

choosing a groundcover



All kinds of plants make good groundcovers.

In spite of this, lawn grass continues to be what most Americans use to cover large expanses of the yard and to keep it from washing away. But there are lots of other groundcovers—shrubs, vines, annuals, perennials, conifers, and herbs—that do a better job of protecting soil and decorating yards. Almost all of them require

less overall attention, including watering, fertilizing, mowing, and repairing. And almost all of them are more versatile and contribute more to a healthy environment than grass. **C**The universal stereotype of plain-green, low-growing plants doesn't define a groundcover plant. Even though the familiar and

W season hint

Many good groundcover plants are annuals or herbaceous (soft-stemmed) perennials which die back in the winter. The soil they protected all summer becomes bare and is exposed to harsh winter weather. To keep the soil in good condition, spread 3 to 4 inches of organic material over the area after the ground freezes.



1 Barrenwort is a perennial that blooms in spring. After its dainty yellow, pink, or white flowers fade, the wiry stems keep the heart-shaped leaves until fall. Grows in partial shade. Zones 5–9.



1 Cotoneaster is a hardy shrub. This low-growing, tiny-leaved version bears small flowers in spring and red berries in fall. It handles dry slopes. Zones 5–7.



1 Bishop's weed, or goutweed, spreads readily. Its leaves are plain green or variegated, and they serve well in sun or shade, long after their white flowers fade in early summer. Zones 4–9.



1 Heath and Heather are low-growing plants that accept sun or shade. They bear tiny flower spikes in spring (heath) or fall (heather). Zones 5–7.

reliable pachysandra and English ivy do an excellent job of protecting and beautifying areas—large and small—lots of other plants do just as well. Actually, any mass planting that grows together to form a canopy and effectively covers the soil with texture and color is a potential groundcover. There are no

rules for height or type, though in some cases you may want something that remains low to the ground or, conversely, is tall enough to hide eyesores. The site will be a major factor in your choices. For example, some plants thrive in shady areas, while others function better on slopes or in long borders.



1 Bugleweed, or ajuga, grows whorls of purple-tinged, green, or variegated leaves where its runners root. It bears spikes of blue, pink, or white flowers in spring. The plant is easy to control. Zones 3–9.



1 Cinnamon fern grows in shady areas. It has a cloud of soft green foliage and forms vase-shaped clumps of fronds, punctuated with cinnamon-brown reproductive stems. It spreads slowly. Zones 4–8.



1 Hosta foliage has varied colors, patterns, and shapes to brighten shady areas all season. In summer, it bears white or lavender flowers. Zones 3–8.



1 Irish moss, or baby tears, forms a tight mat of tiny, hairy, green leaves and blooms in summer. It grows in moist, shady areas in zones 10 and 11.