

Homeowners can enjoy a convenient, hassle-free game of golf without leaving their homes.



# Green and Glorious

## The Guiltless Pleasures of Synthetic Turf

by **Donna Kent**

**I**n an aerial photo just north of Tucson, nine patches of bright green stand apart from the brown desert. A new housing development, Robson Communities' SaddleBrooke Ranch, has installed artificial grass into the nine homes making up its model village.

The use of artificial turf has grown exponentially in recent years due to its increased dependability, natural look, lack of strain on the environment and the amount of time savings associated with maintenance. While people are feeling the weight of the economy, whether it is gas prices or rising costs for supplies and services, artificial turf is one trend many homeowners are considering.

### **While some balk at the initial installation fee, artificial grass can pay for itself over time.**

Most synthetic turf companies claim their product remains in top form for approximately 10 years. If this is accurate, the calculated cost of using the artificial turf costs approximately 60 to 95 cents per square foot annually. With no need to take on costs for reseeding, watering or maintenance, a synthetic lawn will pay for itself in about three to five years.

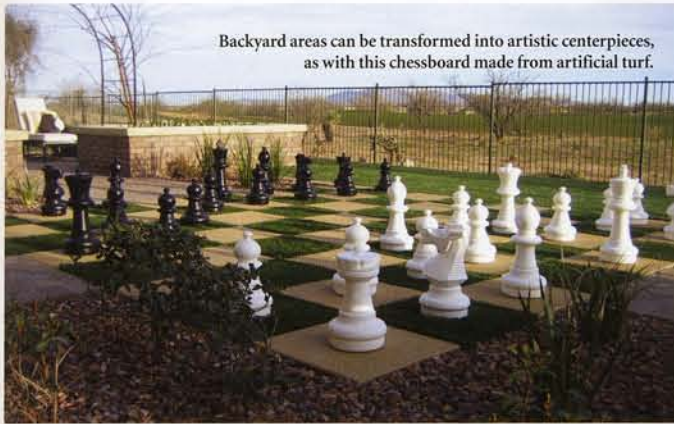
Terry Loutzenheiser, vice president of construction for Robson Communities, felt the company and future residents who choose synthetic lawns could reduce maintenance costs by installing a life-like artificial turf. "Because we used artificial turf, we will save money in the long run," Terry explains. "As the model village expends its life, the money we paid upfront for the product will be less than we would have spent to maintain the nine yards," he added.

Foreverlawn, the company that installed the grass at SaddleBrooke Ranch, has seen usage increase more than 1,000 percent since 2002 when the company began selling synthetic turf. "We've seen a large increase in interest from builders and developers," says Brian Karmie, vice president of ForeverLawn. "The improved aesthetics combined with the reduction in ongoing maintenance make perfect sense for model homes and showcases."

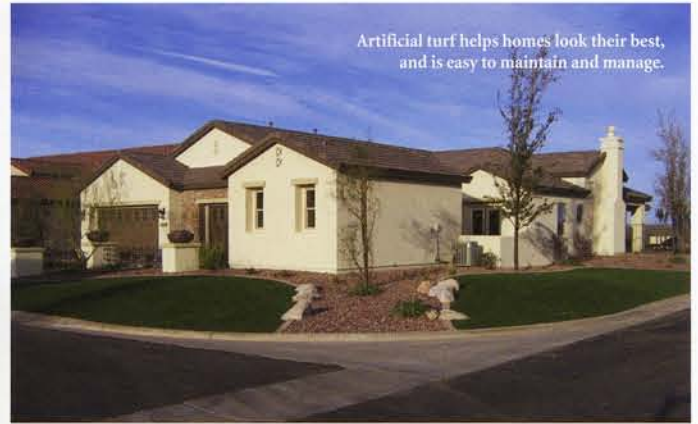
### **Artificial turf can help companies and homeowners "go green."**

Not only can synthetic turf save money and eliminate maintenance costs, it can also save precious resources and help protect the environment. Now that the environment has become an increasingly important issue, most people want to do their part to go "green."





Backyard areas can be transformed into artistic centerpieces, as with this chessboard made from artificial turf.



Artificial turf helps homes look their best, and is easy to maintain and manage.

Artificial turf preserves water resources used on lawns, especially those in dry western states. For example, in Las Vegas, water authorities calculated that every square foot of grass replaced with synthetic turf will save an average of 55 gallons of water per year. With that in mind, artificial lawns can help save millions of gallons of water. In a study done by water officials in Central Orange County, Calif., it was determined six acres of synthetic grass would save about 149,917 gallons of water per year.

Because 60 to 80 percent of all residential water in the Southwest is used on lawns, state governments in states such as California, Arizona and Nevada are offering rebates and tax incentives to replace natural lawns with more water-friendly alternatives such as artificial turf. In Glendale, Ariz., the government offers residents up to \$750 and businesses, homeowners associations or multifamily property owners up to \$3,000 for replacements.

Water isn't the only resource artificial turf can preserve. Artificial lawns also prevent harmful lawn mower emissions from entering the atmosphere and don't add to dangerous runoff because they eliminate grass clippings, pesticides and fertilizers. Vertical drainage also allows water to re-enter the rain table and helps prevent against erosion.

### How are builders and construction companies using synthetic turf to their advantage?

For builders and construction companies, artificial turf is a growing trend, especially for those focused on home and community building. The numerous advantages of artificial lawns for homeowners help to sell

property, so much so that it's becoming a part of interior and exterior design to promote home sales. Susan Welti, a landscape designer in Manhattan and Brooklyn, was quoted in the Wall Street Journal saying, "I'm seeing designers and landscape architects starting to use it."

Aesthetically, artificial turf has come a long way from the AstroTurf used on back patios in the '70s. The company solicited to install artificial turf in Robson's SaddleBrooke community adds bits of fake brown grass to look like dead thatch, making the lawn appear more realistic. With life-like options that are perceived as natural grass, artificial lawns are aesthetically pleasing to buyers, not to mention the reduced and nearly eliminated maintenance costs and benefits to the environment.

"It's maintenance-free and good-looking all the time," says Loutzenheiser, who's received many favorable comments from potential home buyers on the synthetic turf installed in SaddleBrooke Ranch. So good-looking, in fact, that Loutzenheiser installed some in his own backyard.

### Like a new car, artificial turf comes in a fully loaded option ...

In addition to standard artificial turf, builders and construction companies should consider specialty options for homeowners as well. New technology has provided a number of options for parents and pet owners when it comes to choosing an artificial lawn. Depending on the dealer, there are options including fall-safe play area grass for children's safety and pet-friendly grass specifically designed to kill germs and allow waste to run through and drain.

Manufacturers provide synthetic turf options ranging anywhere from \$6 to \$12 per square foot including full installation. Depending on your project needs and the needs of future residents, whether commercial or residential, artificial turf options are becoming as technologically advanced and as numerous as the bells and whistles in new vehicles. From rooftops and balconies to playgrounds and fields, artificial turf gives beauty, functionality and savings in unexpected places ... and people are taking notice. ■

*Donna Kent is Marketing Director for ForeverLawn, Inc., based in Albuquerque, New Mexico.*

### What Makes Up the Costs? ///

According to ASGI (Association of Synthetic Grass Installers):

Surface materials, infill, seaming tapes, glues or tacks, soil stabilizing fabrics, base materials, rodent control barriers (where needed), cups and other trim materials called for in the design specification are all costs associated with artificial turf grass for lawns, pet areas and putting green installations.

Surface styling, fiber quality, stitch count, backing materials, even UV protection and warranty are always reflected in the cost of these materials. Lower costs are generally a sign of a compromise in one of the factors just mentioned, just as is typically found in the world of carpeting.

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