

## Community Horticulture Fact Sheet #77 Ground Covers and Lawn Substitutes

Any relatively low-growing plant with a spreading habit may be used as a ground cover. These plantings protect the soil from erosion and, when well established, can inhibit weed growth. Turf grass has been the ground cover of choice for generations. With adequate sunlight and summer irrigation, there are few other plants that cover soil and withstand hard use like grass.

Unfortunately, many lawn areas present maintenance problems. Good turf is difficult to establish and maintain on slopes and in heavily shaded locations. Long, narrow areas are difficult to irrigate without wasting water.

Also, lawns are a high maintenance landscape feature and offer little to wildlife.

Luckily, there are lots of ground covers that do fine in shade, hold well on slopes and are drought tolerant once established. Many also have flowers, berries or interesting foliage. Some are attractive to wildlife.

The following list presents some evergreen ground covers suitable for use in our region. For complete descriptions and cultural requirements, consult a good plant encyclopedia. In a few cases, not all cultivars of these plants are ground covers. Look for low varieties with spreading habits.

Scientific Name	Name	Flowers	Height	Comments
<i>Achillea tomentosa</i>	Yarrow	Small; gold-cream; sum.	6-10"	Drought tolerant; fernlike hairy leaves; may be mowed
<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	Carpet bugle	Blue; spr.-sum.	4-6"	Variegated leaves on some
<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	Kinnikinnick	Small; pink	2-3"	Slow growing; red berries; drought tolerant
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather	Small; purple; tale sum.	4"	Variety 'nana', others taller
<i>Ceanothus gloriosus</i>	Pt. Reyes creeper	Small; blue; spr.	12"	Drought tolerant
<i>Ceratostigma, plumbaginoides</i>	Leadwort, plumbago	Blue; sum.-fall	6-12"	Bronzy foliage
<i>Chamaemelum nobile</i>	Chamomile	Yellow; sum.	4-8"	Fragrant, may be mowed
<i>Cotoneaster dammeri</i>	Bearberry cotoneaster	Small; white; spr.	3-6"	Fast; red fruit; drought tolerant
<i>Cotula squalida</i>	Brass buttons	Small; yellow	2-4"	Fernlike, bronzy leaves; shade tolerant
<i>Cytisus kewensis</i>	Kew broom	Cream; spr.	6-10"	Spreads to 4 ft.; drought tolerant
<i>Duchesnea indica</i>	Mock strawberry	Yellow; spr.	4-6"	Red fruit attracts birds; can be invasive
<i>Dryas octopetale</i>	Mt. avens	White; sum.	3-4"	Pretty seed head; drought tolerant
<i>Erica carnea</i>	Heath	Small; colors vary; winter-spring	8-15"	'Springwood' var. recommended; red, pink, purple, white colors

600 128th Street SE, Everett, WA 98208-6353

425-338-2400 • Fax: 425-338-3994 • Master Gardeners: 425-357-6010 • TDD 1 -800-833-6388

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Scientific Name	Name	Flowers	Height	Comments
<i>Erica ciliaris</i>	Dorset heath	Small; red; late sum.-fall	6-12"	Attracts bees
<i>Euonymus fortunei</i>	Wintercreeper	Inconspicuous	3-12"	Shade tolerant; drought tolerant; many cultivars
<i>Fragaria chiloensis</i>	Beach strawberry	White; spring	6-12"	May be mowed; drought tolerant
<i>Galium odoratum</i>	Sweet woodruff	White; spr.-sum.	6-10"	Shad tolerant; fast grower; invasive
<i>Gaultheria shallon</i>	Salal	Small; pink; spr.	12-24"	Taller in shade; black fruit; drought tolerant
<i>Genista pilosa</i>	Creeping broom	Yellow; spr.	10-15"	Drought tolerant; fast grower to 6 ft. spread
<i>Hedera helix</i>	English Ivy (has become invasive, non-native weed in wild areas; harbors slugs/rodents)-not recommended, except less vigorous, fancy-leaved types			
<i>Hypericum calycinum</i>	St. Johnswort	Yellow; sum.	12"	Invasive; may be mowed; drought tolerant
<i>Juniperus conferta or horizontalis</i>	Shore or carpet juniper	No	4-18"	Many cultivars, some spread to 10 ft.; bluish foliage on some; drought tolerant
<i>Liriope spicata</i>	Creeping lily turf	Pale lilac; sum.	8-9"	Grasslike leaves; can be mowed
<i>Lithodora diffusa</i>	Lithodora	Bule, spr.-sum.	6-12"	Often has a few flowers all summer
<i>Lysimachia nummularia</i>	Creeping jenny, moneywort	Yellow; sum.	2-4"	Invasive; best in part shade; hangs nicely over walls
<i>Mahonia nervosa or repens</i>	Orgon grape	Yellow ; spr.	24-36"	Spiny leaves; blue berries; drought tolerant
<i>Pachysandra terminalis</i>	Japanese spurge	White; sum.	6-10"	Needs shade; spreads but not aggressive
<i>Potentilla cinerea</i>	Cinquefoil	Yellow; sum.	2-4"	<i>P. tabernaemontanii</i> also good; drought tolerant
<i>Rubus calycinoides</i>	Creeping bramble	White; spr.	4-8"	drought tolerant
<i>Sarcococca hookeriana humilis</i>	Creeping sarcococca	Small; white; wint.	12-18"	Blue, black fruit, tiny flowers noted for sweet fragrance
<i>Thymus praecox arcticus</i>	Creeping thyme	Small; varies; sum.	2-6"	Attracts bees; fragrant; can take light traffic
<i>Thymus lanuginosus</i>	Woolly thyme	Seldom (pinkish)	2-3"	Gray, woolly lvs.; drought tolerant
<i>Vaccinium vitis-idea</i>	Lingonberry	Small; pink; spr.	4-12"	Edible, sour, red berries
<i>Vancouveria hexandra</i>	Inside-out flower	White; spr.	4-10"	Deciduous
<i>Vinca major or minor</i>	Common or dwarf periwinkle	Blue; spr.	6-18"	Best with some shade
<i>Waldsteinia fragaroides</i>	Barren strawberry	Yellow; spr.	3-4"	Foliage bronzy in autumn