

Synthetic turf has lovers and haters

By BoNhia Lee
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Fresno residents either love synthetic turf or hate it.

My [story](#) last week about builder [Granville Homes](#) installing synthetic grass standard on all its new homes struck a chord, mostly with those who strongly oppose the fake grass.

Most Valley builders are putting in drought tolerant landscapes and offering synthetic turf as an option. I've learned that [Bonadelle Neighborhoods](#) has installed synthetic standard in its Bella Vista development, near Millerton Lake, since 2013.

Readers emailed and called to give me an earful on why the product is bad for the environment.

"Synthetic turf is a terrible choice for improving our community," said emailer Andrea De Zubiria of Fresno, who also wrote a letter to the editor. "Synthetic turf is generally a petroleum product that heats up and likely contributes to global warming and certainly contributes to heat islands in our already hot city. It does not oxygenate and clean our air like every living plant would."

It's been nearly 50 years since fake grass was first introduced. Synthetic grass companies are now marketing the third generation of grass. Here's the pros and cons. You be the judge.

Artificial grass. AstroTurf. Synthetic turf. Fake grass. Frass. It's ground cover that looks like natural grass first made of nylon but now typically made of plastic — polyethylene or polypropylene, said Ben Bergquam with [Synthetic Grass Warehouse](#) in Fresno.

The first public use of AstroTurf, as it was called, was in 1966 when it was installed at the Houston Astrodome because real grass could not survive under the stadium's dark cover.

The warehouse, which sells synthetic grass and holds DIY classes for homeowners and contractors, released a nifty infographic last week that shows the evolution of synthetic grass.

The first generation of artificial grass was made of synthetic fabric. The grass fibers was short. The blades got longer in the second generation making it look more natural. Tire crumb infill, crushed up car and tire parts, was used to fill in the space between the blades and help it stand up. Generation three has softer, longer grass fibers and infill materials now include sand instead of the tire crumb.

While synthetic grass does radiate more heat than natural grass, today's designs are 15% cooler, according to the company. And it's porous, so water still seeps into the ground underneath it, Bergquam said.

But parent groups and environmental advocates don't see synthetic grass as an environmentally friendly option. The cons: the grass is a heat hazard, grass fibers contain lead, and infill materials are toxic.

De Zubiria wrote in her letter to the editor, published Tuesday, that synthetic grass takes a long time to break down in landfills and it leaches toxic chemicals into the soil and air.

She refers to a [study](#) conducted by Brigham Young University that showed the surface temperature of a synthetic turf practice field installed in 2002 spiked to 200 degrees on a 98 degree day.

Then there's comments from readers who say that synthetic grass just doesn't look good.

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