

Groundcovers: Low-Growing and Evergreen

By Shirley Priest, Master Gardener

Fall is an opportune time to plant groundcovers. In fact, groundcovers may be planted as long as the ground isn't frozen. Although multiple varieties of delightful groundcovers abound, looking closely at specific low-growing, evergreen, and blooming options is quite worthwhile. Selections should be based upon site considerations such as available sun, water requirements, drainage, and purpose.

In sunny sites, herbs work quite well and provide bloom, fragrance, and culinary usefulness. Winter Savory 'Winter Dwarf' grows to only five inches, and this lovely plant may be used in soups and meat dishes. Withstanding heat, drought, and southern humidity, thymes grow almost flat on the ground and offer a variety of leaf colors and fragrances. The many varieties of oregano are very hardy and may be used on slopes in the landscape. Mints are among the few herbs that actually thrive in partial sun or even in shady, moist areas.

Another choice for sun is ornamental Creeping Raspberry. A row of shrubs in sun, perhaps situated on a small berm, will be a lovely sight with the rusty green leaves of creeping raspberry spilling from the base of the shrubs. A rapid spreader, gardeners may choose from several attractive varieties, and this Gold Medal plant isn't too picky about soil.

Carpet Bugleweed (Ajuga) is a great selection for part sun areas. Providing rapid cover, many beautiful ajuga varieties are available. 'Chocolate Chip' is one of the prettiest and daintiest with violet blooms and perky chocolate-green rosettes of leaves. To light up the garden and add color, 'Burgundy Glow' works well with its white-edged pink and green foliage. Enjoying a bit more sun than other ajugas, 'Purpurea' is a larger-leafed variety with bronzy leaves. Although ajuga revels in moist sites, good drainage is a must.

Mazus, a very low-growing rosette of teardrop-shaped, bright green leaves, will do well near dry river beds, between stepping stones, or in a woodland border. Both white and lilac-blooming varieties are good choices for areas with morning sun or for very moist areas in full sun.

One prolific bloomer for part shade and even full shade is Green and Gold, a native beauty that produces sunny yellow flowers in spring and fall and blooms sporadically the entire season.

Mondo grass, an excellent choice for full shade beds, may serve as a lawn replacement where other traditional grasses do not thrive. Although slow to establish, mondo grass offers many varieties in color, height and plant texture. Black Mondo Grass grows in tufts, but will not make a solid cover as well as 'Gyoku Ryu', a dwarf that creates a tight mat. A green and white variegated mondo is also available. Planting all varieties through fine woodchip mulch will provide protection during cold weather.

Low-growing groundcovers will enhance any garden design, unifying the landscape and providing the welcome green spaces so necessary in winter and so beautiful throughout the year.