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STATE OF THE ART(IFICIAL) GRASS

WORDS: KELSEY MACARTHUR • IMAGES: PAUL WINNER

Do you get sick of mowing your lawn? Or frustrated when your grass turns brown when you only forgot to water for a couple days? Is it hard to balance your commitment to saving water, while at the same time wanting a green lawn? Have you given any thought to artificial grass as a solution? For most people, artificial grass is a solution that doesn't immediately come to mind. We think of artificial turf as the stuff they use for athletic fields and putting greens, not our backyards. In reality, many homeowners are turning to artificial turf as an alternative to sod.

The payoff is obvious – no watering necessary, hot summer days spent maintaining the yard are history, and, of course, the grass is always green. But installing artificial turf brings up a lot of questions. What is it? Is it truly an environmentally friendly decision? Does it feel like real grass? Can my pet use it? How long does it last? And the list goes on. The landscape of artificial grass isn't an easy one to navigate.



✕ What Is It?

Depending on the brand and quality of the artificial turf, polyurethane, polyethylene and nylon fibers are used during the production. White and green plastic pellets are exposed to heat until they reach their melting point. Once melted the plastic is driven through a metal plate with small holes, creating the strands of grass. After the strands have cooled they are stretched to reach the thinness of a real blade of grass. From there the strands of grass are rolled into a spool before multiple spools are unwound together to form multi-ply synthetic yarn. Further along in production the yarn is transported to a tufting machine that sews it to mesh sheets and cuts the yarn so that it looks like blades of grass. After the turf is complete holes are poked through the plastic backing to allow water to drain after installation in your yard. At the end of production the turf goes through rigorous examination to make sure it looks and feels as natural as possible.

✕ Not Just For Athletic Fields Anymore.

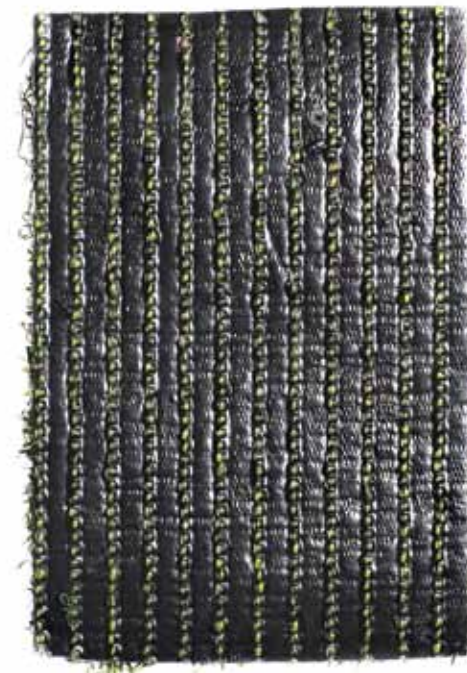
Technological advances have made artificial grass look and feel more natural, which has led to consumers considering it more frequently for their home landscapes. Jonas DiCaprio of Design Platform presents artificial turf as an option to all his clients. The prospect of no more mowing or watering appeals to homeowners.

David and Natalie Huff recently moved into a modern home and made the decision to go with artificial turf instead of having their landscaper install sod -- "we decided to go with turf because it is maintenance free. Not only do we avoid the hassle of hauling a lawn-mower to our courtyard or up the steps to our backyard from the garage, but we also don't have to worry about any watering schedules."

✕ The Options.

Similar to the real deal, there are many choices when it comes to installing artificial grass. Most companies have a variety of weights and colors to choose from. The weight of artificial turf speaks to the density of the blades of grass. The better the weight, the fuller your yard looks. Don't want your grass to be absurdly green? The majority of turfs have a mixture of strand colors, including brown, so your lawn doesn't appear lime green and out of place. DiCaprio, who worked on the Huff residence while with West Standard explains, "The more dense it is, the softer it is, and it's less easy to see through it to the plastic backing. Weight typically ranges from 40oz to 90oz. There are also many options for colors -- tri-color or quad-color. More colors equal a higher quality product that looks more realistic."

In addition to weight and color options, companies are beginning to offer 100% recyclable varieties of artificial grass. The average lifespan of artificial turf is between ten and twenty years, but disposing of the turf is something to think about. Putting your yard in a landfill every fifteen years doesn't sound very environmentally friendly, but with more companies invested in making recyclable products, waste will be a thing of the past.

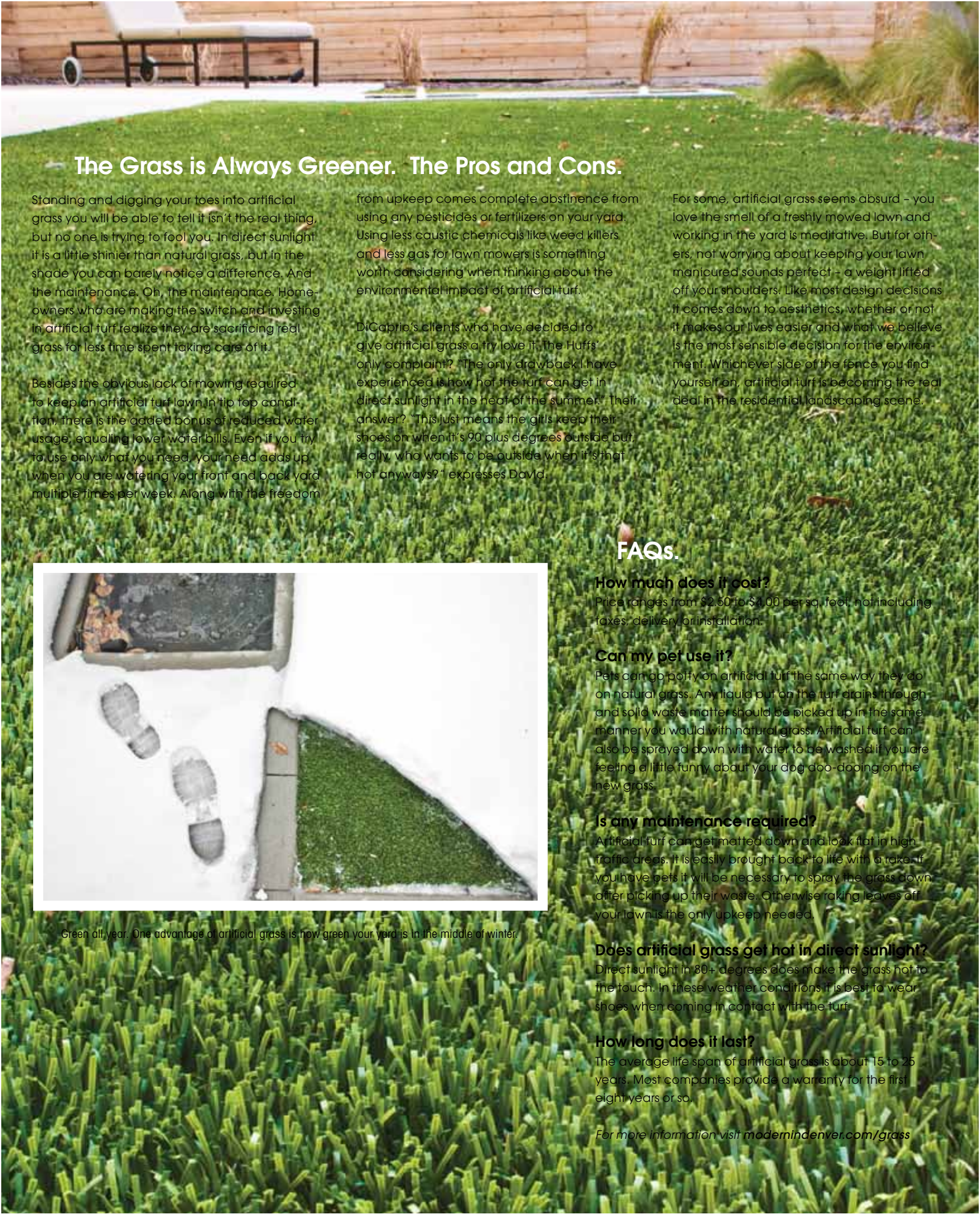


Samples of artificial grass are available so you can decide on the right weight and color for your yard or courtyard. The underside of the swatch shows how the blades of grass are sewn on the plastic backing. Holes are perforated to allow water to drain through the artificial turf into the soil.



“We decided to go with turf because it is maintenance free. Not only do we avoid the hassle of hauling a lawnmower to our courtyard or up the steps to our backyard from the garage, but we also don’t have to worry about any watering schedules.” David Huff

Artificial turf was an ideal option for the Huff’s inner courtyard. It would have been a chore to get a lawn mower from their garage, through the house, to the courtyard all prior to mowing the grass. The artificial turf brings the courtyard to life and makes it a great space for their daughters to play close to the kitchen and living room where Natalie and David can keep a watchful eye.



The Grass is Always Greener. The Pros and Cons.

Standing and digging your toes into artificial grass you will be able to tell it isn’t the real thing, but no one is trying to fool you. In direct sunlight it is a little shinier than natural grass, but in the shade you can barely notice a difference. And the maintenance. Oh, the maintenance. Homeowners who are making the switch and investing in artificial turf realize they are sacrificing real grass for less time spent taking care of it.

Besides the obvious lack of mowing required to keep an artificial turf lawn in tip top condition, there is the added bonus of reduced water usage, equalling lower water bills. Even if you try to use only what you need, your need adds up when you are watering your front and back yard multiple times per week. Along with the freedom from upkeep comes complete abstinence from using any pesticides or fertilizers on your yard. Using less caustic chemicals like weed killers and less gas for lawn mowers is something worth considering when thinking about the environmental impact of artificial turf.

DiCaprio’s clients who have decided to give artificial grass a try love it. The Huffs’ only complaint? The only drawback I have experienced is how hot the turf can get in direct sunlight in the heat of the summer. Their answer? This just means the girls keep their shoes on when it’s 90 plus degrees outside but really, who wants to be outside when it’s that hot anyways?” expresses David.

For some, artificial grass seems absurd – you love the smell of a freshly mowed lawn and working in the yard is meditative. But for others, not worrying about keeping your lawn manicured sounds perfect – a weight lifted off your shoulders. Like most design decisions it comes down to aesthetics, whether or not it makes our lives easier and what we believe is the most sensible decision for the environment. Whichever side of the fence you find yourself on, artificial turf is becoming the real deal in the residential landscaping scene.

FAQs.

How much does it cost?
Price ranges from \$2.50 to \$4.00 per sq. foot, not including taxes, delivery or installation.

Can my pet use it?
Pets can go potty on artificial turf the same way they do on natural grass. Any liquid or on the turf drains through and solid waste matter should be picked up in the same manner you would with natural grass. Artificial turf can also be sprayed down with water to be washed if you are feeling a little funny about your dog doo-dooing on the new grass.

Is any maintenance required?
Artificial turf can get matted down and look flat in high traffic areas. It is easily brought back to life with a rake. If you have pets it will be necessary to spray the grass down after picking up their waste. Otherwise raking leaves off your lawn is the only upkeep needed.

Does artificial grass get hot in direct sunlight?
Direct sunlight in 80+ degrees does make the grass hot to the touch. In these weather conditions it is best to wear shoes when coming in contact with the turf.

How long does it last?
The average life span of artificial grass is about 15 to 25 years. Most companies provide a warranty for the first eight years or so.

For more information visit moderninddenver.com/grass

Green all year. One advantage of artificial grass is how green your yard is in the middle of winter.