

P E T A L U M A
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Dear Editor,

Thank you for your article "Time to lose the lawn?" in the February 19 Argus Courier. Californians use almost 40% of our fresh water on landscapes. Most of this is used to water lawns. While the drought forces us to examine how much water we are willing to use on our lawns in Sonoma County, it is equally important to point out the other ways that lawns do not serve us.

The vast majority of lawns nationwide are maintained using chemical fertilizers. 37% of commonly used lawn chemicals are endocrine disrupters, 53% are toxic to birds, and 80% are toxic to fish and aquatic organisms. Those chemicals directly run off into our creeks and rivers, killing wildlife and poisoning our waterways. 57% are now found in detectable amounts in our groundwater. A study published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute finds that household and garden pesticide use can increase the risk of childhood leukemia as much as seven-fold.

If that isn't bad enough the majority of lawns are maintained using gas powered mowers, which, because they do not have emissions controls, can create as much pollution in one hour as driving a standard vehicle for eleven hours.

Historically lawns were associated with wealth, - originating from the aristocracy in England, where drought is never a concern. Today lawns are considered to be the cheap landscape solution and bring little to no added value to a home in a neighborhood where every front yard has a lawn.

So what is the alternative? Get creative using flowering native shrubs, a drought tolerant shade tree, meandering pathways, boulders and mulch. Your landscape will require far less water, less maintenance and create a habitat for birds and butterflies. Living in Sonoma County we are lucky to have an abundance of local resources for creating beautiful, drought tolerant alternatives to lawns.

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