

Easy and Carefree Groundcovers

By Susan Rose (PCMG)

Definition of a groundcover: Any plant that grows over an area of ground. Groundcovers provide protection of the topsoil from erosion and drought. Low growing, spreading plants that help to stop weeds from growing.

Groundcovers must be vigorous enough to fill in an area of the landscape that you need to dress up or where you need to keep weeds down. They must **not** be so vigorous that it will become a problem plant. Some spreading can be nice, but too much becomes a nuisance. Always research plant choices to find out if it is invasive in your region. The plant also must be pretty enough (or at least, unusual enough) to draw attention and offer some sort of visual interest in the garden. Some gardeners enjoy using white plants or white/green plants to accent an area of their garden. White shows up very nice at night. Using a variation of groundcovers in your garden will give your garden an overall “finished” effect and provide lasting areas that are free from weeds! Houseplants can even be used in the garden as “groundcovers”. Pothos and airplane plant (spider plant) are some examples. Dianthus (considered an annual for some parts of Arkansas) does well as a groundcover and keeps on blooming every spring. Purple heart – a beautiful purple leaved plant with small pink flowers is a great addition to any garden area. Just don’t forget to bring it in or take cuttings for next year. You can even heavily mulch it and it returns every year.

Groundcovers for Arkansas

Ajuga (bugleweed) – sun or shade, moderate water, some have variegated leaves with pink, yellow colors. ‘Bronze beauty’, ‘Chocolate chip’, ‘Burgundy glow’ are some good varieties. Blue or purple flowers in the spring. Evergreen.

Artemisia – full sun, moderate water. Wormwood and Dusty Miller are also under this category that provide a white to grey plant.

Asian star jasmine – sun or shade, moderate water

Big blue liriope (monkey grass) – sun or shade, can survive dry conditions and virtually “no care”. Evergreen.

Bishop’s weed – sun or shade, moderate water, white edged leaves

Blue fescue – prefers sun, mounding plant, regular water, considered a grass. Evergreen

Candytuft – full sun, perennial with white flowers. Grows from 8” to 1’ tall. Smaller varieties are available, regular water. Well drained soil.

Catmint – prefers shade, medium water, blue or white flowers. ‘Six Hills Giant’ blooms all summer with purple flowers. Well drained soil.

English ivy – or other ivies – sun or shade, evergreen foliage. Don’t allow it to go rampant and climb trees. Holds soil well on slopes.

Epimedium – several varieties available. Partial to full shade, medium water.

Holly fern – part or full shade, regular water, coarse textured leaves. Evergreen.

Hosta – lots of varieties to choose from and different sizes. Part to full shade, regular water, different leaf shapes and colors provide a wonderful addition to the garden. The yellow leaved hostas can take more sun than the blue or green varieties.

Houttuynia cordata – sun or shade, regular water. White blossoms resemble dogwood blossoms. Variegated variety has pink, cream, yellow and red foliage.

Japanese pachysandra (spurge) – light to heavy shade, hardy to cold. Moist soil well amended with organic material is recommended. Evergreen.

Lamb's ear – full sun, moderate water, soft, wooly leaves with spike like clusters of small purple flowers. Tough, tolerate plants. Evergreen.

Lenten rose (hellebores) – part to full shade, regular water, long lived blooms (some lasting three months). Blooms in the winter. Prefers good soil with organic material. Evergreen.

Lily of the Valley – part shade, regular water, white bell-shaped flowers. Attractive green foliage with red berries in the fall. Variegated plants available with pink bell flowers.

Lungwort (pulmonaria) – part to full shade, some have green leaves with grey or silver splotches, bear drooping clusters of funnel-shaped blue flowers.

Mondo grass – shade, moderate water, blue fruit in the fall, black or green variety. There is also a dwarf variety that looks great planted among pavers. Evergreen.

Moneywort (creeping Jenny) – light green leaves, moderate water, full sun to part shade. Great to use in hanging baskets as well as ground cover.

Periwinkle – part to full shade. *V. major* has large 3” leaves, aggressive. *V. minor* smaller leaves with white/green variation, blue flowers. Evergreen.

Spotted dead nettle (lamium) – part to full shade, heart shaped leaves, grayish green leaves, pink flowers. Well drained, acid soil.

St. Johnswort – part to full shade, regular to moderate water, yellow flowers resembling single roses.

Stonecrop (sedum) – full sun to light shade, star-like clusters of flowers, most propagate by stem cuttings. ‘Angelina sedum’ succulent foliage, golden flowers, well-drained soil.

Thrift (phlox subulata) - full sun to light shade, blooms in spring, provide loose, rich soil, moderate water. Rose, lavender, white or pink flowers.

Thyme (creeping types) – full sun to part shade, heavily scented leaves and masses of colorful flowers in late spring. Well drained soil. Attracts butterflies. Evergreen.

Reference: Floyd, Jr. JA, editor. The Southern Living Garden Book. The Complete Encyclopedia of more than 5,000 southern plants. Oxmoor House, 1998.