

GROUNDCOVERS



THE MOST VERSATILE LANDSCAPE PLANTS

Ground covers are the practical plants of the landscape – the problem solvers – and are used to integrate and accent the other elements of the garden. But to fully appreciate them, look beyond their obvious function to the unique beauty of color, form and texture they can add to any location.

Ground covers include all kinds of plants - low-growing perennials, shrubs, familiar herbs, and sprawling vines – and are valued for their ability to spread rapidly, grow close to the ground, and create a thick, low-maintenance covering that binds the soil.

Problem solvers

When it comes to less-than-ideal growing conditions or problematic terrain, ground covers can provide the solution. They can be substituted for lawns where grass cannot thrive because of poor soil, dense shade, high wind, or lack of moisture. In a heavily wooded yard, for example, where little light penetrates, ground covers are the answer. For dry conditions, look to plants that require little water. There is a ground cover to suit any type of soil.

Problems posed by specific landscape features also can be remedied. Ground covers can blanket and conceal a harshly angled slope or fill in a hard-to-mow space at the base of a tree. A thick ground cover planting can reduce maintenance under trees. Groundcovers are ideal for preventing erosion on steep slopes, where maintenance is difficult.

The small-leafed ground covers can be used to creep into all sorts of nooks and crannies –

between the cracks in garden paths, around steppingstones, in and over stone walls and fences, in an empty corner, between the exposed roots of trees, or almost any other in-between, out-of-way, bare spot. Tall-growing or veining types are useful for covering rocks or hiding unsightly areas. Other ground covers serve as barriers or help to direct foot traffic. Whatever the landscape problem, there's a ground cover to solve it.

Beautifiers

Although ground covers are used most frequently as problem solvers in landscapes with difficult growing conditions, they should also be considered for non-problematic locations because of their beauty and ornamental value. The brilliant flowers of many ground covers are a special bonus, and the herbal covers offer fragrant foliage as well. Some plants provide uniform foliage color throughout the year.

Ground covers create harmony in the landscape. They provide a continuity of coverage that creates a feeling of tranquility. Besides unifying a landscape, ground covers can emphasize its patterns and forms. They offer a variety of heights, texture and color. Ground covers also make attractive accent plants and can be used to highlight other landscape elements. Used in combinations, they create variety in depth and texture. There's no limit to the imaginative combinations that can be designed to create a more appealing landscape.

Choosing a ground cover

Once you have decided to fill that shady corner with a ground cover, the question is which one? There are hundreds of possibilities. If you choose a plant simply because you like its looks, you're asking for trouble. If you match the cultural requirement of the plant with the location, you are one big step ahead.

Be sure you know the growth habit, mature size, and water requirements of a ground cover before you plant it.

When to plant

Generally, either a spring or fall planting is best. These are the times of least environmental stress, when the shock of transplanting is most easily endured. Temperatures are moderate and rainfall

is most abundant.

In cold-winter areas, spring is usually more successful. Fall plantings are most likely to suffer from the "heaving" caused by alternate freezing and thawing of the soil.

In dry-summer areas you should avoid planting in midsummer, unless you're prepared to spend a lot of time watering.

Preparing the soil

Ground covers are plants that naturally grow in very close proximity, creating severe competition for space, nutrients, and water. A good soil helps overcome these adverse conditions. As a rule soil for ground covers should be prepared as carefully as soil for a fine lawn. Extra effort in preparing the soil often makes the difference between success and failure.

Good soil can almost be equated with good drainage – for good reason. When water replaces the air in the soil, roots suffocate. Roots will not develop without a constant supply of oxygen and moisture and a constant removal of carbon dioxide.

Sandy soils are well drained but dry out quickly. Frequent watering eventually washes nutrient through the soil. Clay soils retain water and prevent air from getting to the roots.

The only quick way to improve either a sandy or heavy clay soil is through the addition of organic matter. Not just a little but lots of it. By adding organic matter- peat moss, compost, manure - clay soils are loosened up, allowing air into the soil, and they are easier to work. In light sandy soil, organic matter holds moisture and nutrients in the root zone.

Spread a layer of compost 2" thick, over the soil and work it into the soil to a depth of 6". If this is not practical, one solution is to dig a planting pocket for each plant and fill it with amended soil.

Fertilizing

In addition to building up the soil with amendments, an all-purpose fertilizer should be added, when you prepare the planting bed. A 5-10-10 or 10-10-10 fertilizer worked into the soil before planting will get the plants off to a strong start.

Planting

There's no hard and fast rule in estimating the number of plants for a given location. The spacing chart below will give you an idea of how many plants you need. The number also depends on the effect you want to achieve and how fast you want the effect. As a guide, plants such as pachysandra and periwinkle are planted on 1-foot centers; cotoneaster and junipers on 3-foot centers. Trail-ing roses, Virginia creeper, and other large - scale ground covers are often spaced no closer than 5 feet.

Groundcover Spacing—Chart

Spacing between each plant	Coverage for each flat of 4" pot = 18 plants
6"	4.5 square feet
8"	8 square feet
10"	12.5 square feet
12"	18 square feet
15"	28 square feet
18"	41 square feet

Mulches

A good, weed-free mulch is a most valuable addition to a new ground cover planting. A couple of inches of mulch will keep weeds down and make them easier to pull out if they do appear; 4-5 inches will prevent most weeds from growing. Some of the better mulches are sawdust, fir bark, ground bark, and tree leaves, as well as gravel and rocks and weed barrier.

Besides preventing weeds from growing, some organic mulch improve the soil and add nutrients as they decompose. They also conserve moisture, an important consideration where summertime water is in short supply and anytime young, shallow-rooted plants are just getting started. Finally, soil temperature is controlled evenly, creating a more favorable root environment.

You may also try a living mulch of flowering bulbs or annuals while the ground cover is filling in. It will hide the bare spots with color.

Mowing

Ground covers need to be cut back to rejuvenate new growth, usually just once a year. Mowing, or any method of cutting back old growth, is very important to the appearance of a ground cover. When a ground cover is beginning to thatch, or the foliage loses its fresh look, it's time to clip off the old growth.

SELECTED PLANTS FOR SPECIAL SITES

Easy to grow

Ajuga—Bugleweed
Arctostaphylos—Massachusetts Bearberry
Cotoneaster—Tom Thumb
Euonymus—Wintercreeper
Juniperus—Blue Rug
Lamium—Spotted Dead Nettle
Liriope—Lilyturf
Pachysandra—Japanese Spurge
Potentilla verna—Spring cinquefoil
Sedum—Stonecrop
Vinca minor—Periwinkle

Nooks and Crannies

Alyssum saxatile—Madwort
Antennaria dioica—Pussy Toes
Arabis—Rock Cress
Armeria—Thrift
Campanula—Bellflower
Heuchera sanguinea—Coralbells
Iberis sempervirens—Evergreen Candytuft
Lamium—Spotted Dead Nettle
Liptinella—Brass Buttons
Lysimachia nummularia—Moneywort
Mentha requienii—Corsican Mint
Sagina subulata—Irish or Scotch Moss
Sedum—Stonecrop
Sempervivum—Hen & Chicks
Thymus—Thyme

Tolerate Traffic

Ajuga—Bugleweed
Juniperus horizontalis—Blue Rug
Sagina subulata—Irish or Scotch Moss
Veronica repens—Speedwell

Tolerate Occasional Traffic

Achillea tomentosa—Woolly Yarrow
Arabis alpine—Rock Cress
Armeria maritime—Common Thrift
Ceratium tomentosum—Snow-in-Summer
Lysimachia—Moneywort
Mentha requienii—Corsican Mint
Phlox subulata—Moss pink
Potentilla—Cinquefoil
Thymus—Thyme
Vinca minor—Periwinkle

Drought-Resistant

Aegopodium—Snow-On-The-Mountain
Arctostaphylos—Massachusetts Bearberry
Artemisia—Dusty Miller
Coronilla—Crown Vetch
Festuca—Blue Fescue
Hemerocallis—Daylily
Juniperus—Blue Rug
Phalaris—Ribbon Grass
Sedum—Stonecrop

Full Sun

Achillea tomentosa—Woolly Yarrow
Arabis—Rock Cress
Arctostaphylos—Massachusetts Bearberry
Artemisia—Wormwood
Cotoneaster—Tom Thumb
Juniperus—Japanese Garden
Phlox subulata—Moss phlox
Rosa—DayDream
Sedum—Stonecrop

Tolerate Deep Shade

Adiantum ped.—Maidenhair Fern
Asarum—Wild Ginger
Athyrium—Japanese Painted Fern
Convallaria—Lily-of-the-Valley
Dryopteris—Autumn Fern
Epimedium—Barrenwort
Galium odor.—Sweet Woodruff
Hostas
Pachysandra—Japanese Spurge
Sagina—Irish or Scotch Moss
Viola odor.—Sweet Violet

Lawn Alternative (Large Area)

Aegopodium—Snow-On-The-Mountain
Ajuga reptans—Bugleweed
Arctostaphylos -Massachusetts Bearberry
Clematis
Coronilla varia—Crown Vetch
Dianthus deltoids—Maiden Pink
Euonymus fortunei—Wintercreeper
Festuca ovian glauca—Blue Fescue
Juniperus—Blueberry Delight
Lamium—Spotted Dead Nettle
Lonicera japonica—Honeysuckle
Pachysandra—Japanese Spurge
Polygonum cuspidatum—Fleece Flower
Potentilla—Goldfinger
Sedum—Stonecrop
Vinca minor—Periwinkle

Erosion Control

Arctostaphylos—Massachusetts Bearberry
Coronilla varia—Crown Vetch
Cotoneaster—Tom Thumb
Hemerocallis—Daylily
Juniperus—Blue Rug
Lonicera—Honeysuckle
Pathenocissus quinquefolia—Woodbine
Phalaris arundinacea—Ribbon Grass
Rosa—Mystic Fairy
Vinca minor—Periwinkle

Drape and Trail

Arctostaphylos—Massachusetts Bearberry
Artemisia—Wormwood
Campanula—Bellflower
Cerastium tomentosum—Snow-in-Summer
Clematis
Cotoneaster—Tom Thumb
Euonymus fortunei—Wintercreeper
Juniperus—Mother Lode
Vinca minor—Periwinkle

Planting Groundcovers



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