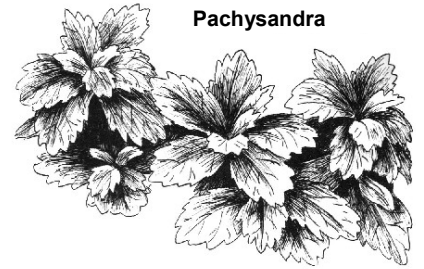




Ground Covers



Ground covers are versatile and interesting landscaping components. You can use them to define planted areas, add beauty to the landscape, or even provide the perfect solution to a planting problem.

What Is a Ground Cover?

Though ground covers are often thought of as massive plantings of low growing plants that fill in an area in a more or less permanent way, they actually include a wide range of materials—both living and nonliving—that blanket the soil. Examples of nonliving ground covers are mulch and rock. Grass is also considered a ground cover.

Many Benefits

Ground covers provide many benefits to the landscape in addition to their aesthetic value.

- When planted on slopes and run off areas, they help prevent soil erosion.
- They improve soil conditions by increasing the air and water exchange between the soil and the atmosphere.
- They aid in soil fertility, and suppress weed growth.
- Sometimes ground covers are the only plants that can thrive in places where other plants cannot grow.
- Many ground covers provide color and contrast to the landscape.

Ideal Places for Ground Covers

- Steep banks or slopes
- Shady areas under trees or next to buildings
- Underplantings in borders and beds (growing small plants beneath and between large plants)
- Poor or rocky soil conditions
- Heat relief for soil and other plants growing nearby
- Wet or dry locations
- Walks and paths
- Areas where mowing is unsafe or undesirable

Choosing the Right Ground Cover

It is very important to select the right plant for the project and area. Before planting any type of ground cover, determine if the area is sunny or shady, and if the soil is moist or dry. Select plants based on conditions, needs, and preferences. Some ground covers are deciduous (lose their leaves in winter), and some are semi-evergreen or evergreen. Some produce flowers, others do not. Each ground cover has its own unique color, texture, and form. Also consider the maintenance level of the plant. Some need periodic maintenance to thrive and look good while others do not need extra care.

There are some ground covers that spread rapidly. While that may seem advantageous at first glance, aggressive ground covers may be hard to control. Aggressive plants are easier to control if you plant them in pots or in areas that have borders such as stone or pavement. You can also control them by cutting and trimming. The warning here is that aggressive plants may need to be controlled and therefore should be considered carefully before planting. Invasive plants are also a concern. They can take over and spread to native areas. Ground covers with aggressive and invasive tendencies are noted in the plant chart.

Bed Preparation

Prepare the area to be planted by removing weeds that will compete with the ground cover. Weeds may be removed by hand or with chemical treatments. Once weeds are cleared, check for good drainage and re-grade the area if necessary.

Soil Preparation

Work the soil 6 to 8 inches deep. Incorporate organic matter such as compost, humus or peat. Test the soil before you plant to determine if fertilizer is needed. The Johnson County K-State Research and Extension Office offers soil testing for a fee of \$12 (see side bar). If fertilizer is needed, apply it before planting. Use one pound of 10-10-10 fertilizer per 100 square feet or ¼ pound of 27-3-3 per 100 square feet.

Testing Your Soil

1. First collect small random samples from the lawn or garden. Six to ten samples are best. Each sample should be dug to a depth of 4 to 6 inches.
2. Mix samples together in a clean bucket. Then, from the random mix, collect 2 cups of soil for the actual test.
3. Bring or mail your soil sample to Johnson County K-State Research and Extension, 11811 S. Sunset Drive, Suite 1500, Olathe, KS 66061-7507. Results will be mailed to you in two to three weeks.

For more information, go to www.johnson.ksu.edu and click **Lawn and Garden > Soil Testing**.

How Many Should I Plant?

Use this chart to determine how many plants are needed. For example, using the top row of the chart, an area of 100 square feet with plants placed 6 inches apart requires 400 plants.

Area Sq. Ft	Number of Plants		
	6" Apart	12" Apart	18" Apart
100	400	100	45
200	800	200	90
300	1,200	300	135
400	1,600	400	180
500	2,000	500	225
600	2,400	600	270
700	2,800	700	315
800	3,200	800	360
900	3,600	900	405
1,000	4,000	1,000	450

Planting and Maintenance

- Stagger plantings for a quicker fill in.
- If planting on a slope, use erosion control netting and mulch to decrease erosion.
- Water newly planted ground cover and then water as needed.
- Remove annual and perennial weeds as they appear.
- In the spring, remove leaves and other debris.
- If fertilizer is needed, apply ¼ to 1 pound per 100 square feet.

Plant List

Common Name	Botanical Name	Exposure	Plant Characteristics
Aegodium Bishop's Goutweed	Aegodium	Morning sun to light shade	Aggressive spreader, grows 6" to 10" tall, has white flowers, tends to burn out in the summer
Ajuga - Bugleweed	Ajuga reptans	Sun to light shade	Provides dense cover, good for smaller areas, space about 1 foot apart
Bergenia	Bergenia	Part sun	Slow spreading with pink flowers, semi- evergreen
Chameleon Plant	Houttuynia	Sun to shade	Extremely aggressive, displays a variety of colors, tolerates wet areas
Coral Bells	Heuchera	Morning sun to shade	Clump forming, does best in organic, even moist soils
Cotoneaster	Cotoneaster	Sun to part shade	Deciduous shrub with red berries, grows 1 - 3' feet tall, drought tolerant
Creeping Phlox	Phlox	Full sun to light shade	Semi-evergreen with nice spring color, needs well-drained soil
Creeping Speedwell	Veronica	Light sun to shade	Aggressive plant with nice flowers, steppable, needs even moisture soil
Creeping Thyme	Thymus	Full sun	Steppable, flowers, is also an herb
English Ivy	Hedra helix	Part to full shade	Glossy green leaves, evergreen, both shade and drought tolerant, could be considered invasive
Epimedium - Barrenwort	Epimedium	Partial to full shade	Slow growing, clumping, nice flowering, needs even moisture
Euonymus - Wintercreeper	Euonymus fortunei	Full sun to full shade	Glossy, semi-evergreen, strong spreader, drought tolerant, invasive.
European Wild Ginger	Asarum	Full shade	Shiny green leaves, somewhat evergreen, needs even soil moisture
Honeysuckle	Lonicera japonica	Sun to light shade	Woody vine with sweet flowers, drought tolerant, invasive
Hosta	Hosta	Partial to full shade	Clump forming, not spreading, higher maintenance, used in mass plantings
Japanese Forest Grass	Hakonechloa macro 'Aureola'	Light sun to full shade	Arching golden grass that spreads by clumping, 12" to 18", prefers even moisture
Junipers	Juniperus	Full sun to light shade	Very low maintenance, drought tolerant
Lamb's Ear	Stachys	Full sun to light shade	Very soft light green leaves, flowers, needs even moisture to dry soil
Lamium - Dead Nettle	Lamium	Partial to full shade	Two-toned leaves, flowers, needs moist to slightly dry soil, aggressive

Plant List cont.

Common Name	Botanical Name	Exposure	Plant Characteristics
Lily of the Valley	Convallaria majalis	Morning sun to shade	Delicate white flowers in May, aggressive, can be poisonous
Liriope – Lilyturf	Liriope	Full sun to shade	Some varieties spread, some clump, cut back each spring
Lysimachia – Creeping Jenny – Moneywort	Lysimachia	Part sun to shade	Aggressive but controllable, needs average moist soil
Mazus	Mazus reptans	Light sun to shade	Aggressive, steppable, flowers, needs even moist soil
Pachysandra – Japanese Spurge	Pachysandra	Full shade	Semi-evergreen, acidic, needs even moisture soil with good drainage
Plumbago	Ceratostigma	Sun to light shade	Blue flowers, 8 – 10” tall, do not confuse with tropical
Rose	Rosa species	Full sun	Most popular flowering shrub, taller plant, higher maintenance
Sedum	Sedum	Full sun	Many varieties available, tolerates hot, dry conditions
St. John’s Wort	Hypericum	Sun to part shade	Woody shrub with yellow flowers
Strawberries	Fragaria	Full sun to light shade	Ornamental flowers, edible fruits, needs even moisture
Sweet Woodruff	Galium	Light to full shade	Starburst leaves with fragrant flowers, needs dry to moist soil
Vinca – Periwinkle	Vinca Minor	Morning sun to full shade	Classic ground cover, semi-evergreen with blue flowers

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Extension Master Gardener Hotline

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