

THE PLANTSMAN

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What's right for your garden, real turf, fake turf, paving or waterwise groundcovers?

This is a summary of factors to consider before making a decision about surface treatment. In particular it addresses the issues involved with road verges and street frontages. Comments are welcome.

Environmental Cost of Production

Real Turf	Fake Turf	Paving	Groundcovers
Moderate carbon cost which is offset to some extent by photosynthesis and carbon absorption. Moderate energy use. Moderate water use.	High carbon cost. High energy use. Moderate to high water use in manufacture.	High carbon cost. High energy use. Moderate water use in manufacture.	Moderate carbon cost which is offset to some extent by photosynthesis and carbon absorption. Moderate energy use. Low to moderate water use.

Dollar cost of installation

Real Turf	Fake Turf	Paving	Groundcovers
Low if simply rolled out on unimproved soil. Moderate if soil is improved and irrigation cost included	Moderate when cheap brands are used and not properly installed. High when expensive brands used and properly installed.	High when properly installed	Low when just planted straight out. Moderate when soil is improved, integrated inline irrigation installed and surface mulched.

Maintenance

Real Turf	Fake Turf	Paving	Groundcovers
High. Requires regular maintenance and service of irrigation inputs.	Low. to moderate. Requires regular cleaning to prevent dust and dirt build up and may require watering and disease control when used as an active playing surface	Low. Only sweeping as necessary.	Low. Requires regular checks and occasional weeding and pruning.

Disturbance

Real Turf	Fake Turf	Paving	Groundcovers
Can be dug up for services maintenance and replaced at low cost. Damage from vehicles easily repaired.	Difficult and expensive to dig up sections and replace for services maintenance. Damage from vehicles can be significant and expensive to repair.	Easy to remove and replace for services maintenance. Damage from vehicles easily repaired.	Can be dug up for services maintenance and replaced at low cost.

Durability

Real Turf	Fake Turf	Paving	Groundcovers
Indefinite with proper maintenance	Depending upon brand. Claims range from 8 to more than 20 years	Indefinite	Indefinite with gradual replacement

Surface Temperature and Heat Storage

Real Turf	Fake Turf	Paving	Groundcovers
Low. Comfortable to walk on even in full sun at midday. Extra cooling effect through transpiration. No heat release overnight.	High to very high when in full sun. Can burn bare skin. Heat release continues after sun has fallen due to thermal mass and properties of the base material.	High to very high when in full sun. Can burn bare skin. Heat release continues after sun has fallen due to thermal mass.	Low. Comfortable to walk on even in full sun at midday. Extra cooling effect through transpiration. No heat release overnight.

Other Environmental Effects

Real Turf	Fake Turf	Paving	Groundcovers
Supports many life forms from the microscopic to insects and birds. Allowing breakdown and absorption of particulate material like dust and dog turds. Produces oxygen.	Does not support any life at all, until dust and debris build up and weeds can become established. All products but especially cheaper ones release gases and noxious chemicals into the environment. Does not support natural breakdown processes. Dog turds persist.	Totally inert. Does not support any life at all. Does not support natural breakdown processes. Dog turds persist.	Supports a myriad of life forms from the microscopic to insects and birds. Allows natural breakdown and absorption of particulate material.

Water Use

Real Turf	Fake Turf	Paving	Groundcovers
High	Very low. High when used as an active playing surface	Very low	Low

User friendliness

Real Turf	Fake Turf	Paving	Groundcovers
Supportive playing surface	Only suitable for passive recreation. When used for active recreation has to have a filler and be watered before, and often during play. When unshaded can be too hot for any daytime activity in summer.	Only suitable for passive recreation. When unshaded can be too hot for any daytime activity in summer.	Not suitable as a playing surface. Correct plant choice will allow access.

Disposal

Real Turf	Fake Turf	Paving	Groundcovers
Disposed of through naturally occurring recycling processes.	Expensive to dispose of. Some materials can in theory be recycled but does not happen in practice. Currently it goes to landfill. Expensive to remove base material.	Can be re-used	Disposed of through naturally occurring recycling processes.

