

## High-end 'replica grass' hopes to find niche in desert

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Palm Springs, CA

In Matt Mighell's view of the Coachella Valley, the grass is as green and lush as your average golfer, resident or tourist prefers. But, more than that, it's also virtually maintenance-free and does not need to be watered, fertilized or reseeded with winter rye.

That's because the Cleveland, Ohio, transplant's preferred turf is a synthetic version similar - but superior - to the artificial turf used on athletic fields throughout the country. It's the showcase product offered by JSA Depot Synthetic Turf Supply, a company launched by Mighell three and a half months ago and targeted for the Coachella Valley area. Claimed to be a high-end version of artificial turf, JSA Depot's product is marketed as an alternative to regular grass for businesses and golf putting greens, as well as homeowners' yards and dog runs.

Available in three varieties - blue grass, fescue and Bermuda, JSA Depot turf carries an 8-year warranty on the product (covering fading, seam ruptures, blade durability, backing, etc.) and two years on installation if performed by company installers.

"To a lot of people, synthetic grass is the green backporch carpet covering that's been around for years. But not all synthetic lawns are created equal. This product we have actually looks like real grass," says Mighell, 36, who relocated to the desert after shutting down an advertising agency operation he had in Cleveland. "Many people, once they walk on it and feel it, say 'This is what I've been looking for.'"

Besides himself, Mighell's Desert Hot Springs-based business is staffed by an office assistant and three sales associates. The installation crew of about 20 is shared between his outlet and a separately operation in Riverside.

Asked if he's sold on the product as a sound alternative to nature's version of grass, Mighell says, "I see a need for a product like this after noticing how much time and expense is involved in keeping grass alive and maintained in the desert.

"It's not just the appearance and durability of it. It's the maintenance-free aspect that saves time and expense (of fertilizer, water, insecticides, seed, sod). It also creates an environment in which you're avoiding the allergens and not dumping more chemicals into it."

Certainly, the battle right now is an uphill one, with marketing a significant challenge. Mighell says the company has done about 10 installations, ranging from small areas of 100 or so square feet to large yards.

"We need to make people aware of the product," he said. "The immediate goal is to grow the business. It is a business venture, so there's risk involved that must be weighed against the potential for success. It's a startup business, so we've got our hiccups along the way."

The main obstacle in selling it is the cost. "Up front, it's about four times as expensive as installing sodded grass," Mighell says. "But factoring in the savings (on water bills and other maintenance costs that are eliminated), it pays for itself in an average of five years. You can illustrate that by doing the math."

A new target market for Mighell's sales force is looming-the homeowners associations tasked with maintaining the "common areas" such as front and back yards of homes and condominiums in the multitude of gated communities locally.

"HOAs are just getting interested in this as a solution," Mighell says. "They want greenbelt. But there's the issue of what it costs to maintain natural grass. Having grass, and keeping it, is a never-ending expense here."

#### JSA Depot Synthetic Turf Supply

What: Company that sells and installs high-end synthetic turf for residential and commercial customers, and playgrounds.

Owner: Matt Mighell, Desert Hot Springs

Web site: [www.jsadepot.com](http://www.jsadepot.com)

Phone: 866.456.LAWN

#### Frequently asked questions about JSA Depot Synthetic Turf Supply...

- \* Can animal waste harm the turf? Since the product is porous, pets' urine will drain through and not stain the fibers. Feces can be scooped and the remainder hosed off.
- \* Is it abrasive like AstroTurf? This product is made from a polyethylene fiber, which is softer and nonabrasive compared to AstroTurf's nylon fibers.
- \* How hot does the grass get? It doesn't stay as cool as natural grass. It is around 10 degrees hotter than natural grass. But it does not absorb and radiate heat like pavement or brick.
- \* How much will be saved because this product requires no watering? As much as 75 percent of most monthly water bills are for outside use, according to water management statistics.
- \* Will the turf fade? The 10-year warranty includes a no-fading clause.

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