be much easier than splitting a couple of these monsters that I can't even move.

I need to create an area for wood splitting that is completely on my property. One friend suggested having the path come from the street. I think it will look better from the driveway, with a little S curve that isn't too decorative to make using a wheelbarrow full of rounds impossible to navigate. But part of me wants to make the path wide enough to drive on to make it easier to unload the rounds. This would necessitate a straight path. It would also mean less area to have to vegetate.

And so, I keep procrastinating. But I do know I can start getting rid of the drip line. That involves moving rocks and probably making the garage inaccessible as I make the driveway a staging area. That should annoy me enough to really start going – and get things accomplished before the snow starts to fly.

What the state is doing

California is considering a statewide initiative, in partnership with local agencies, to collectively replace 50 million square feet of lawns and ornamental turf with drought tolerant landscapes. There will be a meeting about this on

July 2 from 1-3pm in Sacramento. Go online to register for the webinar. Comments on the program are being taken until July 10.

The state Department of Water Resources is also devising a model landscape ordinance at the direction of Gov. Jerry Brown.

The updated draft rules would prohibit installation of turf unless it is used for a specific function such as sports fields or gathering areas, require the installation of efficient sprinkler nozzles, ban turf in street medians and parkways with few exceptions and require use of compost to improve the water-holding capacity of soil.

Officials say the law would reduce water use at a new home by 16,000 gallons a year, or 30 percent. Water use on new commercial landscapes would be cut by approximately 40 percent. California is expected to add 472,000 single- and multi-family housing units with an associated 20,000 acres of new landscape over the next three years. The state's population is expected to grow by more than 11 million, reaching nearly 50 million people by 2050.

State law requires all land-use agencies, such as cities and counties, to adopt a water-efficient landscape ordinance that is at least as efficient as the model ordinance prepared by DWR.