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# Keeping homes and forests safe

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- Bonanza Photo -Jen Schmidt

## New garden plots feature grass options

Maintaining defensible space while still trying to prevent having bare soil that erodes is something many homeowners in the Tahoe Basin try to accomplish. Now, new plots at the North Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden at Sierra Nevada College can show homeowners 11 different varieties of grasses that accomplish both in home landscaping.

Grass can be an excellent ground cover in the critical defensible space zone while still complying with the Tahoe Basin fire chiefs recommendation against use of organic mulches within 30 feet of structures. It also complies with suspending the use of wood and bark mulches and to rake up all pine needles by May each year, said John Cobourn a water resource specialist with University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.

The point of the demonstration plots is to give homeowners an idea of what the grasses look like, he said.

"We did a lot of research talking with the fire chiefs and TRPA in terms of their plant list and we thought well we probably can't demonstrate every grass in the world but what would be a dozen of the best grasses people could use?," Cobourn said. The grasses at the demonstration garden were seeded May 19.

All of the grasses are approved for use by TRPA staff. The first four 4-foot-by-8-foot plots are Kentucky bluegrass mixes and turf-type tall grasses, which are suited for use in traditional lawns.

"Most of the fire chiefs I talked to feel that if it gets hot enough it could dry out and catch fire, but that's probably after everything including the house has burnt down," Cobourn said.

The second group of four plots demonstrates low-maintenance "erosion-control grasses," which require less watering and mowing, once they are established. "We consider them a low maintenance," Cobourn said. "It's an easy thing for people who don't want to mow grass or install a complex irrigation system."

These grasses will stay green for most of the summer if irrigated just once a week. When they turn brown in August or September, they should be mowed down, and the stalks should be removed to reduce fire hazard.

Three more erosion-control grasses are shown in a raised bed 50 feet below the first eight plots.'

For guided tours of the North Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden and the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences, attend the free "Living Green at Tahoe" event, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., July 1. This is the kickoff event for this year's "Red, White and Tahoe Blue" festivities.

<http://www.tahoebonanza.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080629/NEWS/486135369/1061&parentprofile=-1&template=printart>