



MASTER GARDENER

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Year Round Gardening

Ground Cover

Joan Nusbaum, Colorado Master Gardener

Ground cover plants are often overlooked when planning a garden. “Ground cover” is a generic name given to a large group of plants with differing textures, cultural needs and growth habits. But they all have one thing in common: a spreading habit. While many ground covers grow very low to the ground, any plant up to 12 inches tall can be used as ground cover. They can be herbaceous, woody, or evergreen. Herbaceous plants die back to the ground, and grow the next year, if they are perennial. Woody plants have a woody stem that persists during the winter. Evergreen plants will maintain green foliage year-round.

Ground cover has many benefits, including preventing soil erosion, adding a design element, replacing grass where it is not practical. Ground cover spreads easily and can help link together ornamental plants.

There are several considerations when choosing ground cover varieties. Design balance can be achieved by selecting lower-growing ground covers for smaller areas and taller ones for larger areas or steep slopes. Sun, exposure to winter sun and wind, and irrigation availability are important when you select plants.



Sedum kamchaticum
Photo courtesy of Joan Nusbaum

Soils should be improved with good quality organic matter before planting ground cover. Incorporate one to two cubic yards of compost into each 500 square foot area. The area should also be weed-free prior to planting.

If the area you are considering for ground cover will get foot traffic select plants that tolerate being stepped on. If the plants you choose do not tolerate foot traffic, consider installing a flagstone walkway and use the ground cover in between the stones.

When selecting a ground cover, be advised that while a positive attribute is to spread into a dense cover, some may become invasive. Watch for the words aggressive or invasive in the plant description.

For additional plant suggestions, go to Fact Sheet #7.400 at <https://extension.colostate.edu/topic-areas/yard-garden/ground-cover-plants-7-400/>.

Ground cover suggestions

Sedum kamschaticum tolerates heat and drought, evergreen succulent with scalloped leaf margins

Zauschneria garretti 'PWWG01S', Orange Carpet hummingbird trumpet attracts hummingbirds, full sun

Callirhoe involucrate, poppy mallow or winecups, good for larger areas, trailing stems, wine-colored saucer-like flowers

Prunus besseyi 'P011S' Pawnee Buttes, sandcherry, woody plant, with a low, spreading habit, orange/red fall color.

Ceratostigma plumbaginoides, plumbago a taller herbaceous perennial with dark blue flowers August to September, red foliage sun or part shade.

Veronica sp. also known as speedwell is an earlier bloomer.

Ajuga reptans, carpet bugle thrives in shade, comes in different shades of blue/pink and white/purple.

Galium odoratum, sweet woodruff, shade, a little aggressive in spreading, has fragrant foliage with white flowers in May and June.

Starting April 15 Colorado Master Gardeners will be available to answer your questions at the extension office help desk. The address is 17 N Spruce Street, Colorado Springs. The desk will be staffed on Mondays and Wednesdays, from 9am to noon and 1pm to 4pm. Come visit us with your questions. Help desk volunteers can also be reached by phone at 719-520-7684, or at csumg2@elpasoco.com.