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RACHEL BAILEY

RACHEL BAILEY GARDEN DESIGN

I am troubled by the rising trend of artificial lawns in domestic gardens. I am even more dismayed that people in the industry – one which should be about protecting the environment – seem to be so willing to design them into gardens.

Artificial lawns are installed on the premise that they are cleaner, lower maintenance and offer an alternative to real grass where grass won't grow. Whilst this might meet client needs, artificial lawns are not good for the environment, wildlife, or our health and wellbeing.

Producing the plastic for the artificial turf and the turf itself both emits CO_2 and uses fossil fuels. Whilst in use they do not need to be watered and mown, leaves and other organic matter need to be removed from the surface of artificial turf. This job could be done by brush, but it is increasingly being done by garden

> "ARTIFICIAL LAWNS ARE **NOT GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, WILDLIFE**, OR **OUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING**"

vacuums – so, one carbon producing activity is being replaced with another. It is also being questioned whether microplastics are being released from the plastic turf during use, adding to the burden already in our environment.

Artificial turf acts as a barrier over the soil and, unlike real grass or plants, stops the soil functioning properly as an ecosystem. Burrowing insects can no longer get into the soil, and organisms that depend on organic matter coming in from above are starved. Without plant roots growing in it, the soil

can no longer function as a natural filter. We also need real grass and plants for our health and wellbeing. A daily dose of nature helps mitigate the stresses of daily life, whether at work or at school. More and more research is also pointing towards the beneficial microbes in soil that help our mental health and immune systems.

One issue lies in the fact that artificial turf lawns are sanitising our gardens; they are being used to keep children and their clothes clean when they go out to play or to provide an unnaturally perfect garden.

At the end of its life, artificial turf cannot currently be recycled so ends up in landfill sites. If it could be recycled, this would just use more energy and produce more CO_2 emissions. I would urge designers and contractors to think outside the box and offer an alternative solution to the artificial lawn whilst still meeting clients' needs.

If the conditions are not good enough for a real lawn, then forget it altogether. Consider planting low growing plants that will thrive in the site conditions and offer an open, evergreen space. Rather than a lawn for play, why not consider alternative, natural play areas. Children love playing on the edges in parks, amongst trees, shrubs, fallen logs and long grass. Why not encapsulate that landscape in the garden?

> "CONSIDER PLANTING **LOW GROWING PLANTS** THAT WILL **THRIVE IN THE SITE CONDITIONS** AND OFFER AN **OPEN, EVERGREEN SPACE**"

Surely getting a little bit of mud on our children's (or even our) hands and feet and on our clothes is a small price to pay for that connection to and preservation of nature and the environment on all levels?

Are you interested in having your say? Get in touch via content@eljays44.com. We'd love to hear from you.

ABOUT **RACHEL BAILEY**

Rachel Bailey is an award-winning designer who runs her practice, set up in 2015, in the west of Scotland creating anything from naturalistic wildscapes to more traditional suburban and town gardens. Combining her expertise in garden design with her passion for plants and the natural environment, she aims to reduce the environmental impact of her designs.
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