

Mow Less and Enjoy More

Life is too short to manicule a lawn from property line to property line, especially when these alternatives are available

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more pastoral setting that no doubt consumes a vast portion of your life when you consider the time spent on or behind the mower. If your lawn is much smaller than either of these, chances are

When I tell someone that it takes me 16 minutes to mow my yard, they react in one of two ways. "Must be nice," is one comment. The other is, "Yeah, sure you can, you big fat liar. Nobody is that lucky..." and so on. But it's true. And with some radical advice, we can all ease off the gas, enjoy more time with the kids and invest some of our very precious, finite moments in activities other than lowering each blade of grass in the yard from four to two inches each week. Hey, let's face it. In the summer months, when the lawn "goes to sleep," many still feel compelled out of habit or guilt or both to kick up a cloud of dust and call this productivity. Before we go out and buy that new John Deere or Snapper, we should look at the big picture.

Most every lawn in Tennessee falls into one of two categories. You either have the typical, suburban quarter acre, or you have a bigger,

this article won't be too relevant. For the rest of you, here are my words of free advice. Relax. Take it easy. Life is too short to manicule a lawn from property line to property line.

If you have a really big yard, consider lawn delineation. What I mean is draw a line with marking paint, temporary flags or stakes to define a smaller, more interesting shape of lawn where most of the activity takes place. Let the "fringe" go wild. Conveying this another way, imagine your home as the bull's-eye of a dartboard. If the scale of your property allows, you can divide it into three zones. The zone closest to the bull's-eye (your home) is managed and mown more frequently. The next level gets less attention but is no less important. This can be a wildflower buffer or transitional zone separating that which is highly maintained from that which is left to



Mother Nature. This “edge,” as it is called, can be rich with wildlife. Not necessarily deer and black bears, but butterflies, birds, rabbits and other Bambi-like critters. If this sounds too woolly for you, consider weed whacking or bush-hogging annually (in late winter) to keep the woody plants at bay. The third zone or perimeter of this dartboard is left untouched. Let natural succession occur here. Or you can supplement the privacy effect by planting evergreen trees.

The majority of us probably fall into the second category of smaller lawns. Due to codes and neighborhood conformity, it's harder to get away with the apparent wildness described above. My advice here is “mow less, plant more.” Again, the philosophy is that a smaller, well defined, appealing shape of lawn is no less attractive than the rest of the landscape and can indeed be the focal point. Instead of letting natural succession do most of the work, define the lawn and concen-

trate plantings around the perimeter. This can be expensive if you tried to do it all at once, so take your time and break down the planting into phases. Contrary to what you may often see, planting “islands” are only one very common option. I've heard from one landscape architect that “the shape of the lawn is more important than the shape of the beds.” If you think of your landscape with this in mind, you can mow less and enjoy more. ❁



PHOTOS: Garry Menendez