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## Front Yards Uprooted for 'Greener' Pastures

Architect Campaigns to Keep the Grass off Lawns



Architect Fritz Haeg converts lawns into what he calls edible estates by creating environmentally friendly landscapes that overflow with vegetables and indigenous plants. (ABC News)

 By **NANCY WEINER**  
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From WNT

When the Cox family of Salina, Kan., ripped out the Bermuda grass from its front lawn and planted native plants instead, the family committed one of the cardinal sins of suburbia.

Neighbors responded by saying, "I just don't like it," or "What are they doing?"

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But in drought-ridden prairie country, the Cox family says its curious front yard saves money on the water bill while giving a new use to the space. "It's so much more interesting. A front yard is flat and boring," Priti Cox said. "And when you don't have young children, the only reason you ever go out in your front lawn is to mow it."

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Architect Fritz Haeg has targeted that space, and started converting lawns like the Cox family's into what he calls edible estates by creating environmentally-friendly landscapes that overflow with vegetables and indigenous plants.

"The lawn has become an icon of the American dream. But there really is a dark side to that image because ... we pour water on it, we pour chemicals on it, we mow it. It pollutes the air. And then, it's not even a space that we occupy. We don't feel comfortable spending time there," Haeg said.

The traditional American front lawn isn't even American. It's British.

The Rockefellers adopted the style in the mid-1800s for the family's **Kykuit estate**, along with other wealthy Americans. By the 1950s, lawns had reached mainstream America.

But in England, constant drizzle keeps lawns green. In the United States, sprinklers and fertilizers do the job.

"And what happens with nitrogen and phosphorous is, it produces an algae bloom," said landscape architect Diana Balmori. "When that dies down it consumes all the oxygen in the water and kills the fish."

Haeg is trying to change how Americans use their front lawns by placing edible estate prototypes in every area of the country in the hopes of making it a standard design.

We spoke with a family in Lakewood, Calif., who has an edible estate that stands out like a sore green thumb in its planned community.

Still, it has its fans.

"The vast majority of the neighborhood really does seem to get a kick out of it," Michael Foti said. "Most of the people, they've altered their jogging routine. They pass by and sort of give me a thumbs up and let me know they appreciate it."

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