



Not Your Ordinary Groundcovers

Gardeners plant groundcovers for many reasons: to reduce soil erosion on a slope; to form a weed-inhibiting carpet; to protect the soil from drying winds; to dress up the edge of a border; or just to add another layer of color and interest to the landscape.

The most common groundcovers include ivy, periwinkle and pachysandra. These popular choices are certainly suitable solutions, but look beyond the commonplace and consider other perennials willing to blanket your landscape with their beautiful foliage, flowers and form.

Groundcovers for shade

Lady's mantle is an ideal choice for a partly shaded spot. Its tiny chartreuse flowers emerge in late spring and can be used like baby's breath in floral arrangements. The gray-green scalloped leaves are covered with soft hairs that capture drops of rain or dew to the delight of a gardener taking a stroll through the garden. Lady's mantle grows best in average to moist soil.



Lilyturf is another candidate for covering ground in a shade garden. It looks like tufts of lawn grass on steroids. Violet-blue flower spikes begin blooming in late summer followed by glossy black seeds. The leaf blades of lilyturf contrast beautifully with broad-leaved perennials like hostas and the fine-textured foliage of ferns.

I love sweet woodruff. First, it's beautiful. Fragrant, delicate white flowers bloom in late spring over whorled foliage. Next, it's adaptable. Although it prefers moist soil, sweet woodruff performs satisfactorily in dry shade. And most important to me, it grows densely prohibiting weeds as it quickly covers garden spaces.



Bishop's hat is another favorite. Pretty heart-shaped leaves emerge red and turn green as they mature. Petite flowers in yellow, red or white appear in April and May. Bishop's hat is slower to establish but worth the wait, especially if you garden in dry shade.

Heartleaf bergenia will give gardeners three seasons of interest. Pink or white drooping flower clusters bloom in April. Thick rounded leaves are glossy green all summer and then turn bronze for fall color on the garden's floor. Give bergenia rich, moist soil and they will thrive.

Groundcovers for sun

Gardeners who tend a sunny landscape might consider Phlox subulata. I think this should be commonly called carpet of color instead of moss phlox. In spring, semi-evergreen foliage is

ensconced with fragrant flowers in vibrant shades of pink, lavender, red or blue. This perennial requires well-drained soil.

A plant that charms adults and children alike with its soft, woolly leaves is appropriately named lamb's ears. This drought-resistant perennial spreads effortlessly to provide a soft edging to a border. Helen Von Stein is a larger-leaved cultivar that produces few, if any, flowers.

Catmint requires little maintenance and rewards gardeners with dainty, lavender-blue flowers in June. Re-blooming is likely if the faded flowers are deadheaded. Blue Wonder is an ideal choice for groundcover use as it grows just 12 to 15 inches tall. The gray-green foliage of catmint is perfect for softening a border by tumbling over its edge.

Weihenstephaner Gold sedum is a very low-growing groundcover. Tiny, bright yellow flowers sit on top of the green carpet of succulent foliage in July and July. Although it prefers a spot in full sun, it will adapt to light shade situations but good drainage is a must.

Plumbago (commonly called leadwort) is slow to emerge in the spring but makes up for lost time with brilliant blue flowers over bright green leaves beginning in late summer. In fall, its leaves turn deep red lighting up the bottom layer of the landscape. Combine plumbago with spring bulbs. The bulbs star in the landscape while the plumbago is still dormant. The plumbago foliage camouflages the bulb foliage as it yellows.



It may be quick and easy to pick up a few flats of ordinary groundcovers, but take a little time to ponder the wealth of perennials available at your local garden center.



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