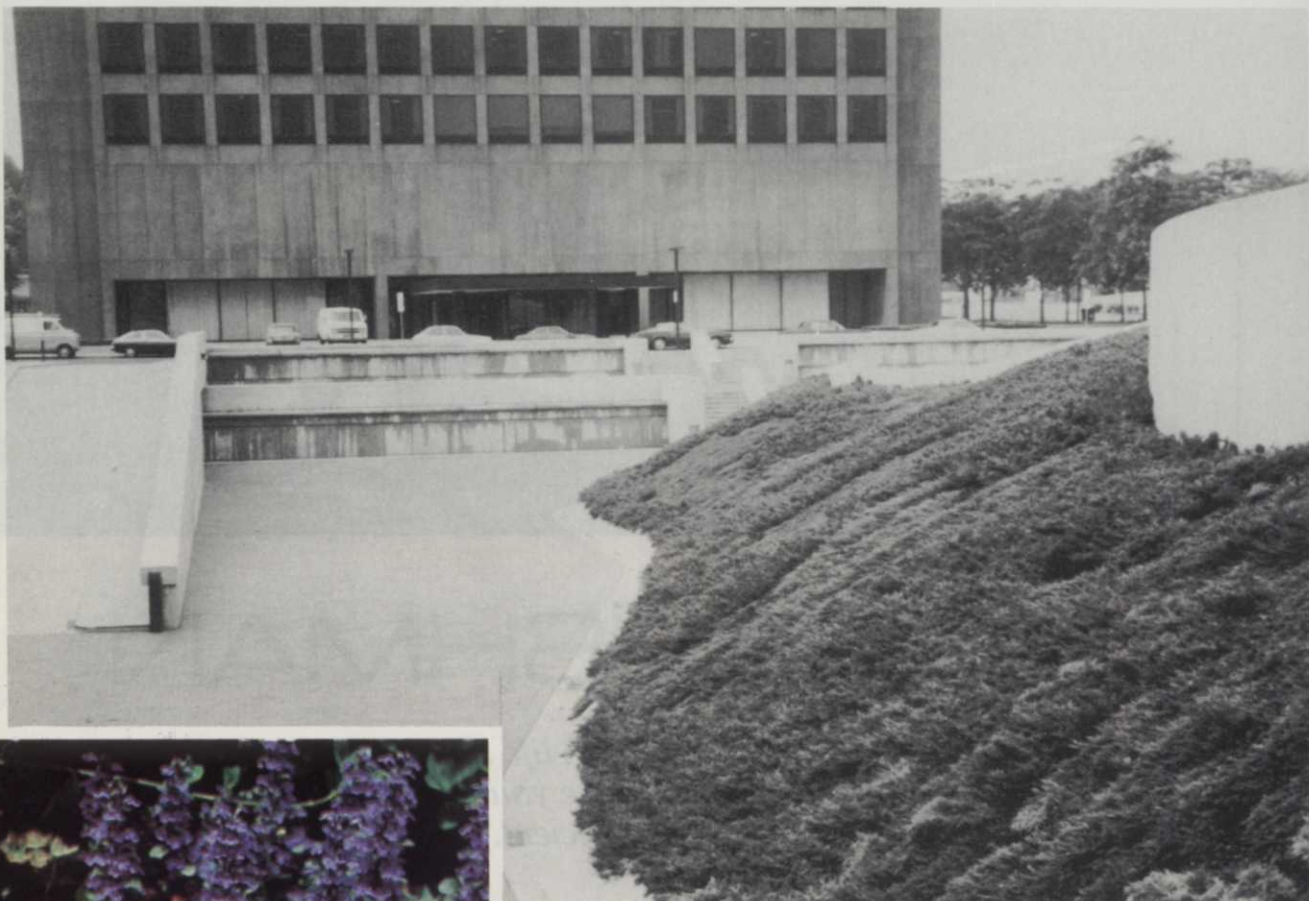


A NATURAL CARPET

Those problem turf areas can be combated with the use of practical ground cover. It's low maintenance and visually pleasing.



Junipers decorate an embankment at the Rainbow Center in N.Y. At left, ajuga reptans feature an attractive purple flower.



by Ann Reilly, Bedding Plants Inc.

Every landscape manager is faced with the maintenance of problem areas.

One answer might be the use of ground covers. They're beneficial wherever a uniform, growing carpet is needed without having to cope with the maintenance of turfgrass.

These could be areas where turfgrasses are difficult to maintain because of low light, steep slopes, poor soil, or where turfgrass won't grow well.

Ground covers are low-growing plants that spread quickly to form a dense carpet for outdoor landscaped areas.

This article will deal with both woody plants and perennials (herbaceous plants) and their uses as ground covers.

Some annual plants are also useful as ground covers where temporary color or a different look each season is needed. The best of these will be listed later on.

The main difference in choosing between woody plants and perennials is one of choice; most perennials die in the winter, leaving bare spaces, while

Ground Cover Characteristics-Characteristics of each ground cover are listed in common name category. Each number listed corresponds to a particular trait below.

Scientific name	Common name	Height	Characteristics
<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>	Goutweed 1,2,4,8	14"	White flowers-June
<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	Carpet bugle 1,4,5	3-6"	Blue flowers-May colored foliage
<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	Bearberry 2,5,6,8,9,10	4"	Red fall foliage and berries
<i>Armeria maritima</i>	Thrift 4,5,6,10	6-12"	Pink flowers-May
<i>Asperula odorata</i>	Sweet woodruff 1,3	8"	White flowers-May
<i>Arenaria verna</i>	Moss sandwort 1,4,5,6	2"	White flower-May
<i>Aurinia saxatilis</i>	Alyssum 9	6"	Gold flowers-April
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather 2,6,7,9	10"	Mixed flowers- summer
<i>Cerastium tomentosum</i>	Snow-in-summer 3,5,10	6"	White flowers-June silver foliage
<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	Lily-of-the-valley 1,4,5,8	6"	White flowers-May fragrant
<i>Cotoneaster horizontalis</i>	Rock-spray coton. 6,8	36"	Red fall berries
<i>Cytisue species</i>	Broom 2,8,10	18"	Yellow flowers-June
<i>Epimedium species</i>	Epimedium 1,7	9"	Pink & yellow flower May
<i>Erica carnea</i>	Heath 2,6,7	12"	Pink & white flowers March
<i>Euonymus fortunei</i>	Wintercreeper 1,4,5,6,7,9	3"	Colored foliage
<i>Festuca ovina</i>	Ornamental fescue 2	18"	Blue foliage
<i>Hedera helix</i>	English ivy 1,4,5,6,8,9	3"	
<i>Hemerocallis species</i>	Daylily 1,2,3,9	18"	Varied flowers summer
<i>Hosta species</i>	Hosta, funkia 1,2,8,9	12"	Violet flowers-June unique foliage

- 1. SHADE** Plants for low light conditions.
- 2. DRY SOIL** Plants for poor, dry soil. These will generally become pests where growing conditions are good, so use them with caution.
- 3. WET SOIL** Plants that will tolerate wet conditions and poor drainage.
- 4. RAPID INCREASE** When funds are slim, time is tight and space is large, use plants that will grow rapidly and cover the ground in short period of time.
- 5. LOW GROWERS** Plants for neatly trimmed areas close to buildings.

- 6. EVERGREENS** Most desirable as they supply a green cover over the ground the entire year.
- 7. HIGH MAINTENANCE** These will require extra care, such as trimming or pruning, so be prepared.
- 8. LOW MAINTENANCE** Plants requiring little attention.
- 9. FOR SLOPES** Those with a heavy root systems that will hold soil in place.
- 10. FOR THE SEASHORE** Plants that will tolerate salt air.

woody plants will naturally be in evidence.

Improved landscapes

Ground covers reduce maintenance while improving the landscape. Besides replacing turfgrass, they can be used on steep slopes to prevent erosion and eliminate mowing.

Small areas and wet locations where mowing is difficult, areas beneath shade trees, wooded areas, and spots with rock outcroppings are also suited to ground covers.

Ground covers play a large role in landscape design. Present day land-

Spacing depends on the type of plant, its size, and how quickly it will spread.

scaping stresses simplicity. A few carefully selected plants may be widely spaced to create an interesting landscape, tied together as a unit by ground covers. The ground cover forms a green, horizontal mass that serves as a base or platform to trees and shrubs.

Ground cover can tie together the manicured and the informal, the mature and the newly-planted, and the various segments of the landscape.

Since ground covers discourage foot traffic, they can be used to direct the flow of pedestrians in and out of buildings or through parking areas. Some low-growing ground covers, such as sandwort, thrift, pearlwort, and thyme will even grow well between steppingstones, eliminating the need for weeding.

Selection criteria

When choosing ground covers, there are several items to consider—light, soil requirements, and desired maintenance levels to name a few.

Don't overlook foliage, for some are unusually colored and add certain highlights. These could include bronze or green-leaved ajuga, blue festuca, silver snow in summer, or purple wintercreeper.

Flowers-white candytuft, gold alyssum, pink creeping phlox, and blue ajuga-add needed color to the landscape.

Boston creeper has brilliant fall color, and cotoneaster has a fine display of berries.

The accompanying table outlines the characteristics of the most popular of the ground covers.

It may aid you in choosing plants

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Scientific name	Common name	Height	Characteristics
<i>Iberis sempervirens</i>	Candytuft 6,8	12"	White flowers-May
<i>Juniperus chinensis sargentii</i>	Sargent juniper 2,5,6,8,9	6-12"	
<i>Juniperus conferta</i>	Shore juniper 2,6,8,9,10	6-12"	
<i>Juniperus horizontalis</i>	Creeping juniper 2,6,8,9,10	6-12"	
<i>Lamium</i> species	Lamium, Nettle 1,2,4,5	6"	Yellow & pink flower colored foliage
<i>Liriope spicata</i>	Liriope 1,4,6,8	8"	Purple & white flowers variegated foliage
<i>Mesembryanthemum</i>	Ice plant 2,4,5,9	6"	Varied flowers spring & summer
<i>Lysimachia nummularia</i>	Moneywort 1,3,4,5	2"	Yellow flowers-June
<i>Myosotis scorpioides</i>	Forget-me-not 3,5	4"	Blue flowers-May
<i>Pachysandra terminalis</i>	Pachysandra, spurge 1,4,5,7,9	6"	Insignificant flower
<i>Phlox subulata</i>	Creeping phlox 5,8	6"	Pink flowers-May
<i>Sagina subulata</i>	Pearlwort 1,5,6	4"	White flowers-summer
<i>Saponaria ocymoides</i>	Soapwort 1,2,5,8	3"	Pink flowers-summer
<i>Sedum</i> species	Stonecrop 3,4,5,7,9	5"	Varied-spring & summer
<i>Thymus vulgaris & serpyllum</i>	Thyme, Mother of Thyme 5,6	2"	Rose flowers-May
<i>Tiarella cordifolia</i>	Foamflower 1,2,4	8"	White flowers-May
<i>Veronica officinalis</i>	Speedwell 1,4,5,8	4"	Blue flowers-summer
<i>Vinca minor</i>	Periwinkle, myrtle 1,4,5,6,8,9	3"	Lavender flowers-May

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based on their height, light requirements, soil preference, quick cover capabilities, maintenance, use, ever-green characteristics, and special characteristics such as flowers, fruit or foliage.

Planting

Even though you can plant ground covers throughout the growing season, early spring is the ideal time.

Spring plantings will be well established by winter, which will help protect them from freezing and thawing. Steep banks should be mulched with salt hay or straw until the ground

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cover is well established.

Spacing depends on the type of plant, its size, and how quickly it will spread.

One plant per square foot is a good rule for herbaceous material with further distance for larger woody plants. Closer spacing results in faster cover, but it is more costly. Small bulbs can be added when planting ground covers for spring color in between.

Once established, a ground cover needs little maintenance. Keep well weeded while growing, and weeding will not be needed in the future.

Watering and fertilizing requirements of most ground covers are low. Some plants may become aggressive and can be kept out of paths and turfed areas with brick or metal edgings. If they become overcrowded, they should be thinned out.

When a quick, temporary ground cover is needed, select an annual flower. The most reliable are sweet alyssum, portulaca, annual vinca, lobelia, annual candytuft, and annual phlox.

More information on ground covers is available free of charge from Bedding Plants Inc., a non-profit trade association that distributes information on the selection, planting, and care of annuals and perennials.

For your copy, send a self addressed, stamped envelope to Ground Covers, 210 Cartwright Boulevard, Suite W, Massapequa Park, NY 11762. **WT&T**