

Home Grounds Fact Sheet

Forty Better Ground Covers

Some gardeners hope to find a “good substitute for grass.” They think there must be some plant that will look as good, grow as well and withstand abuse as well as grass without requiring the care given most lawns. Of course, there is no such plant. Even ground covers need some attention, especially early on. Those that need no cutting, pruning or fertilizing differ from a grass cover in that they may grow considerably taller and cannot be walked on. Though these plants will not replace grass in every respect, there are many situations where ground covers can be used very effectively.

1. For Shade

There are frequently shady spots in the home landscape where grass fails to grow well. If this shade is not augmented by poor soil and competing tree roots, as is so often the case, there are some ground cover plants that will withstand such conditions and make a better cover than grass.

2. For Dry Soil

Plants for poor, dry soil are usually vigorous growers that can easily become garden pests in good soil and quickly outgrow their garden limits. Such plants may be needed, but they should be used with caution in the general landscape.

3. For Rapid Increase

When funds are slim and space is large, plants are wanted that can be expected to grow rapidly and cover the ground.

4. Plants Less Than 6 Inches High

These are wanted for the neatly kept areas often near the house where they can be viewed from close range. Some ground covers can be walked on infrequently, but none are as serviceable in this respect as grass.

5. Evergreen

These are the most desirable because they supply a green cover over the entire year. They are usually more expensive than deciduous woody plants and perennials and slower in growth.

6. Plants Needing Special Attention

Some of the ground covers listed die in the winter, while others may become too tall over a five year period and have to be cut to the ground occasionally. Others, like the heather, may die back in some situations or during some winters and require a severe pruning every spring. There may be some good reason for using such plants as ground covers, but their failings should be known.

7. Plants Needing No Attention

Such plants, of course, are greatly desired; but they may grow too tall, too rampant or be too coarse for use in every situation.

In the following list, the numbers to the right of the common names refer to the categories above. This is a rough grouping of possible uses to aid inexperienced gardeners in making their first list from which to choose a ground cover for a particular situation.

*POSSIBILITY OF BECOMING INVASIVE.

| Scientific Name | Height | Common Name |
|--|----------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Aegopodium podagraria</i> | 12" | Goutweed - 1,2,3,7 |
| <i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i> | 4" | Bearberry - 2,3,4,5,7 |
| <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> | 4-24" | Heather - 5,6 |
| <i>Cerastium tomentosum</i> | 6" | Snow-in-Summer - 3,4,6 |
| <i>Convallaria majalis</i> | 6" | Lily-of-the-Valley - 1,3,4,7 |
| <i>Cotoneaster horizontalis</i> | 2-3' | Rock Spray - 7 |
| <i>Chamaecytisus purpureus</i> | 18" | Purple Broom - 2,7 |
| <i>Diervilla lonicera</i> | 36" | Dwarf Bush-Honeysuckle - 2,3,7 |
| <i>Epimedium grandiflorum</i> | 9" | Longspur Epimedium - 1,7 |
| <i>Forsythia 'Arnold Dwarf'</i> | 36" | Arnold Dwarf Forsythia - 1,3,7 |
| <i>Gaultheria procumbens</i> | 4" | Checkerberry or Wintergreen - 1,2,4,5 |
| <i>Gaylussacia brachycera</i> | 12-15" | Box huckleberry |
| <i>Hosta sp.</i> | 12" | Plantain-lily - 1,2,7 |
| <i>Hypericum buckleyi</i> | 12" | Blue Ridge St. John's Wort - 7 |
| <i>Iberis sempervirens 'White Gem'</i> | 12" | White Gem Evergreen Candytuft - 5,6 |
| <i>Indigofera decora alba</i> | 24" | White Chinese Indigo - 3,6 |
| <i>Indigofera kirilowii</i> | 48" | Kirilow Indigo - 3,6 |
| <i>Juniperus chinensis sargentii</i> | 6-12" | Sargent Juniper - 2,5,7 |
| <i>Juniperus horizontalis var. (Phomopsis resistant vars.)</i> | 6-12" | Creeping Juniper - 2,5,7 |
| <i>Leiophyllum buxifolium</i> | 24" | Box Sand Myrtle - 2,5,7 |
| <i>Leucothoe fontanesiana</i> | 36" plus | Drooping Leucothoe - 1,5,7 |
| <i>Liriope spicata</i> | 8" | Creeping Liriope - 1,5,7 |
| <i>Lonicera henryi</i> | Vine | Henry Honeysuckle - 3,7 |
| <i>Lysimachia nummularia</i> | 2" | Moneywort - 1,3,4,7 |
| <i>Paxistima canbyi</i> | 12" | Canby Pachistima - 5,7 |
| <i>Pachysandra terminalis</i> | 8" | Spurge - 1,3,5,6 |
| * <i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i> | Vine | Virginia Creeper - 2,3,7 |
| <i>Phalaris arundinaceae var. picta</i> | 18" | Ribbon Grass - 2,3,7 |
| <i>Phlox subulata 'Emerald Cushion'</i> | 6" | Emerald Cushion Moss Pink - 4,7 |
| * <i>Polygonum cuspidatum var. compactum</i> | 18" | Dwarf Lace Plant - 2,3,6,7 |
| <i>Rhus aromatica</i> | 36" | Fragrant Sumac - 2,3,7 |
| <i>Rosa 'Max Graf'</i> | 24" | Max Graf Rose - 2,3,7 |
| <i>Rosa wichuraiana</i> | 6" | Memorial Rose - 2,3,7 |
| <i>Saponaria ocymoides</i> | 3" | Rock Soapwort - 1,2,4,7 |
| <i>Sedum sp.</i> | 3-12" | Stonecrop - 2,4,6 |
| <i>Teucrium chamaedrys</i> | 12" | Wall Germander - 6 |
| <i>Vaccinium angustifolium laevifolium</i> | 8" | Lowbush Blueberry - 1,7 |
| <i>Veronica officinalis</i> | 18" | Common Speedwell - 3,7 |
| <i>Viburnum utile 'Conoy'</i> | 12"-24" | Service Viburnum |
| <i>Xanthorhiza simplicissima</i> | 24" | Shrub Yellow Root - 1,3,7 |