

The Lawn Experiments at Aldersgate Gardens



Like many landowners, Aldersgate Church has struggled with keeping its grassed areas looking nice, especially in a drought, while also keeping costs down. Also, the impact of lawns on birds, pollinators, and other beneficial insects has been an increasing concern. For several years, we have landscaped major areas that were formerly grass. In 2023 as a demonstration project, we added several new types of grass and alternatives to the traditional lawn. The lawn substitutes are indicated by letters and numbers in the diagram above. The back side of this page provides a description of each area. Use the QR code on the right for more information or visit our website at: <http://aldersgatelinc.org/aldersgate-gardens/>.

The lawn alternatives at Aldersgate Gardens take inspiration from the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum's publication: "Let's Rethink the Lawn" (<https://plantnebraska.org/resources-events/publications.html>).

Existing Lawns

- Area A. As part of a years-long landscaping project, this section was planted with shrubs and perennials in the Spring and Fall of 2023.
- Area B. Repairing drought damage in the Spring of 2023 involved overseeding with RTF Fescue (<https://www.toddvalleyfarms.com/rtf-fescue.html>).
- Area C. These areas are slated for overseeding with RTF in the fall of 2023.

Eco-Friendly Alternatives to Traditional Lawns

Aldersgate Gardens is experimenting with the following lawn substitutes that are better for the environment than traditional lawns. They require little or no watering, infrequent mowing (if any), and provide a food source for pollinators. They are also consistent with the grassroots approach to conservation advocated in Doug Tallamy's book, *"Nature's Best Hope, A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard."* *Nature's Best Hope* shows how homeowners everywhere can turn their yards into conservation corridors that provide wildlife habitats. Incorporating nature into our landscape is also beneficial to mental and physical health. Studies show that direct exposure to nature is essential for a child's healthy physical and emotional development. This is important to us because we welcome children and families into our landscape to play and enjoy nature.

1. **Miniclover**[®] (*Trifolium repens*) <https://www.outsidepride.com/>. It is a very small leaved white clover that is drought tolerant and only grows to approximately 4 - 6 inches tall.
2. **Pennsylvania Sedge** (*Carex pensylvanica*) (grows 6" to 12") – A complete description is available at: <https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/>. "Groundcover for dry shade. Underplanting for shade perennials. A lawn substitute for dry soils in shady areas that never needs mowing or mow 2-3 times per year to 2" tall.
3. **Eastern Star Sedge** (*Carex radiata*) grows up to 2' tall. "Group or mass as a clumping ground cover in shady areas of borders, woodland gardens, or naturalized areas. Edging plant for paths or woodland areas." A complete description is available at: <https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/>.
4. **Bee Lawn 2.0 Mix**. "A bee lawn features flowering plants as well as turf grasses, with these benefits to bees and pollinators: • Natural diversity of forage for pollinators • Less mowing, fertilizing and watering • Beauty of flowers • Increased resilience to extreme seasonal temperatures and drought." More information is available at: <https://twincityseed.com/> and <https://northerngardener.org/bee-lawn/>.
5. **Eco-Grass Low Maintenance Lawn Blend** is "a versatile blend of fine-leaved fescue grasses with a mix of native and non-native cultivar fescues. It can go un-mowed or be mowed to a 3" height occasionally or frequently, depending on rainfall, application and intended use." (<https://www.prairiemoon.com/eco-grass>)
6. **No Mow Lawn** from <https://www.prairienursery.com/>. "No Mow Lawn, also called eco-lawn, is a drought tolerant, low-maintenance grass that needs mowing only once or twice a year. A blend of cool-season fescue grasses, No Mow requires very little water once fully established."
7. **Sunny Bee Lawn Mix**. See the description for lawn plot #4, above. This plot is in full sun most of the day.
8. **RTF** from Todd Valley Farms <https://www.toddvalleyfarms.com/>. (Not yet seeded.) RTF (rhizomatous tall fescue) is a tall fescue that produces rhizomes, which enable the turf area to self-repair future damage.
9. **Prestige Buffalograss** from Todd Valley Farms <https://www.toddvalleyfarms.com/>. "Prestige™ was developed by the University of Nebraska and released in 2003. This warm season grass has soft emerald-green blades that provide a beautiful, low maintenance lawn."
10. **Hachita Blue Grama** from Todd Valley Farms <https://www.toddvalleyfarms.com/>. "Hachita' is the most vigorous selection of this beautiful native grass from the western Great Plains. It is a native, warm season grass that is beloved for its "eyelash" seed heads."
11. **Shady Bee Lawn Mix**. See the description for lawn plot #4, above. This plot in the parkway on South Street is located under a large tree in full shade where nothing would grow.
12. **Sundancer Buffalograss** from <https://www.stockseed.com/Shop/turf-type-buffalograss/sundancer-buffalograss>. "This new variety fills the demand for a warm season turf with accelerated establishment and superior turf quality from seed. Sundancer is widely adapted and has proven itself a PREMIUM turf, suited to a variety of diverse environments." This plot is located between the parking lot and sidewalk along 84th Street.