# Colorado State University Extension

## Xeriscaping: Ground Cover Plants

Fact Sheet No. 7.230

Gardening Series | Yard

by J.E. Klett and C.R.Wilson

Ground cover plants are appealing for their variety of ornamental features that add interest to landscapes. They provide a variety of textures and colors, help to reduce soil erosion and can function as a transition between landscape spaces. They offer alternatives to turfgrasses in some situations.

A ground cover should spread by itself. Species that produce rhizomes or stolons or that spread by offsets or tip layering are good choices for ground covers. Ideally, they will develop rapidly into a dense cover. Some grow so fast they can become invasive.

Ground covers also can enhance the beauty of shrub borders and break up the monotony of mulched areas. Xeric ground cover plants may be the answer for difficult landscape areas that are difficult to mow or water, require extra maintenance or are less suitable for turfgrass such as:

- landscaped medians, parking strips, traffic islands and rights-of-way along streets;
- steep slopes that are impractical in lawns or a mowing hazard;
- hot, dry areas on south and west exposures;
- deeply shaded areas beneath trees or shrubs, along north sides of walls and fences, between buildings and in front of low windows.

#### Soils and Exposure

The key to successful ground cover establishment is good soil preparation. Some ground covers spread by offshoots or runners and are more apt to fill in quickly where the soil has good aeration and drainage. Improve soils with good quality organic matter before planting. Incorporate 3 to 5 cubic yards of compost or other organic soil amendment into 1000 square feet of area.

Pay attention to exposure. Tables 1 and 2 indicate ground cover plants for sun or shade as well as bloom characteristics and useful comments.

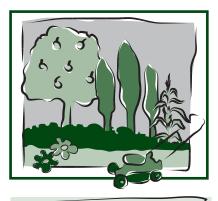
### Weed Control and Maintenance

Prior to planting ground covers, make sure that existing weeds are hoed, pulled or killed with an herbicide. Perennial weeds can be especially troublesome later if not eliminated prior to planting. Glyphosate herbicide controls many weeds if applied a few weeks prior to planting. This herbicide does not leave a harmful soil residue, allowing planting in treated areas 10 to 14 days after spraying. Follow label directions when using.

Weeds can be discouraged by using weed barrier fabrics, anchoring with U-shaped wire pins. Plant through slits cut into the barrier. Apply mulch on top of the fabric. Avoid the use of solid sheet plastic as a weed barrier.

All ground covers require maintenance, some more than others. Ground covers that develop flowers and fruit often require more maintenance than evergreen ground covers.

> See Tables 1-2, pages 2-3.



#### **Quick Facts**

- · Plants that are low-growing (generally less than 24 inches) and spread easily are suitable ground cover plants.
- Suitable places for xeric ground covers include dry slopes, landscape medians, parking strips, traffic islands and street rights-of-way.
- Consider ground covers on hot, dry, south and west exposures as well as for dense, dry shade.
- · Improve soils before planting ground covers.
- · Ideally, a ground cover should grow dense enough or be mulched to inhibit weeds.

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Table 1. Xeric ground cover plants for full sun.

Achilles serbice Serbian yarrow Achilles tomentose Achilles tomentose White to pink Woolby yarrow Antennaria dioloa Pussytose Artennias fligida Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califhroe involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califhroe involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califhroe involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califhroe involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califhroe involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califhroe involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califhroe involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califor involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califor involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califor involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califor involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califor involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Balloman gracific involucrata Fringed sage Bourleou gracifis Blue grama grass Califor involucrata Fringed sage Blooms not showy, silver gray fringed follage, woody stems, excellent for cocky slopse Blooms not showy, silver gray fringed follage, woody stems, evolucy stems,	Plant Name	Height (in)	Flower Color	Bloom time	Remarks
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Artemisia frigida gage Bourleous gracilis Biuer grama grass Callirhoe involucrata Prairie winnecups Cerastium tomentosum Snow-in-summer Ceratostigma plumbaginoides Plumbago Delosporma sp. Liceplant D. Industrust	Antennaria dioica	1-2	White to pink		
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Cerastium tomentosum   Showhise   Spring to summer   Gray foliage, aggressive spreader   Showhise summer   Showhise summer   Shirpy green leaves, purplish fall leaf color   Plumbago	Callirhoe involucrata	6-12	Red	Summer to fall	
Certostigma plumbaginoides Plumbago         8-12 Plumbago         Violet-blue         Late summer to fall fuchsia         Shiny green leaves, purplish fall leaf color           Delosperma sp. Loeplant         1-6 D. Bioribundum         1-6 Pink with white centers         Spring to fall         Succulent leaves           D. John Proffit         2-4 Fuchsia         Puchsia         Spring to fall         Cushion growth form, requires dry soil in winters, Plant Select®           D. Yellodis Previsions         2-4 Mesa Verde         Salmon-pink         Spring to fall         Vigorous, compact habit, Plant Select®           D. nubigenum Hardy Yellow         1-2 Pisfave         Yellow         Early to mid summer         Light green, compact foliage turns purplish in winter, Plant Select®           D. Pisfave's LAVENDER ICE™         2-3 Lavender         Lavender         Spring to fall         Light green, compact foliage turns purplish in winter, Plant Select®           Duchesnia indica Mock strawberry         4-6 Vellow         Late spring to summer         Aggressive creeper, inedible red fruit           Eumbelatum v. aureum 'Psdowns' Kannah Creek buckwheat         6-12 Vellow         Yellow         Summer         Flower stalk 8 inches, foliage in a low mat, reddish in winter, native           Festuca glauca Blue fescue grass         8-10 Vergreen, several foliage, purplish winter color Silverhola foliage, purplish winter color Silverhola foliage, purplish in winter         Gray-blue foliage, purpl	Cerastium tomentosum	6-8	White	Spring to summer	Gray foliage, aggressive spreader
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Juniperus horizontalis   Creeping juniper   Sar Harbor'	Festuca glauca	6-15	Tan	Summer	
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Penstemon linarioides var. coloradoensis 8-12 Lavender Late spring to early Evergreen silver foliage, Plant Select®	Penstemon caespitosus	1-4	Blue	Early summer	Spreading carpet-like growth habit
Silverton® bluemat penstemon summer	Penstemon linarioides var. coloradoensis	8-12	Lavender		Evergreen silver foliage, Plant Select®
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'Mersea Yellow' 6-8 Yellow Summer Needle-like leaves	·	6-8	Yellow	Summer	Needle-like leaves
Phlox subulata 6 Red, white, Spring Moss-like foliage	Phlox subulata		Red, white,		
Creeping phlox lavender	. •.	0.40		0	Annualization
Persicaria affinis 8-12 Pink Summer Aggressive creeper Himalayan border jewel		8-12	PINK	Summer	Aggressive creeper
Potentilla neumanniana 2-4 Yellow Late spring to early Low mat, aggressive summer	Potentilla neumanniana	2-4	Yellow		Low mat, aggressive
Salvia daghestanica 8-10 Dark blue Spring to early summer Silvery white foliage, slow spreading, Plant Select®	Salvia daghestanica	8-10	Dark blue	Spring to early summer	
Sedum acre 2-4 Yellow Early summer Bright green evergreen leaves Goldmoss sedum		2-4	Yellow	Early summer	Bright green evergreen leaves
Sedum kamtschaticum 4-6 Orange to yellow Late summer Toothed, glossy dark green leaves Kamschatka stonecrop		4-6	Orange to yellow	Late summer	Toothed, glossy dark green leaves

Table 1 (cont.). Xeric ground cover plants for full sun.

Plant Name	Height (in)	Flower Color	Bloom time	Remarks
Sedum spurium 'Dragon's Blood'	2-4	Rose red	Mid summer	Red edged foliage turns solid red in fall
Stachys byzantina 'Helene von Stein' lamb's ears	8-10	Not important	Not important	Large leaves, rarely flowers
Thymus praecox Creeping thyme	1-4	Pink	Spring to early summer	Fragrant, evergreen foliage
Thymus praecox  'Pseudolanuginosus'  Woolly thyme	1-2	Pink	Spring to early summer	Woolly-gray foliage turns purplish in winter, sparse flowers
Thymus serpyllum  Mother-of-thyme	3-6	Pink to purple	Late spring	Mint-like fragrance
Thymus x citriodorus Lemon thyme	6-12	Pink	Early summer	Lemon scented foliage
Verbena bipinnatifida Valley lavender® plains verbena	3-6	Purple	Summer	Flowers held above plant with deeply cut leaves, Plant Select®
Veronica 'Reavis' Crystal River® veronica	2-4	Blue	Spring to early summer	Evergreen, fast growing, vigorous, Plant Select®
Veronica liwanensis Turkish veronica	1-2	Blue	Late spring to early summer	Dark green leaves, evergreen, Plant Select®
Veronica pectinata Woolly veronica	1-2	Blue	Early summer	Gray foliage, evergreen in mild winters, tolerates part shade
Zauschneria garrettii Orange Carpet® California fuchsia	4-8	Orange	Late summer	Tubular flowers, cascades over walls, attracts hummingbirds, Plant Select®

Table 2. Xeric ground cover plants for part shade to shade

Plant Name	Height (in)	Flower Color	Bloom time	Remarks
Arctostaphylos uva-ursi Kinnikinnick	4-6	Pink	Spring	Evergreen, red berries, native
Euonymus fortunei 'Coloratus' Wintercreeper	12-18	Not important	Not important	Glossy dark green leaves turn purple in winter
Mahonia repens Creeping Oregon grape	6-18	Yellow	Spring	Evergreen holly-like foliage turns reddish in fall, native
Vinca minor Periwinkle	4-6	White or purple	Spring	Semi-evergreen, dark glossy green leaves