



## GROUND COVERS

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Ground covers are a diverse group of plants. They offer an alternative to lawns, requiring less maintenance and, when properly selected, less water. This type of plant will not tolerate as much traffic as a lawn. They require routine fertilization, watering, weeding and pruning to develop into attractive plantings.

### CHOOSING THE BEST GROUND COVERS

The following factors should be considered when selecting a ground cover:

1. Always select a ground cover that is adapted to the site. Consider its ability to thrive in the soil type, light exposure and soil condition, dry to wet or poorly drained.
2. The ground cover should give the desired landscape effect. Consider how the plant will look when mature. Focus on the plants that suit your garden and your design. Choose a ground cover that requires the least maintenance, but is competitive enough to keep out weed.
3. The color, height, form and texture of a ground cover plays a vital role in any garden.

### PLANTING GROUND COVERS

The best time to plant ground covers is in the fall or early spring. This allows the plants time to develop an extensive root system before the hot summer weather arrives.

It is important to prepare the soil properly at the time of planting. Shallow-rooted ground covers benefit from organic amendments tilled into the entire growing area at planting time. After planting, spread mulch between the plants over the entire growing area two to three inches deep. As they age, ground covers continuously produce their own organic mulch, low in nutrients. Supplement this with a slow release fertilizer applied annually or in a split application spring and fall.

Space the plants so that they will cover the site in one or two growing seasons. This will aid in preventing mounding and in weed control.

### GROOMING

Periodical inspections and grooming are needed, even for low maintenance ground covers, to keep them in prime condition. Look for overcrowding that cuts down on air circulation and promotes disease. Thin plants or prune back overcrowded plants. Avoid hedge cut or "one size fits all" pruning. This causes excessive branching, crowding and unthrifty plants. They are more susceptible to leaf loss from self shading, increased disease and insect attack.

### NEGLECT

This is perhaps the greatest problem affecting long-lived landscape plants, including ground covers. Plants may be taken

for granted for years until they begin to decline, at which point it is too late to help them with improved care. Sometimes the best option is to replace the plant with a species that is easier to maintain or more disease resistant, especially if the plant has become hazardous. Sometimes ground covers may recover through rejuvenation, corrective pruning or dividing and replanting.

## MAINTENANCE OF ESTABLISHED PLANTS

**Watering** - Water when necessary. Always irrigate deeply to encourage deep rooting, which in turn encourages foliar growth and good health. The plant's ability to withstand water stress from hot, windy conditions is improved.

**Pruning** - This is necessary when the ground cover becomes mounded, unattractive or woody. Pruning should be done in the fall or spring, depending on the variety, to promote spring and summer growth.

**Fertilizing** - An application of nitrogen, such as ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) is helpful early in the growing season and will aid in promoting a flush of growth. Apply the fertilizer when the foliage is dry, then water thoroughly to wash the fertilizer off the foliage and into the soil. Apply a complete, slow release fertilizer in the fall for good winter performance. Use one pound of nitrogen (1:2:1) per 1000 square feet over the top and watered into the soil, or follow soil test recommended actions.

**Pest Control** - Apply pesticides only when a pest problem exists or the potential of a pest problem. If possible, identify the insect or disease first. Seek professional advice from University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, (702) 222-3130, about the best way to solve the problem. Always avoid spraying when the ground cover is in flower to prevent killing bees.

**Propagating** - Occasionally, ground cover will develop a bare spot or the gardener might want to extend a planting into a new area. The three most common methods of propagating ground cover plants are division, cuttings and layering.

**Division** - For the average gardener, division is the simplest method. Dig up the plant. Divide the clump of roots with a sharp shovel into halves or quarters. Replant by spacing the individual plants in the areas needing coverage.

**Cuttings** - Some ground covers can be propagated by cuttings. Cut stems into four to six inch lengths. Make a straight basal cut below a bud. Remove any foliage from the bottom half to two-thirds of the cutting. Place the cuttings into a flat or container holding a moistened, sterile medium. A hormone powder applied on the end of the cutting before placing it in the soil will help in the rooting process. Place in a shady, humid, sheltered area, keeping the rooting medium moist at all times. Plants vary in the length of time they need to grow roots. After rooting, transplant into a pot to allow for more growth, and, finally, into the bed.

**Layering** - Propagating root and stems while they are still attached to the mother plant is called layering. Many ground covers such as English ivy and juniper will layer naturally. In spring, the best time to start layers, simply tie, stake or otherwise hold the stem to be layered to the soil. Stake or otherwise hold the stem to be layered down to the soil. Four to six inch landscape staples work well. Mound several inches of soil over the stem on the ground and keep the area moist. After several weeks, it will root into the soil. Prune it from the mother plant and leave it in place as a new plant, or transplant it as a ball of soil into another location.

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PLANT	HEIGHT	RATE OF GROWTH	PLANTING DISTANCE	SHADE	PART SUN	SUN	COMMENTS
Ajuga <i>Ajuga reptans</i>	4" – 6"	Medium	8" – 12"	X	X		Erect spikes of deep blue blossom in spring. Burns in full sun. Division.
Algerian Ivy <i>Hedera canariensis</i>	8" – 18" length indefinite	Medium	8" – 12"	X	X		Fertile, well drained soils, burns out in full sun, needs more water than English ivy. Layer/cutting.
Aptenia Cordifolia <i>Mesembryanthemum cordifolia</i>	2" - 3"	Fast	3" – 6"		X		It has ice plant flowers in spring and summer. Start from cuttings. Division.
Asparagus Fern <i>Densiflorus 'sprengeri'</i>	8" – 12"	Medium	8" – 12"	X	X		Shiny, bright green needlelike leaves, also good in hanging baskets and containers. Division.
Carolina Jessamine <i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i>	12" – 36"	Medium	2' - 5'	X	X	X	Twining woody vine, dark green foliage, fragrant tubular yellow flowers. Layer/cutting.
Cotoneaster <i>Cotoneaster spp.</i>	½ to 1' tall, branches 10' long	Fast	10" – 12"		X		Leaves bright green above, whitish underneath, fruit is a showy, bright red. Cuttings.
Coyote Brush <i>Baccharis Centennial</i>	5' wide, half as tall	Medium	10" – 12"	X			Narrow leaves and tufted seed capsules. From seed.
Creeping Acacia <i>Acacia redolens</i>	1' – 2', spreads to 12'	Medium	1' – 2'			X	Has puffy yellow balls in spring, endures heat.
Desert Marigold <i>Baileya multiradiata</i>	12" – 18"	Medium	6" – 12"			X	Colorful desert perennial, reseeds itself. Long blooming period.
Dwarf Rosemary <i>Rosmarinus officinalis 'Prostratus'</i>	1' – 2', spreads to 12 ft.	Medium	12"		X	X	Lavender blue flowers, will trail over wall or edge of raised bed. Division.
English Ivy <i>Hedera helix</i>	6" – 12", length indefinite	Medium	8 – 12"	X			Good for small spaces, not as heat tolerant as Algerian ivy.
Euonymus Winter Creeper <i>Euonymus fortunei Colorata</i>	1' – 2'	Fast	2' – 3'	X	X	X	Mounding vine, dark green foliage turning reddish purple in winter. Layer/cutting.
Fountain Grass <i>Pennisetum setaceum</i>	3" – 4"	Medium	12" – 18"			X	For banks, slopes and mounds. Tolerates poor soil.
Gazania <i>Gazania sp.</i>	2 ½" - 6", length indefinite	Slow	1"0 – 12"			X	They are effective in mass plantings and on slopes.
Green Carpet <i>Herniaria glabra</i>	2" – 3"	Medium	6" – 8"	X	X	X	Dense, mat-like carpet of foliage turn bronzy red in colder temperatures.
Green Santolina <i>Santolina virens</i>	18" – 24"	Medium	12" – 18"			X	Good in small areas. Mounding, dense foliage. Flowers in summer.
Good Morning Glory <i>Convolvulus maritanicus</i>	12" - 21"	Fast	2'-4'		X	X	Tolerates poor soil, needs good drainage. Do not over water.

Hummingbird Flower <i>Zauschneria latifolia</i>	6"	Fast	15" – 24"		X	X	Dies to ground in winter. It has bright red flowers. Layer/cutting.
Japanese Honeysuckle <i>Lonicera japonica</i>	1' – 3'	Fast	2' - 3'	X		X	Fragrant tubular flowers, white changing to yellow in spring.
Lavender Cotton <i>Santolina chamaecyparissus</i>	1'	Fast	1'			X	Spreads rapidly by creeping stems, forms a dense mat, yellow flowers. Layer.
Lippia <i>Lippi repens</i>	1" – 2" high	Fast	4"	X		X	Green foliage, spreading rapidly by surface runners.
Liriope <i>Liriope spicata.</i>	8" – 9"	Medium	12" – 18"	X	X		Spreads rapidly through underground stems. Cut back in spring.
Mexican Evening Primrose <i>Oenothera berlandieri</i>	10" – 12"	Fast	12" – 18"		X	X	Good for dry slopes. Invasive, if not controlled.
Mondo Grass <i>Ophiopogon japonicus</i>	8" – 10"	Slow	6" – 8"	X	X		Oriental in appearance. Slow to fill in.
Mother of Thyme <i>Thymus serpyllum</i>	4 – 6"	Medium	10" – 12"		X	X	Stands light foot traffic, soft and fragrant.
Myoporium Prostrate <i>Myoporium pavifolium</i>	3" – 6" high, spreads 5'	Medium	2' – 3'		X		Small white flowers appear in summer, branches trail along the ground, rooting where it makes contact with moist soil.
Periwinkle <i>Vinca spicata, Vinca major, Vinca minor</i>	4 – 8" and 1 ½ ft wide	Medium	10" – 15"			X	Phlox-like flowers 1 ½" wide in various colors. Division.
Peruvian Verbena <i>Verbena peruviana</i>	6" – 12"	Fast	2'			X	Excellent ground cover, it forms a very flat mat.
Potentilla <i>Tabernaemontanii</i> ( <i>Potentilla. verna</i> PR. V. 'Nana')	2" – 6"	Medium	6" – 8"	X	X	X	Tolerates light traffic, good for small areas. Cut back in spring. It is invasive.
Prostrate Germander <i>Teucrium 'Prostratum'</i>	4" – 6"	Medium	8" – 12"		X	X	Takes heat, sun, and poor soil. Cut back in late winter to renew growth.
Prostrate Juniper <i>Junioperus spp.</i>	6" – 30" tall	Medium	1 ½' - 3'.		X	X	Flat, mounded or prostrate habit, depending on variety. Good on banks, edging beds, planter boxes. Layer.
Pyracantha <i>Fortuneana 'Santa cruz'</i>	1' o 3'	Medium	4' - 5'		X	X	Dense, shrubby ground cover. Prune to control size.
Four-Wing Saltbush <i>Atriplex canescens</i>	8" – 18"	Fast	12" – 24"		X	X	Tolerates poor, dry soil and alkalinity.
Sand Verbena <i>Abronia villosa</i>	18" – 24"	Medium	1' - 2'			X	Plant is hairy and somewhat sticky.
Star Jasmine <i>Trachelospermum jasminoides</i>	1" across	Medium	24" – 36"	X			One of the best for shady areas. Star shaped flowers are very fragrant.
Trailing Indigo Bush <i>Dalea greggii</i>	12"	Fast	15" – 24"			X	Purple flowers in spring and summer. Tolerates drought when established.