



Hips of Wood's rose (*Rosa woodsii*)

Photo: Connie McCauley, courtesy of Washington Native Plant Society

# February 2023 Newsletter

*Edited by Colleen Lyon*

## In this newsletter...

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*Words of Wisdom* - This, from our Wild Ones' National newsletter is worth repeating (by Mary Reynolds, Irish gardener, landscape designer, author, public activist and the youngest person to win a gold medal at the Chelsea Flower Show):

**"The time for treating our patches of the planet as blank palettes for our creative expressions is over. Now we need to become guardians, not gardeners, to weave the web of life back together, patch by patch. It is time to step up and be part of the solution to the problems that are engulfing our world. To be part of a patchwork quilt of hope."**



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## Replacing Your Lawn with Native Turf Alternatives

*By Ayn Schmit*

One of the first goals for many gardeners new to landscaping with native plants is to rid their landscape - in part or entirely - of non-native turf. Doing so is a no-brainer! Non-native turf grasses are ecological dead zones, they require large amounts of water, and often prompt gardeners to use fertilizer and herbicides to ensure turf is lush and weed-free. Non-native turf also provides an excellent overwintering environment for Japanese beetle grubs, which will then emerge to eat foliage and flowers of other plants in the summer. Around half of the water used in Denver during irrigation season goes to outdoor use - much of it to watering Kentucky bluegrass or KBG, which incidentally is from Eurasia (not from Kentucky and not native to North America). So, time to roll up your gardening sleeves and convert your non-native turf to native alternatives.

**Setting Turf Replacement Goal and Choosing Turf Removal Approach.** Whether you

have a few hundred square feet or acres of turf, set a realistic goal for turf replacement before you embark on your project. For large areas, it may make sense to approach it incrementally over time - start small and expand your effort over time, learning what works best for you as you go. It is also important to consider what you'd like to replace the turf with. Are you looking for native turf alternatives? Colorado has wonderful native grasses to choose from. Do you want to be able to walk and run on the replacement plants? Do you want to mow the replacement plants or simply let them grow? Or is your preference to replace turf with flowering plants to provide more diverse pollinator habitat?

**Approaches to Removing Non-Native Turf.** There are a few basic approaches to removing turf that offer differing pros and cons.

- **Smothering.** This involves covering the turf removal area with a continuous layer of clean cardboard. The cardboard is then covered with organic mulch (wood chips or crushed leaf mulch) or non-organic mulch (gravel), depending on the post-turf plan for the area. The cardboard must be left in place for several months during the growing season. The cardboard can be left in place and planted through if desired.
- **Solarizing.** This involves covering grass with clear plastic (some use black plastic, which doesn't seem to work as well). The greenhouse effect created by the plastic will kill the turf though may allow some of the tougher weeds to survive. This also takes a full growing season to work effectively.
- **Sod Removal.** This involves removing the top 8" of turf by hand or with a sod cutter. Sod removal is quicker than the first two but may require a second round of removal to capture all the turf, and the removed turf and topsoil will need to be disposed of. This also disturbs the soil much more than the other methods, which has its drawbacks.

Following implementation of one of these methods, there will still be weeds or remnant turf that will need to be managed to create a 'clean slate' for replacement plants. This can be accomplished through mechanical weed removal or the use of a herbicide. The toolkit describes these options in more detail.

**What Comes Next? Choosing Native Lawn Alternatives.** While you may choose to replace your turf with flowering plants, prairie, shrubs or other non-turf alternatives, many people are interested in retaining at least some lawn-like space for kids or pets to run and play on. The good news is, there are some good native alternatives. The native grass most tolerant of foot traffic is buffalograss (*Buchloe dactyloides*). It is a warm season grass that tolerates light-moderate foot traffic or occasional heavy traffic. It can be challenging to establish but once established it can survive without irrigation, although CSU recommends irrigation every 2-4 weeks for optimal results. It can be mowed or left unmowed. It will green up later in the spring and looks best in the May-September time frame. Other options include our state grass blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), which is less tolerant of foot traffic but a beautiful option for infrequent traffic areas.

As we look ahead to spring and summer, make a plan to remove some turf and replace it with native options that sustain our pollinators and wildlife and conserve our precious water (not to mention offer climate resilience benefits)! We will have more information on this topic in the WOFR Toolkit Section on Turf Removal and Replacement, with additional resources referenced there, in the next few months.

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## Metropolitan Turf Conversion Rebate Programs

# Along the Front Range

By Richard Phillips and Danna Liebert

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Are you thinking of replacing some of your lawn this year with native grasses? Would you like to convert part of your yard to a native plant garden? Well, you may be able to get a rebate from your local municipality or water provider to help with the costs! As you might expect, the primary driver of these programs is water conservation and savings. Under Colorado House Bill HB22-1151, there will be state funding available to cities to expand their existing turf replacement programs or establish new programs this Spring, so we should be seeing more local turf conversion programs this year. HB22-1151 was discussed in more detail in the [December 2022 WOFR Newsletter](#) (see "Colorado Landscaping Summit Recap").



*Before and after photos of a turf conversion in Castle Rock.*

In almost all the programs there is reference to “xeriscaping.” That’s the term coined by Denver Water (and others) back in 1981 for a landscaping technique that prioritizes water conservation. Since xeriscaping refers to the use of any low water plants, regardless of their geographic origin or ecological value, it is the position of WOFR that the term needs to be updated to prioritize the use of native plants. Most of the plants native to our region require little, if any, supplemental irrigation once established and they have the additional benefit of supporting the local insect population, which means greater biodiversity, more food for birds, and more pollinators. Additionally, native plants with their deep roots help sequester carbon and mitigate flooding.

The table below summarizes the turf replacement programs for a group of Front Range cities. If you don’t see your city listed, it doesn’t mean that they don’t have a program, it just means that they weren’t checked - or perhaps they are waiting to see if they receive funding through HB22-1151 (one can hope!). If your city is not listed, just go online and search for “turf or lawn replacement programs” for your city.

Many cities combine their rebates with Lawn Removal or the Garden in a Box program offered by [Resource Central](#) (RC). You can go on their website for more information. This year, RC’s boxed gardens contain a majority of plants that are native to CO.

Three stellar programs are those offered by Aurora, Castle Rock and Fort Collins. Aurora will provide rebates up to \$4,000 and they have an extensive list of native plants that are accepted. Castle Rock offers rebates up to \$1,800 and allows a wide selection of native plants. Fort Collins offers rebates up to \$1,000, including a bonus for use of native plants.

Currently, two notable exceptions on the table are the two largest cities in the state – Colorado Springs and Denver.

If you are planning to reduce your lawn area this year, hopefully you live in a city that will provide cost assistance with your gardening plans. It is important to sign up early for the program, since their funds are limited (many cities have waiting lists if the program is not active yet).

Whether or not your city has a turf conversion or replacement program, you can advocate to establish and expand these programs along the Front Range - see our *Advocacy News and Action* section below for actions you can take!

City	TURF REPLACEMENT PROGRAM WITH REBATE?		NATIVE PLANT ENCOURAGEMENT
Aurora	YES	Up to \$4,000 rebate (500 sq. ft. minimum)  Program for HOAs and large properties also available	Large selection of native plants allowed
Boulder	YES	<i>Partners with Resource Central</i>  \$500 off their lawn replacement program  One free Garden in a Box (minimum 200 sq. ft.)	Only native plants included in Garden in a Box
Broomfield	YES	<i>Partners with Resource Central</i>  Up to \$500 rebate for lawn removal and/or Garden in a Box	Only native plants included in Garden in a Box.
Castle Rock	YES	\$1.20/sq. ft. for turf replacement (minimum 400 sq. ft. and maximum \$1800). There is also a rebate for non-residential turf replacement.  \$25 rebate for Garden in a Box	Large selection of native plants allowed
Centennial	YES	\$1.00/sq. ft. for turf replacement (up to 1,000 sq. ft.)  \$25 rebate for Garden in a Box	Any drought tolerant species allowed.
Colorado Springs	NO		
Denver	NO	<i>Denver Water does encourage Xeriscaping, but no rebate.</i>	Some suggested Xeriscaping plans include native plants.
Englewood	NO		
Fort Collins	YES	\$0.75/sq. ft. (up to 1,000 square feet)	Extra rebate of \$0.25/sq. ft. for use of native plants (up to 1,000 sq. ft.)
Golden	NO	<i>Only \$25 off for Garden in a Box</i>	
Lakewood	NO		
<u>Westminster</u>	YES	Up to \$1,000 rebate. Partners with Resource Central for their lawn replacement program and Garden in a Box.	Only native plants included in Garden in a Box.

# Advocacy News and Action

## Promoting Turf Conversion *with Native Plants* - What You Can Do!

- *If your city does not offer rebates*, call or write your city council representative and water authority (or better yet, sign up to speak in person at their meetings) to lobby for rebates and incentives, for residential turf conversion, and ask that it include an emphasis on the use of native plants for their additional ecological value. Recruit your neighbors and local neighborhood association to do so too.
- *If your city does offer rebates, yet does not refer to the use of native plants in their program*, call or write your city council representative and water authority to ask them to update the term xeriscaping to include native plants and let them know the many advantages of using low-water native plants.
- *To enhance the power of your action*, get a group of neighbors to join you in speaking to your city council and water utilities. Be sure to follow up later to ask if they have plans to add native plant criteria for 2023 programs.

## Get Involved



The Wild Ones Front Range Chapter (WOFR) is a King Soopers Community Rewards Recipient! As a result, anyone with a King Soopers Shopper's Card (linked to a digital account) can designate the WOFR chapter for community rewards. Then, any time you shop at King Soopers, you can raise money for the chapter. Once your account is set up, there's nothing to remember, except to swipe your shoppers card (or use your alternative ID, e.g. a telephone number) each time you check out.

Here are the steps. If you already have a Shopper's Card and digital (online) account, go to step 3 below.

### 1 - New to King Soopers? Get a Shopper's Card.

- Go to the service desk in King Soopers

### 2 - Set up an online account linked to your Shopper's Card.

- Get a Shopper's Card and set up an online account all at once [here](#).
- Link your Shopper's Card to your online account (do

this under profile).

### 3 - Link WOFR to your online account

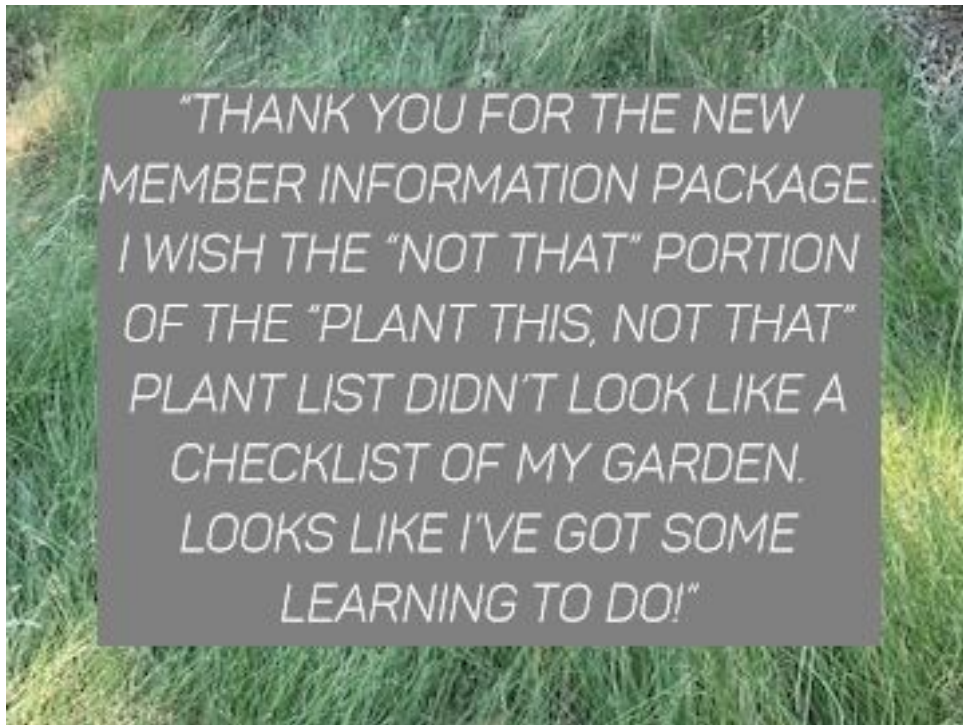
- Go to "My Account" and selecting "Community Rewards" on the left menu.
- Search for "Wild Ones Front Range Chapter" and select ENROLL
- Confirm by selecting "Community Rewards" from "My Account" on left menu again.

Whenever you shop and provide your Shopper's Card (or alternate id) a portion of your purchase will go to the organization! Yippee!

The Shopper's Card gives you access to all kinds of coupon savings and discounts. Tell family members to use your alternate ID (e.g., your phone number) whenever they check out to get the basic coupon savings and earn money for WOFR!

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**And, a chuckle, if you need one  
(this from a new Wild Ones Front Range Chapter member):**



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## Upcoming Events

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*Important notice: We announce many of our events to members first, as our events are popular and sell out fast. So, if you are not a member, please consider becoming one!*

**Landscaping With Colorado Native Plants Conference: Climate Resilience**  
Saturday, February 25, 2023  
9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Experts in horticulture, ecology, and landscape design will share how to plan, plant, and maintain beautiful and biodiverse native landscapes from the ground up. With the theme of climate resilient landscapes, this year's conference offers inspiration and insight to both novice and experienced gardeners.

The conference will be online to allow participation throughout the state and beyond. Recordings of the speakers' presentations will be available for registrants to view after the event as well. All classes are eligible for CEUs for Landscape Industry Certified Technician recertification.



More info and registration details [here](#).

### **Watering Your Native Garden: Could you, Would you, Should you?**

Tuesday, March 28, 2023

6:30 -8:00 pm

John Murgel, Extension Specialist with Colorado State University Extension, will cover different watering strategies during establishment and long-term maintenance of dry native gardens. Is there a "best method" out there?

More details coming soon. In the meantime, please complete this brief [pre-survey](#) so John may customize his presentation to address your questions about native plant garden watering.

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*We love to hear from you! If you would like to comment on anything in this newsletter or write an article, please send your comments or ideas to [FrontRangeWildOnes@gmail.com](mailto:FrontRangeWildOnes@gmail.com).*

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