

# GROUNDCOVERS FOR YOUR XERISCAPE

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## *Characteristics of the Best Drought-Tolerant Groundcovers*

- Plants that are low-growing (generally less than 24 inches tall) and spread easily are suitable ground cover plants.
- Appropriate places for xeric ground covers include dry slopes, at the front of perennial borders, in between stepping stones and as a replacement for traditional lawns.
- Consider ground covers on hot, dry, south and west exposures as well as for dense, dry shade.
- Ideally, a ground cover should grow dense enough or be mulched to inhibit weeds.
- A ground cover should spread by itself. Species that produce rhizomes or stolons or that spread by 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 tough to mow or water, require extra maintenance or are less suitable for turfgrass.
- 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. Choose plants for sun or shade as required.
- 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.
- All ground covers require maintenance, some more than others. Ground covers that develop flowers and fruit often require more maintenance than evergreen ground covers.

## GROUNDCOVERS FOR SUN

### Pussytoes (*Antennaria dioica*)

- Soft, gray foliage is one of the best ornamental features of this spreading ground cover.
- A low mat of woolly, silver-gray evergreen leaves produces short stalks with compact clusters of furry flowers.
- Blooms occur in early summer. The flowers resemble the toes of a cat.
- Male flowers are white and females are pinkish. This plant sends out runners just like strawberries.
- Mature height 2" to 3", spread 18" to 24". Zone 3
- Full sun; deer resistant. 'Rubra' is a true pink flowering cultivar. Max. Elev. 10,000 ft.



### Prairie Winecups (*Callirhoe involucrata*)

- Also known as Purple Poppy Mallow, this 1999 Plant Select introduction is a mat-forming perennial with attractive lobed leaves. NATIVE
- From early summer to fall, the plant is covered with bright magenta 1" to 2" wide cup-shaped blossoms.

- A valuable plant for hot south or west facing beds, it grows well in a wide range of soil types, including clay.
- If conditions are too wet, plants may suffer from rust and be consumed by slugs. Foliage is eaten by rodents, deer and livestock.
- Mature height 5", spread 24" to 30". Zone 4
- Full sun, Max. Elev. 7,500 ft.

#### Snow-in-Summer (*Argyranthemum* spp.)

- An indestructible choice for difficult sites, it is often grown in dry, sunny areas with poor soils.
- Plants form a low, fast-spreading mat of silvery-gray leaves.
- Small snow-white flowers appear and cover the entire plant from late spring to early summer.
- Plants should be clipped hard or mowed to 2 inches after blooming to maintain a tight growth habit.
- Mature height 4" to 8", spread 24" to 36". Zone 2
- Full sun; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 10,000 ft.+



#### Dog Tuff™ Grass (*Cynodon* 'PWIN04S')

- This Bermuda Grass selection is derived from African grasses similar to Buffalo Grass.
- VERY drought tolerant, resistant to dog urine, recovers from heavy foot traffic quickly.
- Not tolerant of shade. It loves full sun and grows well on dry slopes.
- It greens up in early June and typically goes dormant in October.
- Mature height 2 ½" to 4"; can only be established from plugs, Zone 5
- Full sun, Max. Elev. 7,000 ft.

#### Plumbago (*Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*)

- Plumbago (also commonly known as Leadwort) is an easy to grow groundcover well suited for average, medium and well-drained soils.
- It blooms in late summer with deep blue flowers followed by foliage that turns burgundy red in fall. It only requires occasional water once established.
- Plumbago spreads by rhizomes and can be aggressive in optimal growing conditions.
- Mature height 8" to 12", spread 12" to 24". Zone 5
- Full sun to partial sun; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 7,000 ft.



#### Starburst Ice Plant (*Delosperma floribundum*)

- Perfect for hot, dry areas, this hardy clumping groundcover produces a dome of shimmering bright lilac-purple flowers with white centers, from early summer to fall.
- A 1998 Plant Select introduction, this plant grows best in full sun with moderate moisture.
- Superb soil drainage is essential, especially in winter where moist to wet soils can be fatal.
- Mature height 2" to 4", spread 12" to 24". Zone 5
- Full sun; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 7,500 ft.



#### Hardy Yellow Ice Plant (*Delosperma nubigenum*)

- A mat-forming groundcover, Hardy Yellow Ice Plant is a vigorous variety that blooms continuously, May – July.
- The attractive bright evergreen foliage turns red in the winter months. The genus gets its name because the flowers and leaves shimmer as if covered in ice.
- Attractive to butterflies, it is easily propagated by breaking off short pieces and simply sticking them into the ground; new roots form within just a few weeks.



- Mature height 2" to 3", spread 24" to 30". Zone 5
- Full sun; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 8,000 ft.

Lavender Ice Ice Plant (*Delosperma* 'Psfave')

- This Ice Plant is a sport of Table Mountain Ice Plant (*Delosperma* 'John Proffitt'), and has the same mat-forming foliage that tinges burgundy/purple in the winter. A 2009 Plant Select introduction.
- Shimmering iridescent lavender flowers up to 2" across have a darker pink eye appear late spring through late summer.
- Its foliage tends to remain low and dense right to the ground. Its attractive small succulent leaves are dark green in color.
- Mature height 2" to 3", spread 18" to 24". Zone 4
- Full sun; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 8,000 ft.



Hummingbird Trumpet (*Epilobium canum* ssp. *garrettii* 'PWWG01S' Orange Carpet®)

- A 2001 Plant Select® introduction, this vigorous groundcover is perfect for slopes or cascading over walls.
- Bright orange, trumpet-shaped flowers bloom from July through October.
- Regular watering during bloom keeps the flowers coming. Very attractive to hummingbirds!
- Forms a loose mat of low growing bright green foliage when not in bloom. Prefers some afternoon sun.
- Mature height 4" to 6", spread 18" to 24". Zone 5
- Full sun to partial shade; deer resistant. Prefers compost enriched soil with good drainage. Max. Elev. 9,000 ft.



Kannah Creek Buckwheat (*Eriogonum umbellatum* var. *aureum* 'Psdowns')

- This durable western native was found in the Kannah Creek region of western Colorado in the shadow of Grand Mesa. A 2007 Plant Select introduction.
- Kannah Creek Buckwheat is best known for its masses of bright yellow flowers that gradually deepen to orange as they mature on their thin but sturdy stems.
- A defining feature of this plant is that as the weeks of autumn pass, the foliage transforms from deep green to a vivid purple-red through the winter, extending the color interest throughout the year.
- Mature height 4" to 6", spread 18" to 24". Zone 3
- Full sun. This plant can survive off natural precipitation of 15" annually. Max. Elev. 9,000 ft.

Blue Star Juniper (*Juniperus squamata* 'Blue Star')

- Slow growing juniper with a compact habit and mounding growth pattern.
- Attractive sparkling blue foliage on dense, spreading branches. Best color with morning sun, afternoon shade.
- Perfect for the front of the border, in rock gardens or as a focal point to be admired for its shape and color.
- Water regularly until established. Prefers average well-drained soils.
- Mature height 2 to 3', spread 4 to 5'. Zone 4
- Partial shade to full shade; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 7,500 ft.



Mother Lode Juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis* 'Mother Lode')

- Bright, golden-yellow foliage in spring and summer which softens with burgundy plum undertones in winter.
- Extremely low and ground hugging. Creeping branches root as they grow along the ground.



- Adaptable to a wide range of soil conditions, but prefers a dry, sandy soil.
- Tolerant of hot dry conditions; an excellent groundcover which is very low maintenance.
- Mature height 4", spread 4 to 10'. Zone 3
- Full sun to light shade; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 8,500 ft.

#### Silverheels Horehound (*Marrubium rotundifolium*)

- An extremely versatile and low maintenance ground cover, this plant is native to the low mountains of Turkey.
- Medium green foliage is edged in silver. Undersides of the leaves are white to silver.
- A 2009 Plant Select® introduction, this member of the mint family adds interest in hard-to-grow areas.
- Flowers are not much to speak of, and should be sheared off to keep the mat looking its best.
- Mature height 2" to 4", spread 24" to 30". Zone 4
- Full sun; deer resistant; avoid poorly drained soils and frequent irrigation. Max. Elev. 10,000 ft.



#### Little Trudy Catmint (*Nepeta 'Psfike'*)

- Little Trudy is a 2008 Plant Select introduction and is a long-awaited compact catmint that is well-suited to our regional climate.
- Its long-blooming (May – September), deep lavender flowers attract bees and butterflies. Great plant for a pollinator garden!
- The aromatic foliage is grayish-green and finely textured. The aroma is irresistible to cats, as well as enjoyed by people.
- This plant is ideal at the front of a border. Its spreading habit makes it useful as a groundcover.
- Mature height 8", spread 12" to 16". Zone 4
- Full sun to partial shade; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 8,500 ft.



#### Pineleaf Penstemon (*Penstemon pinifolius*)

- Pineleaf Penstemon is one of the very best western Penstemons, blooming late spring to mid-summer, with a display of bright-orange tubular flowers held over attractive, evergreen pine needle-like foliage.
- Compact, hardy and water thrifty, the flowers are attractive to bees and hummingbirds. This plant is native to southern New Mexico and eastern Arizona.
- Out of flower, the plant resembles a tiny mugo pine with thin, evergreen leaves on tidy stems.
- Because this plant is woody at the base, prune no lower than 4 inches in spring. 'Mersea' is the yellow version.
- Mature height 12" to 24", spread 18" to 24". Zone 4
- Full to partial sun; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 8,000 ft.



#### Silverton® Bluemat Penstemon (*Penstemon linarioides* var. *coloradoensis*)

- Silverton® Bluemat Penstemon is a small native plant that is found growing in southwestern Colorado and northern New Mexico. It has silvery, evergreen leaves.
- In May and June, it bears an abundance of lavender-blue flowers. The attractive foliage maintains its mounded shape and beauty through the winter months. This small native plant is suitable for rock gardens.
- It is a small plant, so it needs to be placed where it will be noticed.
- This 2005 Plant Select introduction should be deadheaded for the first 2 years to avoid seed set. This results in a stronger plant.
- Mature height 8" to 12", spread 12" to 16". Zone 4
- Full to partial sun; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 8,000 ft.



### Creeping Phlox (*Phlox subulata*)

- Also known as Moss Phlox, this dense evergreen groundcover is blanketed with flowers in April and May.
- Flower colors range from hot pink, bright rose and magenta, to white, lavender blue and bicolors.
- Evergreen foliage is narrow, short and stiff. Reliable and low maintenance, it adapts well to dry, sandy soils.
- Shearing back the foliage after bloom will encourage a denser look, making it more attractive in the summer.
- Mature height 4" to 6", spread 12" to 24". Zone 3
- Full sun; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 7,500 ft.



### Creeping Potentilla (*Potentilla neumanniana*)

- A cheery spring-flowering perennial, excellent as a pathway edging, in the rock garden or at the front of a sunny border.
- Clusters of small yellow buttercup flowers nestle among the green leaves, May – August.
- It forms a low mat, easily divided in early autumn. Requires good drainage.
- Tolerant of poor soil, heat, and drought, but does best in light, well-drained soils. Allow soil to dry between thorough waterings.
- Mature height 3" to 6", spread 6". Zone 4
- Full sun; tolerates light foot traffic. Max. Elev. 8,500 ft.

### Platinum<sup>®</sup> Sage (*Salvia daghestanica*)

- A 2006 Plant Select introduction, this is a very hardy perennial for edging, rock gardens or as a slow spreading groundcover.
- The deep blue flowers (early summer) contrast nicely against the silver foliage.
- As flowering diminishes the rosettes of textured, silvery leaves continue to draw attention into the weeks of winter.
- Does best in well-drained soils – a great plant for attracting pollinators and hummingbirds.
- Mature height 3" to 6", spread 6". Zone 4
- Full sun; tolerates light foot traffic. Max. Elev. 8,500 ft.

### Goldmoss Sedum (*Sedum acre*)

- A classic evergreen perennial groundcover, it is covered with showy yellow flowers in spring and summer.
- A perfect choice for the rock garden, between stepping stones or on dry walls. It also works well in containers and hanging baskets.
- It forms a low mat of succulent tangled stems covered in conical, bright green leaves.
- Once established, it only needs occasional watering. Very attractive to butterflies.
- Mature height 3", spread 6" to 24". Zone 4
- Full sun; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 9,500 ft.



### Dragon's Blood Sedum (*Sedum spurium* 'Dragon's Blood')

- A long-time favorite, this sedum is a mat-forming, evergreen perennial with fleshy, rounded, bright green leaves with burgundy on the edges.
- Deep-red flower buds open to brilliant pink; the star-shaped flower clusters are borne just above the foliage.



- Foliage deepens to bronze-red in summer before changing to brilliant red in fall.
- Perfect for rock gardens, containers, as a groundcover or edging plant. Virtually disease and pest free, this sedum forgives neglect!
- Mature height 4" to 6", spread 1' to 2'. Zone 4
- Full sun; deer resistant; Max. Elev. 9,100 ft.

#### Woolly Thyme (*Thymus praecox* 'Pseudolanuginosus')

- One of the best creeping thymes for general groundcover purposes, this is a low, creeping species with fuzzy grey-green foliage.
- Pale pink flowers appear in early summer, but this thyme is not as floriferous as others of the species. It is mainly prized for its fuzzy foliage.
- A strong grower, it is ideal as a drought-tolerant lawn substitute or for planting between flagstones – this evergreen "Stepable" is tolerant of foot traffic.
- Easily divided in spring or early fall; even small pieces will take root and grow.
- Mature height 2" to 4", spread 6" to 18". Zone 4
- Full sun; deer resistant; Max. Elev. 9,100 ft.



#### Mother of Thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*)

- Also known as wild thyme or creeping thyme, Mother-of-Thyme is a vigorous mat-forming species, with dark green leaves and clusters of bright rose-purple flowers.
- Blooming profusely from early to mid-summer, the nectar rich blossoms are very attractive to butterflies.
- One of the best for large groundcover plantings. Also nice in the rock garden and between stepping stones.
- Another great "Stepable" lawn substitute!
- Mature height 2" to 3" and spread 2'. Zone 4
- Full sun; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 8,500 ft.



#### Crystal River<sup>®</sup> Veronica (*Veronica* 'Reavis')

- A 2003 Plant Select<sup>®</sup> introduction, this speedwell forms a low spreading mat of glossy evergreen leaves.
- Tiny sky-blue flowers smother the plant in mid to late spring, then appear now and again through the summer.
- Suitable for growing in between flagstones or along pathways, and excellent as a massed groundcover over a large or small area.
- Plants tolerate a range of different soil types and conditions, from moist to dry.
- Mature height 3" and spread 2' to 3'. Zone 3
- Full sun; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 9,000 ft.



#### Turkish Speedwell (*Veronica liwanensis*)

- A 1997 Plant Select<sup>®</sup> introduction, this vigorous fast growing plant thrives in poor soils.
- It forms a thick green carpet of round, glossy evergreen leaves.
- As the weather warms in April/May, the plant is covered with bright cobalt blue flowers that persist through June.
- With a little extra water, it can rebloom lightly in summer. This "Stepable" groundcover is great between stepping stones.
- Mature height 1" to 2", spread 18". Zone 4
- Full sun to partial shade; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 8,500 ft.



## GROUNDCOVERS FOR PART SHADE TO SHADE

### Kinnikinnik/Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)

- A trailing evergreen groundcover shrub with glossy green, paddle-shaped leaves on flexible branches.
- Clusters of small, bell-shaped pink/white flowers occur on bright red stems in May.
- Bright red berries follow the flowers and persist into winter. Berries are indeed eaten by bears.
- Found throughout North America from Labrador to Alaska and south to Virginia and California.
- Mature height 4" to 6", spread 5' to 6'. Zone 1
- Shade to partial shade; deer resistant; coarse, rocky, slightly acidic soils preferred. Max. Elev. 10,000 ft.



### Purple Leaf Wintercreeper (*Euonymus fortunei* 'Coloratus')

- Ivy-like growth makes an outstanding evergreen groundcover or low, spreading shrub.
- Deep-green foliage turns a beautiful, rich plum color during the fall and winter. Drought tolerant once established.
- One of the most cold-hardy and durable groundcovers available. Branches root along stems wherever they touch the ground.
- Mature height 2', spread 6 to 8'. Zone 4
- Full sun to full shade; Max. Elev. 6,500 feet.

### Spotted Dead Nettle/Lamium (*Lamium maculatum*)

- Spectacular as a groundcover in the shade garden, this perennial has a long bloom period and colorful foliage.
- Heart-shaped leaves may be white or silver variegated. Small hooded flowers in magenta, pink or white mid-spring to summer.
- Lamium can cover large areas quickly - it dislikes heat and humidity. 'Beacon Silver', 'Pink Pewter' and 'White Nancy' are the most common cultivars.
- Mature height 4" to 8" and spread 3'. Zone 5
- Full shade to partial shade; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 10,000 ft.



### Creeping Oregon Grape Holly (*Mahonia repens*)

- This native evergreen groundcover with holly-like leaves does well in shade gardens.
- Low spreading form displays bright yellow flowers in May followed by blue-black fruit clusters.
- Leaves turn shades of red in the fall and remain until new growth in the spring; drought tolerant once established.
- Mature height and spread 12 to 18". Zone 5
- Full sun to partial shade; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 10,000 ft.



### Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*)

- Also known as Creeping Myrtle and Vinca, this popular groundcover is evergreen.
- One of the best groundcovers for shade, displaying large, violet-blue, pinwheel-shaped flowers, June – September, against glossy dark green leaves.
- Prefers an enriched, well-drained soil. Tolerant of light foot traffic.
- Mature height 4 to 8", spread 24 to 48". Zone 4
- Full sun to full shade; deer resistant. Max. Elev. 8,500 feet.

