



See more activities at the Living Sculpture website: www.hort.cornell.edu/livingsculpture

Sod Sofa Sculpture

In turf works, we create living sculpture by shaping soil and covering it with grass or moss. These sculptures take on many shapes and sizes, from sod animals and other figures, to more abstract creations. One of the most popular forms is a very literal translation of the term “lawn furniture.” Sod sofas, chairs, and chaise lounges are all the rage in both public and private settings. In addition, they’re as functional as they are fun. They have a lot of appeal since they can provide a place to hang out and congregate in a public space such as a school garden, community green space or public garden.



No matter what shape the sod seating takes, the basics of construction are the same. These instructions focus on a traditional sofa shape. However, using the same steps you can easily create armchairs, chaise lounges, or whatever type of furniture meets your needs and creative aspirations.

A critical factor before going further is to find out whether sod -- rolls of grass that have been harvested and rolled for quick application -- is available in your area. Although direct seeding is an option, it takes much longer to germinate and produces more varied results.

Design

The sky’s the limit when it comes to design and there is plenty of inspiration in the home and lawn furniture that we encounter every day. One thing to be careful of is sharp edges or angles that may shade areas of your creation from

sunlight. If an angle is too tight and deprived of adequate light, the sod there may yellow or brown, distracting from your finished product.

Another design consideration is to carefully examine the space at hand. Is it a broad green expanse of lawn, or a nook and cranny into which a piece of furniture can be “tucked?” Give careful thought to how the furniture will be used, by whom, how often, and in what manner to inform size, location, and scale with respect to its surroundings.



Site Selection

Almost any site with adequate drainage and sun exposure will work. Consider a south facing exposure to maximize daily sunlight. Also important is access to water, as the first few weeks of your sofa's existence will require at least daily watering.

Materials

- Soil
- Sod
- Shovels
- Water
- Ground staples
- A large, knife for cutting sod
- Hammer or mallet

Some notes on materials:

Soil Quantity:

The biggest question when it comes to soil is: how much do we need? If you have a very detailed design, carefully drawn to scale, you can measure all the dimensions to calculate the cubic feet of soil needed.

If you're approaching your project in a more free-form manner considering measuring the dimensions of a similar size piece of furniture to calculate an estimate of cubic feet. In either case it's advisable to place your order for 150% of what your measurements suggest. This will allow

for any misjudgments in calculations and the average 25% compaction rate.

Soil Quality:

Because your soil is most likely supporting grass, you needn't worry much about the nutrient levels or pH; although the pH should be in the 6-6.5 range, it can easily be adjusted with lime. In addition, nutrients can be added in the future, since grass readily accesses nutrients. The most important consideration is how easily the soil can be molded into the desired shape. Very sandy or rocky soils can pose problems as they are less likely to hold their shape well. A very heavy clay soil may be difficult and heavy to move around and work with.

Sod:

You can expect to pay about \$.40/square foot of sod from a sod farm. Typically sod is sold in 10 sq. foot rolls. Many sod farms deliver but you may save a bit if you are willing to pick it up yourself. The best scenario would be to pick up the sod the day you plan to use it. However, sometimes that just isn't practical. If you have to store sod for a day or two before applying it be sure to roll it out flat in a shady spot and keep it well watered.

Sod Quantity:

Just like soil, you'll need to estimate based on measurements. Again, it's advisable to purchase 25-35% more sod than you think you'll need. Here are three examples of sod furniture and the amount of sod needed for each.



100 sq feet



170 sq feet



270 sq feet

Knife:

In some spots you'll have to custom cut your sod to make it fit properly. Special sod knives do exist but an average, serrated bread knife works just as well, if not better.

Ground Staples:

Your best bet is 6" ground staples. You'll use these to anchor your sod to your soil. Most garden and hardware stores carry them at around \$15 for a package of 75.

Construction



Soil Shaping:

1. Arrange to have soil dumped right on your site or as close as possible. Moving soil can be time consuming and hard work. The closer your soil is, the quicker you can get to the shaping.
2. If the soil is nearby, move soil by wheelbarrow to the location you intend to build.
3. Begin shaping soil by mounding soil, and tamping or using shovels. Don't worry about neat angles and details at this point. Use the shovels to create the general shape from the mound of soil. Use a tamper (or your feet) to firm the soil into place.
4. Next comes hand shaping which will allow you to bring out the details and creative touches in your design. Have water handy as it often helps to dampen soil for fine, detailed molding.
5. Take a step back every once in a while to review the big picture.



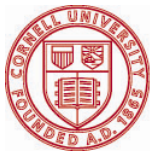
Sod Upholstery

Laying out the sod is one of the easiest and most rewarding aspects of the project

1. Planning for sod placement is time well spent. This will help you use your sod more efficiently and minimize the number of custom cuts that are



- needed. Try to use full rolls if possible.
2. Roll sod out onto the sculpture, cut to fit where necessary.
 3. Fitting the sod is also important to ensure that seams are tight. Tight seams will disappear within a few weeks giving your sofa a uniform appearance. Rather than just laying the sod flush against the adjacent roll, consider overlapping the pieces slightly (1/4"-1/2"). Or, hold up the pieces, and press together as you lay them down so that the edges are very firmly placed together.
 4. Push sod down firmly against the soil and staple into place. If soil is hard and tough to push the staples into, use a hammer or rubber mallet to gently tap them in. You don't need to use a tremendous number of staples -- just a few in places where sod may flap, move when watered, or shift at all. You want good, solid contact between the sod and soil.
 5. Water well everyday for at least three weeks. During periods of hot weather, you'll need to water twice daily; early in the morning and again in the evening. The success of your project will hinge on quick rooting.



Cornell University
Department of
Horticulture

**Garden-Based
Learning**



Resources for educators, volunteers, and parents working with children and youth.

Cornell Garden-Based Learning Program website: www.hort.cornell.edu/gbl