THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
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Ground Covers

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Ground covers, low-growing plants used in the landscape, are popular as mass plantings for covering large areas. Ground covers unify landscapes by providing masses of foliage in sun and shade. To aid in selection, suggested ground covers are listed in Table 1 on page 3. Check the hardiness zones listed in the table against the map to be sure the plant selected will survive in your location.

Uses

Ground covers have many practical uses. For example, ground covers control erosion when planted on slopes or banks. They are effective lawn substitutes in areas too shady to support the growth of grasses. These low-growing plants become attractive accents for areas too narrow to accommodate shrubs. Wide-spreading ground covers engulf large areas in carpets of attractive foliage. Ground covers eliminate costly and time-consuming maintenance such as mowing, edging and trimming.

Ground covers are also valued for aesthetic reasons. They soften harsh architectural lines of buildings and parking lots. They provide contrast with foliage, form and flowers. When skillfully interplanted with trees and shrubs, ground covers impart a textural balance to the planting. Ground covers also give unity to the landscape by tying together all the elements of the planting.

Planting

Proper planting is important for ground covers to grow and spread rapidly. Collect and submit a soil sample to your county extension office at least one month before beginning soil preparation. Work the soil 8 to 10 inches deep. Incorporate fertilizer, lime (if needed) and organic matter. Recommended amounts of

Juniper groundcover.

Low-growing junipers, used as a ground cover, grow well in full sun and tolerate drought conditions.

Mowing in many landscape situations can be eliminated by the use of such ground covers as liriope.

fertilizer and lime will be based on the soil test results. If you did not run a soil test, apply 3 pounds of a complete fertilizer per 100 square feet (½ cup per square yard). Use a complete fertilizer, such as a 5-10-15 analysis. Spread a minimum of 2 to 3 inches of organic matter on the soil and incorporate it. Use organic materials such as compost or ground pine bark. In heavy clay soils, incorporate 2 inches of coarse sand to improve the soil texture.

Competition from weeds following planting is common on untreated soils. Hand-weeding will eliminate this competition, but you can avoid the task of hand-weeding by treating the soil before planting. Areas with existing plants may be treated with a pre-emergent herbicide after planting. Herbicides in combination with mulches will control many weeds and grasses.

Timing

The ideal time to plant ground covers is early fall. The next best times are late winter or early spring. Fall planting takes advantage of lower temperatures and natural rainfall. Watering is reduced and plants establish a stronger root system before summer.

Fall planting results in quicker spread of ground covers, including those traveling by means of underground stems and surface runners. Container-grown plants with well-developed root systems can be planted all year, even in hot weather. Summer planting requires adequate and frequent watering for survival and establishment.

Maintenance

Proper maintenance of ground-cover plantings ensures good growth, rapid coverage and an acceptable appearance. Coverage of an area depends upon new growth. Good maintenance promotes growth and prevents competition from weeds and grasses.

The first maintenance task should be the application of a light mulch to recently planted ground covers. Mulches conserve moisture, reduce weed competition and promote a cooler soil environment during the summer.

The next consideration is adequate and timely watering. When water is needed, apply enough to penetrate the soil to a depth of 12 inches. Check the soil once a week with a soil probe or spade to deter-mine soil moisture. On sandy soils, apply ½ inch of water to ensure penetration to 12 inches. On heavier soils apply ¾ to 1 inch of water to ensure the same penetration. Measure the water applied by placing several empty cans in the ground-cover area.

Finally, encourage plants to cover the ground quickly by fertilizing periodically during the first growing season. For fall-planted ground covers, apply a nitrogen fertilizer the following spring and again in four to six weeks. For spring-planted ground covers, apply a complete fertilizer (containing nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium) immediately after planting. Reapply a nitrogen fertilizer four to six weeks later.

Common nitrogen fertilizers include ammonium nitrate and sodium nitrate. Use ammonium nitrate at 3 pounds per 1,000 square feet or use sodium nitrate at 6 pounds per 1,000 square feet (see Table 2, page 4).

Apply nitrogen fertilizers only when the foliage is dry. Always apply enough water after fertilizer application to disperse the nitrogen into the upper 6 to 8 inches of the soil. Proper watering will prevent foliage and root injury. Do not let the soil become dry after fertilizing.

Complementing your plantings with ground covers requires proper selection, planting and maintenance. Established ground covers will improve the appearance of the landscape while saving time and money.

Table 1.

Ground Covers Recommended for Full Sun

Common Name	Scientific Name	Height	Zone*
Andorra Juniper	*Juniperus horizontalis plumosa*	18-24"	6, 7, 8
Blue Fescue	*Festuca ovina glauca*	4-6"	6, 7
Blue Rug Juniper	*Juniperus horizontalis* 'Wiltoni'	1-2"	6, 7, 8
Cotoneaster	*Cotoneaster* species	1-3"	6, 7
Daylily	*Hemerocallis* species	18-24"	6, 7, 8
Dwarf Japgarden Juniper	*Juniperus procumbens* 'Nana'	6-8"	6, 7, 8
Evergreen Candytuft	*Iberis sempervirens*	6-8"	6, 7
Hall's Honeysuckle	*Lonicera japonica halliana*	18-24"	6, 7, 8
Lavender Cotton	*Santolina chamaecyparissus*	18-24"	6, 7, 8
Liriope	*Liriope muscari*	14-20"	6, 7, 8
Mondo Grass (Dwarf Lilyturf)	*Ophiopogon japonicus*	6-10"	6, 7, 8
Moss Verbena	*Verbena tenusecta*	8-12"	8
Parsons Juniper	*Juniperus davurica 'Expansa'*	18-24"	6, 7, 8
Purple Wintercreeper	*Euonymus fortunei coloratus*	6"	6, 7
Sargent Juniper	*Juniperus chinensis sargentii*	12"	6, 7, 8
Shore Juniper	*Juniperus conferta*	18-24"	6, 7, 8
St. Johnswort (Aarons Beard)	*Hypericum calycinum*	12"	6, 7
Thrift (Moss Pink)	*Phlox subulata*	2"	6, 7, 8

Ground Covers Recommended for Shade

Common Name	Scientific Name	Height	Zone
Algerian Ivy	*Hedera canariensis*	8-10"	8
Ardisia	*Ardisia japonica*	6-8"	8
Asiatic Jasmine	*Trachelospermum asiaticum*	2-4"	7, 8
Bugleweed	*Ajuga reptans*	2-3"	6, 7, 8
Hall's Honeysuckle	*Lonicera japonica halliana*	18-24"	6, 7, 8
Holly Fern	*Cyrtomium falcatum*	24-30"	8b
Japanese Spurge	*Pachysandra terminalis*	6-8"	6, 7
Lenten Rose	*Helleborus orientalis*	12-15"	6, 7
Liriope	*Liriope muscari*	14-20"	6, 7, 8
Mondo Grass	*Ophiopogon japonicus*	6-10"	6, 7, 8
Plantain Lily	*Hosta* species	6"-3'	6, 7, 8
Purple Wintercreeper	*Euonymus fortunei coloratus*	6"	6, 7
St. Johnswort	*Hypericum calycinum*	12-15"	6, 7

* Refers to Plant Hardiness Zone Map (page 4).