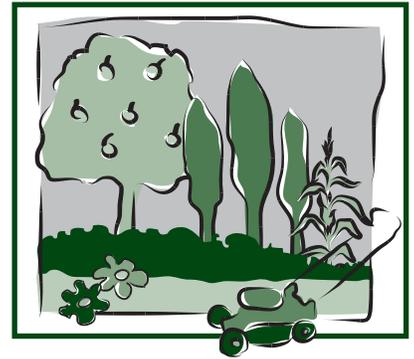


Ground Cover Plants

Fact Sheet No. 7.400

Gardening Series | Yard



by J.E. Klett and R.A. Cox*

A ground cover should spread by itself. Species that produce rhizomes or stolons or that spread by offsets or tip layering are good choices for ground covers. Ideally, they will develop rapidly into a dense cover. Some, however, grow so fast they can become invasive.

A ground cover should be sufficiently dense to inhibit competition from weeds. If the ground cover will be used to prevent soil erosion on a steep slope, it should have a vigorous growth habit and extensive root system.

Considerations

- Control existing weeds before planting ground covers. Weeds may reduce the attractiveness of the ground cover or compete with it for resources such as water and nutrients. No one species of ground cover plant works for every landscape situation. Consider the following factors before selecting a ground cover for a specific situation:
- To maintain design balance, select lower-growing ground covers for smaller areas and taller ones for larger areas or steep slopes.

- The amount of sun versus shade and the exposure to winter sun and winds are important considerations in selecting a ground cover.
- Most ground covers will not tolerate excessive foot traffic. If foot traffic is anticipated, install a walkway through the area before planting the ground cover.
- Improve soils with good quality organic matter before planting. Incorporate 2 to 4 cubic yards of compost or other organic materials into each 1,000 square foot area.

Maintenance

All ground cover plantings require maintenance, some more than others. This contradicts the common perception that ground covers are “no-maintenance plants.” Lawns also are considered ground covers, but may require more moisture, sunlight, fertilizer and maintenance than other ground cover choices.

Evergreen ground covers, such as creeping juniper, require little care. Ground covers that develop flowers and fruit often require more maintenance to keep them attractive. Weeds may become a significant maintenance problem in a ground cover planting if not managed properly.

See Tables 1-3,
pages 2-5.

Quick Facts

- Ground covers help link together ornamental plants.
- Plants that are low-growing (generally less than 12 inches) and spread easily are suitable as ground cover plants.
- Ideally, a ground cover should be dense enough to inhibit weed emergence.
- Build walkways through areas intended for foot traffic before planting a ground cover.
- Incorporate compost or another good quality organic material into soils before planting.
- Use ground covers to prevent soil erosion, as a design element, or where grass is not practical.

*J.E. Klett, Colorado State University Extension horticulture specialist and professor, horticulture and landscape architecture; and R.A. Cox, Extension horticulture agent, Arapahoe County, 1/09

Table 1. Selected ground covers for hot, dry, sunny exposures.

Plant Name	Type	Flower Color	Bloom Time	Remarks
Small areas – under 50 sq. ft.				
<i>Achillea ageratifolia</i> Greek yarrow	Herbaceous	White	June-Aug.	Short (2-3 in.) and spreading; gray-green foliage.
<i>Achillea tomentosa</i> Woolly yarrow	Herbaceous	Yellow	June-Aug.	Poor soil; woolly foliage; spreading.
<i>Anacyclus pyrethrum depressus</i> Mount Atlas daisy	Herbaceous	White	April-May	White daisies with red undersides; silvery foliage.
<i>Antennaria dioica</i> Pussytoes	Herbaceous	White to pink	May-June	Native; silver gray, mat-like foliage; unique flowers.
<i>Arabis caucasica</i> Rockcress	Herbaceous, evergreen	White to pink	April-May	Soft, gray, spreading foliage.
<i>Arenaria montana</i> Mountain sandwort	Herbaceous	White	May-June	Covered in flowers; trailing habit.
<i>Artemisia schmidtiana</i> 'Silver Mound' Silver mound sage	Herbaceous	Unimportant	—	Mounded, feathery, aromatic, silver-gray foliage.
<i>Artemisia stelleriana</i> 'Silver Brocade' Silver brocade sage	Herbaceous	Unimportant	—	Finely-cut, velvety silver foliage; mat forming.
<i>Aurinia saxatilis</i> (<i>Alyssum saxatile</i>) Basket-of-gold	Herbaceous	Yellow	April-May	Shear after bloom.
<i>Coreopsis auriculata</i> Dwarf coreopsis	Herbaceous	Orange, yellow	June-Sept.	Stoloniferous mats of slender leaves.
<i>Penstemon pinifolius</i> Pineleaf penstemon	Herbaceous, evergreen	Reddish- orange, yellow	June-Sept.	Needle-like, evergreen foliage.
<i>Saponaria ocyroides</i> Rock soapwort	Herbaceous	Pink	May-July	Shear after bloom.
<i>Sedum acre</i> Goldmoss sedum	Herbaceous, evergreen	Yellow	May-June	Low growing; succulent, dark green leaves.
<i>Sedum kamschatcicum</i> Kamschatka sedum	Herbaceous, evergreen	Orange, yellow	July-Aug.	Scalloped, succulent, green leaves.
<i>Sedum spurium</i> Sedum, stonecrop	Herbaceous, evergreen	Red	July-Aug.	Succulent leaves; commonly sold varieties are 'Dragon's Blood' and 'Tricolor.'
<i>Sempervivum</i> spp. Houseleek, hen and chicks	Herbaceous, evergreen	Unimportant	—	Succulent, evergreen leaves in rosettes.
<i>Stachys byzantina</i> Lamb's ear	Herbaceous	Purple	June-July	Furry, gray leaves resemble a lamb's ear.
<i>Tanacetum densum amani</i> Partridge feather	Herbaceous	Yellow	May-June	Finely-cut, silvery-white foliage.
<i>Thymus praecox</i> Creeping thyme	Herbaceous	Pink, red, white	June-July	Low growing, evergreen foliage.
<i>Verbena bipinnatifida</i> Native verbena	Herbaceous	Purple	May-Sept.	Deeply-cut foliage; sprawling stems.
<i>Verbena canadensis</i> Verbena	Herbaceous	Purple	July-Sept.	Vigorous groundcover; common variety 'Homestead Purple.'
<i>Zauschneria californica latifolia</i> Hummingbird flower	Herbaceous	Red, orange	Aug.-Oct.	Gray-green leaves; good for attracting hummingbirds.
Large areas – greater than 50 sq. ft.				
<i>Artemisia frigida</i> Fringed sage	Herbaceous	Yellow	Aug.-Sept.	Fringed, silvery-gray foliage; good for naturalized areas.
<i>Callirhoe involucrata</i> Poppy mallow, winecups	Herbaceous	Reddish-purple	June-Aug.	Trailing stems with saucer-like flowers; Plant Select®.
<i>Cerastium tomentosum</i> Snow-in-summer	Herbaceous	White	May-June	Aggressive; shear after bloom.
<i>Delosperma cooperi</i> Purple ice plant	Herbaceous, evergreen	Purple	June-frost	Succulent foliage turns reddish in winter.
<i>Delosperma nubigenum</i> Yellow ice plant	Herbaceous, evergreen	Yellow	May-June	Succulent foliage turns reddish in winter.
<i>Fragaria vesca</i> Strawberry	Herbaceous	White, pink	May-June	Native strawberry; small edible berries.
<i>Juniperus x media</i> Spreading juniper	Woody, evergreen	Unimportant	—	Several low-growing varieties including 'Armstrong' and 'Holbert.'
<i>Juniperus horizontalis</i> Creeping juniper	Woody, evergreen	Unimportant	—	Several low-growing varieties including 'Bar Harbor,' 'Blue Chip,' 'Prince of Wales' and 'Wiltonii.'
<i>Juniperus sabina</i> Savin juniper	Woody, evergreen	Unimportant	—	Several low-growing varieties including 'Broadmoor,' 'Buffalo,' and 'Scandia.'
<i>Oenothera speciosa</i> Mexican evening primrose	Herbaceous	Pink	June-Oct.	Spreads quickly, may become invasive.
<i>Polygonum aubertii</i> Silver lace vine	Woody Herbaceous	White	July-Sept.	Aggressive vine usable as ground cover.

Table 1 (cont.). Selected ground covers for hot, dry, sunny exposures.

Plant Name	Type	Flower Color	Bloom Time	Remarks
<i>Polygonum cuspidatum</i> 'Compactum' Japanese fleece flower	Woody Herbaceous	Pink	Aug.-Sept.	Aggressive; thick, green leaves with red veins; red fall color; excellent ground cover for dry areas.
<i>Potentilla neumanniana</i> Creeping cinquefoil	Herbaceous	Yellow	May-Aug.	Bright green foliage; spreads quickly.
<i>Prunus besseyi</i> 'Pawnee Buttes®' Pawnee Buttes® sandcherry	Woody	White	April-May	Same species as native sandcherry but with a low, spreading habit; orange/red fall color; Plant Select®.
<i>Rhus aromatica</i> 'Gro-Low' Fragrant sumac	Woody	Yellow	March-April	Vibrant orange-red fall color; very drought tolerant.
<i>Rosa</i> x 'Sea Foam' Sea Foam rose	Woody	White	June-Aug.	Double-white blooms; trailing groundcover or over walls.

Table 2. Selected ground covers for sun to part shade.

Plant Name	Type	Flower Color	Bloom Time	Remarks
Small areas – under 50 sq. ft.				
<i>Alyssum montanum</i> Mountain alyssum	Herbaceous	Yellow	April-May	Gray foliage.
<i>Armeria maritima</i> Sea pink	Herbaceous, evergreen	Pink, white, purple	May-June	Grass-like foliage; several varieties.
<i>Aubrieta deltoidea</i> False rockcress	Herbaceous	Purple, blue, red	May-June	Several varieties; mat-like foliage.
<i>Bergenia</i> 'Winterglut' Winter glow bergenia	Herbaceous	Pink	April-May	Low, cabbage-like foliage.
<i>Campanula poscharskyana</i> Adriatic bluebells	Herbaceous	Blue	May-June	Spreads quickly; good for rock gardens.
<i>Ceratostigma plumbaginoides</i> Plumbago	Herbaceous	Dark blue	Aug.-Sept.	Attractive green foliage turns red in fall.
<i>Dianthus deltoides</i> 'Brilliant' 'Zing Rose' Maiden Pink	Herbaceous	Red	May-June	Dark green foliage; mat-like.
<i>Festuca ovina</i> (glauca) Blue fescue	Herbaceous	Unimportant	—	Silvery-blue clump grass.
<i>Geranium cinereum</i> Cranesbill	Herbaceous	Pink, purple	May-July	Leaves are deeply divided; clump forming.
<i>Geranium dalmaticum</i> Compact rose geranium	Herbaceous	Pink	May-June	Foliage turns red in fall.
<i>Geranium</i> x cantabrigiense Biokovo cranesbill	Herbaceous	Pink, white	May-July	Foliage turns red in fall.
<i>Gypsophila repens</i> Creeping baby's breath	Herbaceous	White, pink	June-July	Mat-like.
<i>Heuchera sanguinea</i> Coral bells	Herbaceous	Red, pink, white	June-Aug.	Mounded foliage with taller bell-shaped flowers.
<i>Iberis sempervirens</i> Candytuft	Herbaceous, evergreen	White	May-June	Dark green, mounded foliage.
<i>Persicaria affinis</i> Himalayan border jewel	Herbaceous	Pink	Aug.-Sept.	Mat-like foliage becomes copper in fall.
<i>Phlox subulata</i> Creeping phlox	Herbaceous, evergreen	Pink, white, lavender	April-May	Several varieties; needle-like foliage.
<i>Potentilla nepalensis</i> 'Miss Willmott' Miss Willmott cinquefoil	Herbaceous	Rose, red	June-July	Strawberry-like leaves.
<i>Thymus</i> x citriodorus Lemon thyme	Herbaceous, evergreen	Purple	June-July	Lemon-scented foliage.
<i>Thymus pseudolanuginosus</i> Woolly thyme	Herbaceous, evergreen	Pink, purple	June-July	Mat-like, woolly-gray foliage; turns purplish in winter; sparse flowers.
<i>Thymus serpyllum</i> Mother-of-thyme	Herbaceous, evergreen	Purple	June-July	Aromatic foliage; mat-like.
<i>Veronica filiformis</i> Birdseye speedwell	Herbaceous	Blue	June-Aug.	Grows quickly in dry conditions.
<i>Veronica liwanensis</i> Turkish veronica	Herbaceous	Blue	May-June	Low growing; dark green leaves; Plant Select®.
<i>Veronica pectinata</i> Woolly veronica	Herbaceous	Lavender	May-June	Low growing; gray foliage; evergreen some winters.
<i>Veronica peduncularis</i> Speedwell	Herbaceous	Blue	May-June	Commonly sold variety is 'Georgia Blue'
<i>Veronica prostrata</i> Prostrate speedwell	Herbaceous	Blue to purple	May-June	Dense mats.
<i>Veronica repens</i> Creeping speedwell	Herbaceous	Blue to purple	May-June	Dense mats.

Table 2 (cont.). Selected ground covers for sun to part shade.

Plant Name	Type	Flower Color	Bloom Time	Remarks
<i>Veronica spicata incana</i> Silver speedwell	Herbaceous	Blue	May-July	Silvery foliage.
<i>Waldsteinia fragarioides</i> Barren strawberry	Herbaceous, evergreen	Yellow	April-May	Sparse fruit is inedible.
<i>Waldsteinia ternata</i> Siberian barren strawberry	Herbaceous	Yellow	April-May	Compact growth habit; fruit inedible.
<i>Zauschneria garrettii</i> Orange Carpet® Hummingbird trumpet	Herbaceous	Orange	Aug.-Sept.	Good for cascading over walls; tubular flowers; Plant Select®.
Large areas – greater than 50 sq. ft.				
<i>Campsis radicans</i> Trumpet vine	Woody Herbaceous	Yellow, orange, red	July-Aug.	Can use as vine or ground cover; very aggressive.
<i>Cotoneaster apiculatus</i> Cranberry cotoneaster	Woody	Pink	May-June	Attractive, red fruit; maroon fall color.
<i>Cotoneaster dammeri</i> 'Coral Beauty' Coral Beauty cotoneaster	Woody	White, pink	May-June	Bronze fall color; abundant orange-red fruit.
<i>Cotoneaster horizontalis</i> Rock cotoneaster	Woody	Pink	April-May	Semi-evergreen; small rounded leaves with fall color.
<i>Duchesnea indica</i> Mock strawberry	Herbaceous	Yellow	May	Aggressive; bright red, inedible fruit.
<i>Juniperus communis</i> Common juniper	Woody, evergreen	—	—	Performs best in acidic soils.
<i>Juniperus squamata</i> 'Blue Star' Blue Star Juniper	Woody, evergreen	—	—	Bluish-white foliage; dense growth habit.
<i>Lonicera japonica</i> 'Halliana' Hall's honeysuckle	Woody, evergreen	White, yellow	July-Aug.	Can use as vine or ground cover.
<i>Lysimachia nummularia</i> Moneywort	Herbaceous	Yellow	June-July	Aggressive; prefers moist soil.
<i>Nepeta x faassenii</i> Catmint	Herbaceous	Lavender, blue	May-Aug.	Commonly sold varieties are 'Six Hills Giant' and 'Walker's Low.'

Table 3. Selected ground covers for part to deep shade.

Plant Name	Type	Flower Color	Bloom Time	Remarks
Small areas – under 50 sq. ft.				
<i>Ajuga reptans</i> Carpet bugle	Herbaceous	Blue/pink, white/ purple	May-June	Varieties include 'Atropurpurea,' 'Burgundy Glow' and 'Silver Beauty'.
<i>Convallaria majalis</i> Lily-of-the-valley	Herbaceous	White	May-June	Drooping, fragrant flowers.
<i>Hosta spp.</i> Hosta, plantain lily	Herbaceous	Lilac to white	July-Aug.	Many varieties; primarily grown for foliage effect.
<i>Lamium galeobdolon</i> Archangel	Herbaceous	Yellow	May-June	Silver-flecked foliage; commonly sold variety is 'Herman's' Pride.'
<i>Paxistima cambyi</i> Mountain lover	Woody, evergreen	—	—	Small shrub; prostrate growth.
<i>Phlox stolonifera</i> Running mat phlox	Herbaceous, evergreen	Blue, purple, pink	May-June	Commonly sold varieties are 'Blue Ridge' and 'Pink Ridge.'
<i>Sagina subulata</i> Pearlwort, Irish moss	Herbaceous, evergreen	White	May-June	Dense, moss-like mat; moist soil.
<i>Viola cornuta</i> Tufted pansy	Herbaceous	Violet	May-June	Many varieties with various flower colors; moist soil.
<i>Viola odorata</i> Sweet violet	Herbaceous	Violet	May-June	Several varieties; potentially invasive.
Large areas – greater than 50 sq. ft.				
<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i> 'Variegatum' Snow-on-the-mountain, bishop's goutweed	Herbaceous	White	June-July	Looks best in moist soil; grown for foliage effect; invasive, aggressive.
<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i> Kinnikinnick	Woody, evergreen	Light pink	April-May	Native; prefers acid soil; bright red fruits; glossy, evergreen leaves turn copper-red in fall.
<i>Euonymus fortunei</i> 'Colorata' Purpleleaf wintercreeper	Woody, evergreen	—	—	Foliage turns purple through winter; many other varieties.
<i>Galium odoratum</i> Sweet woodruff	Herbaceous	White	May-June	Fragrant; aggressive.

Table 3 (cont.). Selected ground covers for part to deep shade.

Plant Name	Type	Flower Color	Bloom Time	Remarks
<i>Glechoma hederacea</i> Ground ivy	Herbaceous	Blue, purple	May-July	Member of the mint family; aggressive; variegated varieties available.
<i>Hedera helix</i> English ivy	Woody, evergreen	—	—	Can use as clinging vine or groundcover; aggressive; foliage may winterburn on exposed sites.
<i>Lamium maculatum</i> Spotted deadnettle	Herbaceous	Pink, white	April-June	Many varieties, including 'Beacon Silver' and 'White Nancy'; most with variegated foliage.
<i>Mahonia repens</i> Creeping Oregon grape	Woody, evergreen	Yellow	April-May	Native; spiny foliage turns reddish purple in fall; may winterburn on exposed sites; blue, grape-like fruits.
<i>Pachysandra terminalis</i> Japanese spurge	Herbaceous, evergreen	White	April-May	Glossy foliage; needs moist, acidic soil.
<i>Vinca minor</i> Periwinkle	Herbaceous, evergreen	Blue	April-May	Several varieties; best in moist soil and deep shade.