

Fresno home builder makes synthetic turf standard, grass an option

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In the latest sign of the drought's impact, synthetic turf is now standard in all front yards at [Granville Homes](#) while grass has become an option for home buyers.

It's a bold and expensive move for the Fresno home builder — which may be the first statewide — to say out with water-sucking grass and in with the drought-friendly alternative as the state enters another dry summer.

“Brown lawns are convincing buyers that this is a good way” to go, says Granville president Darius Assemi. “Our goal is to have completed neighborhoods that are timeless, that look attractive now and in the years and decades to come.”

Other Fresno-area builders and many statewide offer artificial grass as an option to buyers while doing more to landscape new homes for the drought. That means smaller patches of real grass or no grass at all and plants that require less water.

There have been a number of multifamily builders looking into using synthetic turf because of local water restrictions for landscaping, says Bobby Raymer, technical director for the [California Building Industry Association](#). But Granville is the first he knows of to make it standard on single-family home lots.

199

homes planned in Via Fiore

Granville Homes was among the first in the central San Joaquin Valley to offer environmentally friendly features including tankless water heaters, tighter duct insulation and thicker walls. The builder's [Eco Smart](#) houses are up to 36% more energy efficient than other new homes, the company has said. Granville built its first energy-saving home in 2008.

In recent years, Granville added an irrigation system that senses the weather and adjusts the sprinklers so it doesn't come on when it's raining, Assemi says.

Last fall, the builder started offering drought-tolerant lawns or synthetic turf to buyers at its [Via Fiore](#) neighborhood at Copper River Ranch in northeast Fresno. In May, artificial grass became standard, with water-wise plants, in all Granville neighborhoods. The builder has developments in northwest Fresno, southeast Fresno and Clovis.

Making synthetic turf standard is part of the company's Eco Smart building approach, Assemi says. “It looks substantially more attractive than grass.”

And more expensive. The cost is six times more than real grass, Assemi says.

The resale value of our homeowners' homes are very important to us. Their investment is very important to us. This is another step in helping to protect one of their most expensive investments.

Darius Assemi, president Granville Homes

But on the upside, using synthetic grass on all homes will create a level of homogeneity where each house looks like

the other, says Raymer, the building industry technical director.

“When you leave it to the individual home buyer to do whatever water conservation they want, you’ll have some who take it to heart and some who don’t care, so all of a sudden you have a street with a patchwork quilt,” he says.

Granville’s average front yard is between 500 and 600 square feet. The landscaping includes synthetic grass, evergreen drought-tolerant shrubs and two trees per house that get water from the drip irrigation system.

The houses that back up to the golf course at [Copper River Country Club](#) have synthetic grass in the backyards, too. Homeowners not on the golf course and in other neighborhoods can have Bermuda grass installed in their backyards.

The building trend nowadays is to use less grass and irrigate more efficiently than in years past, Raymer says.

“We’re seeing high-density, single-family construction where you don’t have very wide side yards anywhere, which reduces the amount of landscaping,” he says.

Builders are extending patios in the backyard, building barbecues and adding sun rooms and raised redwood decks.

“We’re seeing amenities that are not irrigable landscape” space, Raymer says. “That is the wave of the future for backyards.”

In contrast, Fresno builder Wathen Castanos has gotten rid of grass entirely. With the watering restrictions “you can’t get the sod down and establish it,” says Peter Castanos, vice president.

The builder is planting five-gallon, drought-tolerant plants instead of the typical one-gallon size with a tree or two. All plants are on a drip system. The drought is creating a challenge that is hard to explain to buyers, Castanos says.

“People in the Valley are attached to their lawn,” he says. “Part of their dream is to move into their new home and have their child play on the front lawn ... you have to explain what everybody is up against.”

New Granville residents Melissa Roberts and Karren Sandusky moved into a 2,026-square-foot house on the Copper River golf course last month. They were happy to find that Granville was selling homes with synthetic grass.

The golf fans had a putting green installed in the backyard of their previous home in Clovis a year ago and converted the front yard to artificial grass to cut down on maintenance. They knew watering their grass would soon be an issue, too.

The couple’s new Granville house backs up to the golf course and has synthetic grass in the front and backyard.

“It’s very sturdy, it’s low-maintenance, it looks nice all the time,” Roberts says. “If you’re looking at it from the golf course, it looks real. Everything stays green.”

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