



## GROUNDCOVERS

Groundcovers are low-growing shrubs, perennials or annuals that blanket the ground. Groundcovers are useful in a wide variety of situations. Use low-growing plants:

- As a lawn substitute in shady areas.
- Where tree roots or steep slopes make lawns difficult to mow.
- To help control erosion on banks.
- To help conserve water by using drought-tolerant species.

### Weed control

For best results with groundcovers, treat weeds before planting. To eliminate existing weeds before planting:

- Spray with glyphosate herbicide (e.g. Roundup) when temperatures are above 60°F. Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide that kills or damages nearly all types of plant material. A second application might be necessary 2-3 weeks later to control weeds that germinate after the initial application. Wait for weed dieback before planting.
- If a non-chemical method is desired, hoe and/or pull weeds. Disturbing the soil will cause newly exposed weed seeds to germinate. Hoeing and pulling are usually considered an ongoing weed control method unless weed fabric or mulch is used.
- Another alternative to herbicide use is called solarization. This method requires clear plastic to be laid over the planting area and fastened down around the edges with rocks or weed fabric staples. It is essential to use this method for 4-6 weeks in June, July or August to generate enough heat to kill existing weeds and weed seeds. Solarization is not effective if used in spring or fall.

### Planting

- Not all groundcovers grow quickly, therefore individual species and growth habit will determine planting spacing.
- On steep slopes, build a small berm on the downhill side of the planting hole to collect water.
- For steep slopes where erosion control is the purpose, weed fabric or erosion matting can be used over the whole area while plants are still small. Individual plants will be planted in holes cut through the fabric.

- Planting can be done anytime the ground is workable, but April-June usually provides the best conditions for success. Small plants, one gallon and smaller, can heave out of the ground during freezing/thawing in winter if planted later than October 1.
- Water individual plants thoroughly.

### **Fertilizing**

- Groundcovers have moderate fertilizer needs much like other ornamental plantings.
- When planting, use a slow release fertilizer such as Osmocote at the base of the plants. Use according to label directions for perennial plants.
- Or broadcast 1 pound of 10-10-10 granular fertilizer per 100 square feet over the entire planting area after plants are installed and water well.
- Fertilize established groundcovers in spring with one the above methods.

### **Mulching**

- A 2" layer of mulch will help retain soil moisture, prevent weed growth and keep the soil at an even temperature around the roots.
- Use a fine-textured, well-composted mulch such as composted sawdust, fir bark, ground bark or shredded tree leaves.
  - Keep mulch from directly touching the base of plants to prevent crown rot disease.

### **Watering**

- Established groundcovers do not require watering as often as new plantings. The top inch or two of soil can dry out between waterings (even under a mulch layer.)
- Sprinkler systems or drip irrigation systems are best.
- Water groundcovers well in late October.

## Groundcovers

Plant	Height	Spacing	Growth rate	Steep slopes	Full sun	Part sun	Shade	Drought tolerant	Moist soil	Comments
<i>Achillea millefolium</i> Common Yarrow	18"	18"	Rapid	x	x	x		x		Very invasive; plant only where spreading is desired. Can mow once a month at 4-6" to promote uniform spread of foliage.
<i>Achillea tomentosa</i> Woolly Yarrow	8"	18"	Rapid	x	x	x		x		Flat cluster of yellow flowers; light foot traffic. Fire resistant, fern like leaves.
<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i> Goutweed/Bishop's Weed	12"	24"	Rapid	x		x	x		x	Grows slower in shade; <b>very invasive</b> , plant where spread is contained by walls or concrete.
<i>Ajuga reptans</i> Carpet Bugle	8"	18"	Rapid	x	x	x			x	Flowers May-June; trim flowers after bloom; <b>invasive</b> .
<i>Arabis caucasica</i> Rockcress	4"-8"	12"	Mod.		x			x		White or pink flowers; also used in rock gardens.
<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i> Kinnikinnick	6"	18"	Slow	x	x	x		x		Pink flowers; red berries; evergreen leaves; woody stems.
<i>Artemisia schmidtiana</i> 'Silver Mound' Artemesia	8"	12"	Rapid	x	x			x		Finely cut gray foliage; trim to ground in spring; very aromatic.
<i>Asarum caudatum</i> Wild Ginger	6"	18"	Mod.				x		x	Evergreen leaves; protect from drying winds.
<i>Astilbe chinensis 'Pumila'</i> Dwarf Astilbe	12"	12"	Mod.			x	x		x	Lilac flower spikes in August / September.
<i>Aubretia deltoidea</i> False Rock Cress	6"	12"	Mod.		x				x	Evergreen leaves, early spring flowers; shear after flowering.
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> Scotch Heather	12"	24"	Slow	x	x	x		x		Good for erosion control; low maintenance; flowers in late summer; evergreen needle-like leaves.
<i>Cerastium tomentosum</i> Snow-in -Summer	8"	24"	Rapid	x	x	x		x		Masses of white flowers, gray foliage; <b>very invasive</b> .
<i>Chamaemelum nobile</i> Chamomile	6"-12"	12"	Mod.	x	x	x		x		White or pink flowers; also used in rock gardens; mow or shear occasionally for turf substitute.
<i>Convallaria majalis</i> Lily of the Valley	6"	18"	Rapid				x		x	White flowers; develops a dense mass of roots; broad tulip-like leaves; <b>very invasive</b> .
<i>Cornus canadensis</i> Bunchberry	6"	12"	Slow to Mod.		x	x			x	White flowers; add peat moss to provide acidic soil.
<i>Coronilla varia</i> Crown Vetch	24"	24"	Rapid	x	x	x		x		Pink flowers; deep roots; can be planted by seed 1 lb. per 1,000 square feet.
<i>Corydalis lutea</i> Yellow Corydalis	8"	12"	Rapid			x			x	Yellow flowers May through August; delicate green foliage; readily reseeds.

Plant	Height	Spacing	Growth rate	Steep slopes	Full sun	Part sun	Shade	Drought tolerant	Moist soil	Comments
<i>Dianthus spp.</i> Pinks	8-12"	12"	Mod.		x			x		Many species; gives excellent coverage; trim after flowering; fragrant.
<i>Duchesnea indica</i> Indian Mock Strawberry	8"-12"	18"	Rapid		x	x	x		x	Yellow spring flowers, tiny red berries; spreads by runners.
<i>Epimedium rubrum</i> Barrenwort	10"	24"	Mod.				x	x	x	Drought tolerant in shade; needs moisture in sun; will grow over tree roots.
<i>Euonymus fortunei</i> Wintercreeper	24"	24"	Slow to Mod.	x	x	x	x	x	x	Glossy evergreen leaves.
<i>Festuca ovina glauca</i> Blue Fescue	12"-18"	18"	Mod.	x	x	x		x		Tufted mounds of grayish blue grass; good winter interest.
<i>Fragaria sp.</i> Strawberry	6"	12"	Rapid		x	x			x	Ornamental cultivars e.g. 'Pink Panda', 'Lipstick' adapt to groundcover use; small fruits are edible.
<i>Galium odoratum</i> Sweet Woodruff	6"-8"	12"	Rapid	x			x		x	Bright green leaves, white flowers, <b>invasive</b> .
<i>Gaultheria procumbens</i> Wintergreen	4"-8"	12"	Slow	x		x	x		x	Add peat moss to provide acidic soil; evergreen leaves turn bronze in winter; red berries.
<i>Hedera helix</i> English Ivy	12"	24"	Rapid	x	x	x	x		x	Evergreen leaves; woody vine; protect from winter sun and wind.
<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i> Sunrose, Rock Rose	6-12"	12-18"	Slow at first		x			x		Shear after first flowering to promote fall bloom; requires dry, sunny site.
<i>Hosta</i> many cultivars	varies	varies	Mod.			x	x		x	Easy to grow; tolerates tree root competition.
<i>Iberis sempervirens</i> Candytuft	12"	24"	Slow		x	x			x	Evergreen foliage; white flowers in June; trim back after flowering.
<i>Juniperis spp.</i> many cultivars Creeping Juniper	12"-24"	Varies	Mod.	x	x			x		Junipers need full sun, good drainage, proper spacing; evergreen; color varies gray to green.
<i>Lamium maculatum</i> Dead Nettle	6"	12"	Rapid			x	x		x	Highlights shady areas; pink, purple or white flowers in May.
<i>Linnaea borealis</i> Twinflower	2"	12"	Slow				x	x	x	Tiny, pink flowers in pairs in June/July; evergreen leaves.
<i>Lonicera japonica</i> Honeysuckle	30"	36"	Rapid	x	x	x		x	x	Woody vine spreads by stems that root; <b>can be invasive</b> ; delicate yellow spring flowers.
<i>Lysimachia nummularia</i> Creeping Jenny	2"-3"	12"	Rapid		x	x			x	Use in moist shady area; <b>can be invasive</b> .

Plant	Height	Spacing	Growth rate	Steep slopes	Full sun	Part sun	Shade	Drought tolerant	Moist soil	Comments
<i>Mahonia repens</i> Creeping Oregon Grape	24"	24"	Slow to Mod.	x		x	x	x	x	Evergreen shrub that tolerates shade and dry soil if mulched; yellow flowers; blue berries; bronze leaves in winter.
<i>Pachistima canbyi</i> Mountain Lover	8"-12"	24"	Rapid		x	x	x		x	Evergreen shrub; can be planted under trees; bronze leaves in winter.
<i>Pachysandra terminalis</i> Japanese Spurge	8"	12"	Rapid				x		x	Evergreen perennial; dark green leaves; foliage yellows in sun.
<i>Penstemon pinifolius</i> Creeping Red Penstemon	6"	12"	Rapid		x			x		Fine green leaves, red flowers; very drought tolerant; attractive to hummingbirds.
<i>Phlox subulata</i> Creeping Phlox	6"	18"	Mod.	x	x	x		x		Rock garden plant; can be used on slopes; trim back after flowering; needle-like evergreen leaves.
<i>Potentilla verna</i> (Dwarf Cinquefoil)	2"	12"	Mod.		x	x			x	Yellow flowers; makes a tight mat if trimmed.
<i>Sagina subulata</i> Irish Moss	2"	12"	Rapid			x			x	Light green; fine-textured; tiny white flowers; use between stepping stones; <b>seedlings can be invasive.</b>
<i>Sedum</i> many species	varies 2"-10"	varies	Rapid	x	x	x		x		Sedums are effective in rock gardens, slopes, mass plantings; over 600 species.
<i>Stachys olympica</i> Lamb's Ear	6"	24"	Rapid		x	x		x		Silver gray leaves; purple flowers above foliage to 18".
<i>Teucrium chamaedrys</i> Germander	12"	18"	Slow		x			x		Drought tolerant, heat loving plant; deep roots serve as binder in shady soil; can be sheared.
<i>Thymus pseudolanuginosus</i> Woolly Thyme	2"	12"	Rapid		x	x		x		Gray-green velvety leaves; use between stepping stones, over low banks; tolerates light traffic; few flowers
<i>Thymus praecox</i> Creeping Thyme	2"	24"	Rapid		x	x		x		Tiny green leaves; woody stems; light purple, pink, white flowers in May.
<i>Tiarella cordifolia</i> Foam Flower	8"	12"	Slow				x		x	Creamy white flowers; ground cover for shade gardens; drought tolerant in deep shade.
<i>Veronica repens</i> Creeping Speedwell	12"	12"	Rapid		x	x			x	Provides dense carpet of rooting stems; <b>can be invasive.</b>
<i>Vinca minor</i> Periwinkle	6"	18"	Mod.	x		x	x		x	Evergreen leaves; lavender flowers in early summer; trailing dense carpet.
<i>Waldsteinia fragarioides</i> Barren Strawberry	6"	12"	Mod.				x	x	x	Bright green leaves; yellow flowers.

Compiled by Lisa Hill. For more information, contact Master Gardeners at (509) 477-2181.

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