**Grass won't grow? Move on to Plan B.**

**An English family tries to grow a typical British lawn in Jerusalem – but finds that some things don't translate well between countries.**

**By Ann Goldberg**



When we left our home in England and set down fresh roots in Jerusalem, we began to realize just how much an Englishman's garden is his castle.

My husband had always loved gardening, even if he never had much time for it. Planning and buying the seeds was half the fun. And some things we just took for granted, such as those hardy perennials that appeared regularly without much care and attention – and, of course, our small lawn, which was always well watered by the constant English rain.

So we were thrilled when, on our house hunt in Jerusalem, we managed to find a place with a small potential garden spot in the back. This is indeed a rare luxury here in Israel, as most city residents have to make do with an apartment that has, at best, a small porch.

Now when I said "potential garden," I meant it.

When we bought the house, it was still having the last bricks cemented into place, and the area at the back was a pile of hard, dry mud.

With five children under the age of 8, I definitely didn't want to leave the area as it was – and we knew that sowing a lawn was going to take some time. So we compromised: We paved half the area and left the other half for grass.

Well, we tried, we really did.

We dug, sowed, and watered – and then watered some more! – even though this was really frowned upon as being a truly frivolous use of that most precious commodity, H2O.

Patches of grass would grow and thrive, and then wither and disappear.

Not so the fig tree – that grew and grew until it towered above our house, the neighbor's house, and the entire neighborhood. No matter how much we trimmed and cut it back, within a few months it was back like King Kong – its branches hovering and spreading in all directions.

However, we soon realized that the tree was growing taller because it was desperately stretching its branches toward the sunlight. Our garden received no sun whatsoever from October to April.

In our attempt to cultivate a lawn at all costs, we sought expert advice. Grass is thirsty and will always need a lot of watering, which was already a problem, as there is no rain in Israel from about May until November – or even December, some years.

Grass also needs sun.

Standard English grass is very difficult to cultivate here, the gardening nurseries told us, but there are other ways of achieving the same visual effect with other plants, such as clover.

But as the patient garden expert on the other end of the phone went painstakingly through the list of possibilities and conditions for growth, we realized we didn't have a chance. Every type of plant needed a minimum of 20 minutes of sun a day, 365 days a year.

"We don't have any sun at all in our garden for six months of the year," I explained.

"But you need only 20 minutes," the expert said. "Surely you must have at least 20 minutes of sun a day"

"Not in winter," I replied. "None, *nada*, zilch. For six months, there is not a ray of sunlight."

"Then I'm truly sorry, but you'll never get anything resembling grass to grow," the expert responded.

I put the phone down with a heavy heart. On a scale of 1 to 10 of family problems, this didn't even get to 0.5, but, nevertheless, it was a bit of a blow.

Should we just pave over the remaining "lawn" area, leaving just a small spot for plants and trees? Neither of us really wanted that.

My husband wanted to tend to a lawn, but that was now ruled out. I suddenly realized what it was I really longed for – to look out the kitchen window and see a stretch of green with the children's toys and a table and chairs to sit and relax on.

I called our local home center and set off with my husband somewhat reluctantly in tow.

We returned home staggering under a long, heavy roll of fake grass – what I call our long, green, hairy outdoor carpet.

It doesn't need watering, it doesn't need sun. It survives heat and cold, rain and drought, summer and winter.

When I look out the window, I see a stretch of green with the toys and furniture. Even my husband has come to terms with it.

When you can't have it all, you just have to manage with what's available