

## GROUND COVERS FOR LANDSCAPING

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### Introduction

**Ground covers** are low-growing plants that spread quickly to form a dense cover. They add beauty to the landscape and, at the same time, help prevent soil erosion. Grass is the best known ground cover but grass is not suited to all locations. Other ground cover plants should be used where grass is difficult to grow or maintain.

### Uses of ground covers

- ❖ By covering the ground with a carpet of vegetation it prevents the germination of weed seeds. When established, it prevents the ingress of perennial weeds.
- ❖ It protects the soil from erosion and water loss. This can be particularly useful on steep slopes.
- ❖ It acts as an insulating cover for the soil, keeping it cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter.
- ❖ It is living mulch that helps to build up humus levels in the soil.
- ❖ It provides habitats and cover for beneficial insects and other predators.
- ❖ It can be very attractive and it can provide us with various other commodities - food, medicines etc.

### Where to Use the Ground covers

1. **In lawns:** To mimic the green-carpet effect, a groundcover should stay relatively short and spread into a fairly uniform blanket. Stick with a single species for the most realistic effect
2. **In gardens:** Arranged in small drifts or clumps, groundcovers alone can fill a bed with interesting foliage and flowers. Go for less-aggressive species that spread at similar speeds so that they won't compete.
3. **In hillsides:** Drought-tolerant plants tend to do best since hillsides are often windy and sunny and difficult to irrigate. To prevent erosion, choose plants that root tenaciously and cover the ground year-round. 'Bee's Bliss' salvia (*S. sonomensis*) has showy purple flowers.
4. **In Paths and Patios:** To fill spaces between pavers and stepping stones, choose plants that stay short and thrive in gravel or sandy soil ex-baby's tears (*Soleirolia soleirolia*).
5. **As Around trees:** Look for shade-tolerant varieties that don't need regular

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cutting to look tidy, since a string trimmer can damage tree trunks. Unlike turf, the ring of hardy geraniums grows in partial shade and requires little tending.

6. In Carpet-Forming: Plants that completely blanket areas are the most economical and are great for erosion control. But some can invade a nearby lawn or perennial beds unless stopped by a switch in conditions—shade to sun, for example—or a physical barrier. Ex-'Snow in summer' (*Cerastium tomentosum*)
7. In Clump-Forming: All groundcovers spread, but these more upright, slow movers tend to stay under control. They work well in small areas or where you want a defined edge and for combining with other groundcovers, since each plant stays distinct. ex-'Sweet woodruff' (*Gallium odoratum*)
8. As Evergreen: Evergreens look good all year but often lack showy flowers. They are best for shading out weed seeds and hiding any debris that might blow in, a trait that's especially useful where groundcovers edge a walkway or a driveway. Ex-: (*Delosperma cooperi*)
9. As Deciduous: Deciduous groundcovers die back or turn brown when temperatures drop below

freezing. But the majority of the year, they offer color and texture, including spring flowers, summer berries, or bright fall foliage. Ex-'Lily-of-the-Valley' (*Convallaria majalis*)

10. As Low –Growing: Plants that are less than 12 inches tall are good for tight spaces and as edging but can require some weeding to look their best. Ground-huggers in the 1- to 3-inch range that tolerate foot traffic can be used between stepping stones. Ex-'Spotted deadnettle' (*Lamium maculatum*).
11. As Tall Growing: Plants that top 1 foot or more are best at shading out weeds and are often used for larger expanses and slopes. Be sure to select varieties with the mature height and spread you want. That way, you won't have to constantly cut them back. Ex-'Double bird's foot trefoil' (*Lotus corniculatus* 'Plenus')

#### Some of the important ground covers

1. Creeping juniper “*Juniperus horizontalis*” is an excellent, woody, evergreen ground cover that grows 1 to 2 feet tall, depending on the variety. It is a vigorous grower capable of covering a large area. Creeping juniper withstands hot, dry situations and

prefers full sun. It is an excellent plant for slopes and banks.



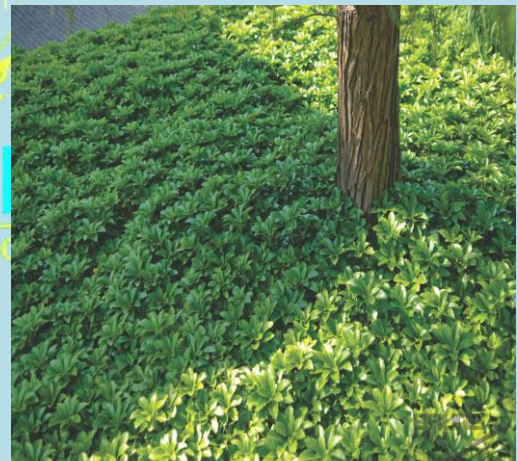
2. **Moss pink** “*Phlox subulata*” or creeping phlox is commonly used as a rock garden plant, but it also forms an effective ground cover on poor, bare soils where there is little competition. It is a plant for full sun and relatively dry soils.



3. **Hostas** for partially shaded areas. They appear most often in perennial borders as accent plants or edgings, but their large leaves provide a lush covering for the soil. As a ground cover, hostas are best where the soil remains slightly moist and not in full sun.



4. **Pachysandra** “*Pachysandra terminalis*” is a popular ground cover suitable for shaded landscape situations. This evergreen plant spreads by underground stems and attains a height of 1 foot.



5. **Yucca** “*Yucca filamentosa*” is a rugged plant able to take almost any situation. The plant is normally around 2 to 3 feet tall with all the leaves arising from a central point at ground level in a rosette fashion. The plant is suited best to hot, dry situations.





6. The **liriope** or lilyturfs "*Liriope spp*" are very versatile grass-like ground covers that adapt to a wide range of conditions, including drought and salt spray. Most cultivars do well in heavy shade or full sun, although some cultivars, especially the variegated ones, are better used in shade.



7. "**Sedum spp**" are spreading or creeping plants that will root from broken branches or fallen leaves. Related to the cacti, their thick, waxy,

generally evergreen leaves mean that they do not require large amounts of water. Most sedums are very drought tolerant and will rot if kept too moist or if air circulation is poor. They are best used in full sun.



### Preparation of site for planting

Before begins planting, rid the site of as many weeds as possible and judiciously apply Roundup to the site to kill any existing vegetation such as turf. Once everything has died back, turn in a 2- to 3-inch-deep layer of compost, manure, leaf mold, or other organic matter. This is also a good time to add amendments like lime or sulfur if you need to modify soil ph.

### Planting

Once planting area has been prepared, lay out your plants in staggered rows according to design. How far apart space, plants will depend on how quickly cover ground, the type of growth habit each plant has, and the size of the plants you purchase—a 1-gallon plant will fill the area more quickly than a 3-inch plug.

### Maintenance

After planting, top the bed with a 2-inch-deep layer of mulch to help keep down weeds and hold in moisture. Getting the plants to grow into a solid stand of ground covers will require a bit of effort and diligence in the first couple of years of establishment. This is the critical time to keep up on weeding and watering and to monitor plants for nutritional needs.

### Disadvantages of ground covers

1. It can provide a habitat for slugs, snails and other pests. This is to a large extent mitigated by the beneficial creatures it also encourages, but it is best not to grow slug-susceptible plants in a ground cover if you normally have a problem with slugs.
2. It can compete with other plants for food and water.

