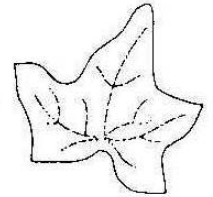


GROUND COVERS



Tips for the Home Gardener

Ground covers are a wide variety of woody or herbaceous perennial plants that blanket the ground with year-round interest. Use them in your garden as a low-maintenance, attractive alternative to turf as well as for controlling soil quality and preventing soil erosion.

Reasons to Use Ground Covers

- ☞ Reduces the mowing, watering, and other maintenance associated with turf grass
- ☞ Acts as an alternative to turf where mowing is unfeasible, such as under trees or on steep banks
- ☞ Helps suppress weeds
- ☞ Conserves moisture and maintains even soil temperatures
- ☞ Stabilizes soil in erosion-prone areas
- ☞ Allows you to create paths for directing foot traffic

Cultural Requirements

Unlike turf or annuals, which usually require full sun to prosper, many ground covers will grow in full or partial shade, making them perfect for blanketing the ground under trees or shrubs. Various ground covers can be used in poor soil conditions where drainage is poor; others display drought tolerance. When choosing ground covers, always consider the sunlight, soil, and moisture requirements of the plant. New plants and plantings around trees require extra fertilization and irrigation.

Quantity

The number of plants it takes to cover a given area depends on several factors: the plant's growth rate, how quickly you want complete coverage, and funds available for the project. Refer to the following equation and chart to help determine the number of plants needed to cover your planting bed. The plant spacing requirements can usually be found on the grower instructions or seed packet.

To calculate the number of plants required to fill a planting bed, use this equation:

$$\text{Square footage of planting area} \div \text{Plant coverage variable (determined from chart below)} = \text{Number of plants required}$$

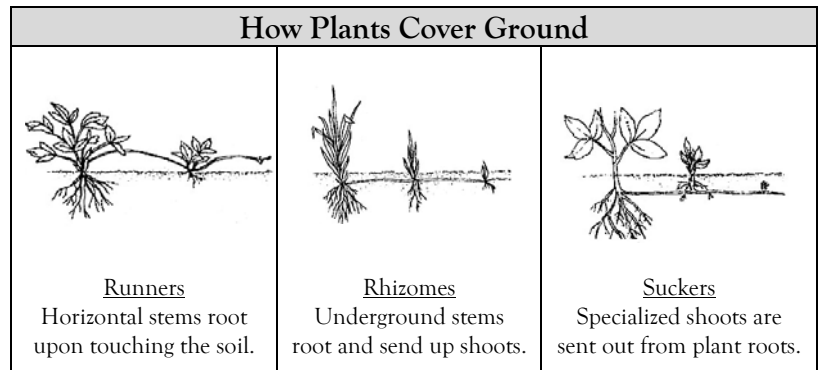
Required plant spacing	4"	6"	8"	10"	12"	15"	18"	24"	36"	48"
Plant coverage variable	0.11	0.25	0.44	0.70	1.00	1.56	2.25	4.00	9.00	16.00

EXAMPLE:

To calculate how to cover a 5 ft. × 10 ft. planting bed with plants spaced 15 inches apart, divide the square footage (50 sq. ft.) by 1.56 (variable from the chart). Thirty-two plants are needed for this bed.

Planting Ground Covers

In temperate climates, the best time to plant ground covers is during the spring. This allows the plant to establish itself with a long growing season before the cold of winter. For full coverage, and for erosion control on slopes, arrange the new plants in a staggered row pattern.



Maintenance

Ground covers require some nurturing when first planted, including regular watering. Once established, water the ground covers as necessary. You should also mulch new plantings to help suppress weed growth, insulate the soil from temperature fluctuations, and retain soil moisture. After the first year, fertilize lightly as needed in the spring (10-10-10 nutrient percentage ratio).

Native Ground Covers

Plants native to North America offer many advantages to the home gardener. These plants are naturally adapted to our environment and soil conditions. Once established, they often exhibit vigorous growth with less care and less irrigation. These ecological advantages, plus their rediscovered beauty has led to increasing public interest in gardening with native plants.

For best results, landscape with plants that are native to your specific area of the country. Do not remove plants from their natural habitat, but select plants that have been nursery propagated. If you are interested in learning more about native plant gardening, there are many reputable publications that explore this subject in depth. See below for examples of ground covers that are native to North America.

For sun	For shade
<i>Amsonia hubrichtii</i> (Bluestar)	<i>Pachysandra procumbens</i> (Allegheny spurge)
<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i> (Bearberry)	<i>Sanguinaria canadensis</i> (Bloodroot)
<i>Polystichum acrostichoides</i> (Christmas fern)	<i>Cornus canadensis</i> (Bunchberry)
<i>Juniperus horizontalis</i> (Creeping juniper)	<i>Phlox stolonifera</i> (Creeping phlox)
<i>Iris cristata</i> (Crested iris)	<i>Tiarella cordifolia</i> (Foam flower)
<i>Phlox subulata</i> (Moss pink)	<i>Chrysogonum virginianum</i> (Goldenstar)
<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i> 'Picta' (Ribbon grass)	<i>Adiantum pedatum</i> (Maidenhair fern)
<i>Sedum ternatum</i> (Wild stonecrop)	<i>Asarum canadense</i> (Wild ginger)
<i>Itea virginica</i> 'Little Henry' (Virginia sweetspire)*	<i>Xanthorhiza simplicissima</i> (Yellowroot)

* This represents a cultivar of a native woody shrub; its low growth habit makes the plant useful to fill spaces in the garden.

Longwood's Ground Cover Display

Visit Longwood's Idea Garden for a living catalog of ground covers that have proven themselves valuable for a variety of home gardening situations. You can see examples of plants that have continued to flourish despite clay soils and associated drainage problems. Assortments of drought-tolerant species are also featured in this display.