

Ground Cover Comparison Chart

This chart of ground covering plants was created to show the many possibilities of plants that can be used to control erosion, as an alternative to grass lawns, instead of mulch or to fill in garden beds. The selections are just some of all the possibilities, beyond the well-known 'regulars' of Ajuga, Periwinkle (Vinca) and Japanese Pachysandra. Selection for inclusion in this list is based on information or experience that they will grow well in the Prince William area and can be purchased locally or through dependable mail order sources.

It is assumed, unless noted, that the plants require well-drained soil. Some ground covers were included that will tolerate wet soil for long periods of time. Where "full sun" is noted, the plant needs 6 - 8 hours of sun. The list begins with evergreen plants, progressing to those that lose their foliage in winter.

If you have questions about the suitability of any plant, please call the Master Gardeners' Horticulture Help Line at 703 792-7747.

Common Name (<i>Botanical Name</i>)	Conditions				Size, Appearance, Maintenance ("mx") and Spacing ("slow, medium or fast spreading" growth rate or spread of plant)
	Full Sun	Part Shade	Shade	Drought Tolerant	
Moss		X	X	X	½ - 2" tall; evergreen; types found in our area are greens, gold or reddish; low mx (water lightly to encourage or to green back up); spread depends on type and growing conditions; best encouraged where it already grows or spread pieces or clumps on bare ground; tolerates foot traffic
Thyme	X	X		X	< 6" tall; there are literally dozens of different thymes that can be used; mostly evergreen; flowers white, pink to violet/lavender; low mx; many are edible; try Elfin Thyme (<i>T. minus 'Elfin'</i>), Woolly Thyme (<i>T. laniginosus</i> , which has no smell) or Creeping Thyme (<i>T. serpyllum</i>); 6-8 plants per sq. yard
Wild Ginger (<i>Asarum canadense</i>)		X	X		2 - 3" tall; evergreen in mild winters; flowers in spring under leaves; 6 - 10" spread; great ground cover for dry areas under trees
Wintergreen (<i>Gaultheria procumbens</i>)		X	X		2 - 4" tall; burgundy leaves in fall & winter; small white flowers, fragrant leaves
Black Mondo Grass (<i>Ophiopogon planiscapus</i>)		X	X	X	6" tall; evergreen; violet/lavender or white flowers 6-12", blooming in spring; evergreen; low mx; tolerates some foot traffic

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Sedge (<i>Carex spp.</i>)	X	X			3 - 18" tall, depending on variety; evergreen; valued for foliage; low mx; try 'The Beatles' (to 4"), Leather Leaf Sedge (<i>C. buchanii</i>), Seersucker Sedge (<i>C. plantaginea</i>), Blue Sedge (<i>C. glauca</i>) or <i>C. comans</i> 'Frosted Curls'; many tolerate wet areas
Sedum, Stonecrop (<i>Sedum spp.</i>)	X	X		X	2" - 2' - many varieties; thick waxy evergreen leaves (some may die back to crown in winter); low mx; medium rate; try <i>S. kamchatka</i> , Sedum 'Blue Spruce,' <i>S. seboldiana</i>
Cushion Spurge (<i>Euphorbia spp.</i>)	X	X		X	6 - 24" tall; mounds of attractive foliage with orange, yellow or chartreuse flowers in spring; most varieties evergreen; low mx; try <i>E. amygdaloides</i> 'Purpurea' (10 - 12" tall, purple leaves, yellow flowers) or <i>E. robbiae</i> (to 24", evergreen foliage, yellow-green flower bracts, tolerates dry shade)
Creeping St John's Wort (<i>Hypericum calycinum</i>)	X	X		X	8" - 12" tall; yellow flowers in summer; evergreen; low mx; medium rate; 4 plants per sq. yard
Evergreen candytuft (<i>Iberis sempervirens</i>)	X	X			6" - 12" tall; white flowers in spring; evergreen; medium mx; slow spreader; 6 - 12 plants per sq. yard
Christmas Fern (<i>Polystichum acrostichnoides</i>)		X	X		2' tall; asymmetric clumps; evergreen; all new fronds in April; low mx; medium spreader; 1 - 2 plants per sq. yard
Barrenwort (<i>Epimedium spp.</i>)		X	X	X	6 - 12" tall; leaves persist in winter, turning bronze and maroon; dainty flowers are red, lilac, yellow or white in spring; deer resistant; begins to spread in 2 nd season
Coral Bells (<i>Heuchera spp.</i>)	X	X			12 - 20" tall; ruffled green, burgundy or silver highlighted leaves form clumps that flower in late spring to early summer in many colors; leaves persist in winter; low mx; 3 - 6 plants per sq. yard
Foamflower (<i>Tiarella cordifolia</i> & varieties)		X	X	X	6 - 14" tall; uniquely-shaped leaves often splashed with color, flowers in spring, shades of pink or white; foliage may persist depending on winter; low mx
x Heucherella		X	X		15 - 24" tall; pink, rose or white flowers in spring; interesting foliage persists in winter; form mounds or mats; cross between Heuchera and Tiarella
Carnation (<i>Dianthus spp.</i>)	X	X			Many species and varieties 4 - 12" tall; flowers in reds, pinks and white in spring; those with silver foliage tend to be evergreen; low mx; fast growth rate; plant 12-18" apart for fill in 2 years
Lamb's Ears (<i>Stachys byzantium</i>)	X			X	12" - 18" tall; flowers in summer; persists in winter; low mx; fast spreader; 4 - 5 plants per sq. yard for coverage in 2nd year; deer resistant
Green Lavender Cotton (<i>Santolina virens</i>)	X			X	1' - 2' tall; yellow flowers in June; evergreen; medium mx; medium rate; 4-6 plants per sq. yard. Grey-leafed species is <i>S. chamaecyparissus</i> .
Lenten Rose, Hellebore (<i>Helleborus spp.</i>)		X	X		12 - 24" tall; evergreen (remove old leaves in spring); yellow-green, maroon or white flowers in late winter to early spring; deer resistant; needs regular watering

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Lungwort (<i>Pulmonaria spp.</i>)		X	X		8 - 12" tall; green leaves often spotted with silver or white, blooms early spring, in red, blue-to-pink, white or lavender; leaves persist in winter; medium mx; 4 - 6 plants per sq. yard
Moss Phlox, Creeping Phlox (<i>Phlox subulata</i>)	X			X	2" - 3" dense, moss-like foliage; flowers in spring; medium mx; slow spreader; 6 - 8 plants per sq. yard
Native Pachysandra (<i>Pachysandra procumbens</i>)		X	X		9" - 12" tall; white flowers with pinkish tinge; evergreen; low mx; medium spreader; plant 1' apart for coverage in 2 years
Ornamental grasses (Numerous species)	X				6 - 24", various blade & flower colors; year-round interest; low mx; spread varies with type planted; some tolerate very wet conditions (<i>Acorus</i> , 6 - 10", see also Sedge). Blue Fescue (<i>Festuca glauca</i> , 8 - 10") is drought tolerant; Fountain Grass (<i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i> 'Little Bunny' and 'Little Honey' 8 - 12") are deer resistant. Hair Grass (<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i> , 12"), Hakone Grass (<i>Hakonechloa macra</i> 'Aureola', 12 - 24") and the Fountain Grasses mentioned above tolerate part shade
Groundcover Raspberry (<i>Rubus calycinoides</i>)	X				6 - 12" tall; evergreen foliage turns burgundy in fall and winter; insignificant white flowers bear edible berries; good for controlling erosion
Lilyturf (<i>Liriope muscari</i> & <i>L. spicata</i>)	X	X	X	X	1' tall; white, pink, lavender or purple flowers; evergreen; low mx; fast spreader; 6 - 12 plants per sq. yard; tolerates wet soil; variegated foliage with <i>L. muscari</i> 'Variegata' and <i>L. spicata</i> 'Silver Dragon'; <i>L. muscari</i> is a clumping species great for erosion control
Sweet Box (<i>Sarcococca hookeriana</i> var. <i>humilis</i>)		X	X	X	18 - 24" tall; evergreen; white fragrant flowers in late winter to early spring; stoloniferous but behaves itself
Cotoneaster (<i>Cotoneaster dammeri</i>)	X	X			1' tall; flowers & red berries; evergreen; low mx; fast rate; 1 - 2 plants per sq. yard; requires pruning to keep it pristine
Creeping Barberry (<i>Mahonia repens</i>)		X	X	X	2' tall; evergreen; yellow flowers in spring; low mx; slow growth rate
Creeping Juniper (<i>Juniperus horizontalis</i>)	X			X	6" - 2' tall; evergreen; variety of colors; low mx; space for mature size of variety chosen
Creeping Mazus (<i>Mazus reptans</i>)	X	X			1" - 2" tall; profuse purple or white (variety 'Alba') flowers in spring; semi-evergreen; low mx; fast spreader; 6 plants per sq. yard; prefers moist-to-wet soil; tolerates foot traffic
Daylily (<i>Heemerocallis spp.</i>)	X	X	X	X	1' - 2' with 3' flower stems, many varieties; evergreen depending on winter; low mx; medium spreader; 1 - 2 per sq. yard (4/sq. yd on slopes)
Plumbago (<i>Cerastostigma plumbaginoides</i>)	X	X		X	8" - 12" tall; flowers summer to late fall; dies back to crown in winter, emerges late in spring; medium spreader

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Rohdea (<i>Rohdea japonica</i>)		X	X		15 - 18" tall; red berries in winter; evergreen clump of wide, strap-like leaves 2 - 3' wide; stalk of red berries in winter; low mx; 3 - 5 per sq. yard
Roman Chamomile (<i>Chamaemelum nobile</i>)	X	X			6 - 12" tall; blooms mid spring, daisy-like flowers, scented; evergreen in most winters; low mx; tolerates foot traffic; deer resistant; prefers neutral soil
Creeping Speedwell (<i>Veronica repens</i>)	X	X		X	1 - 4" tall; leaves persist in mild winters; blue flowers in spring; low mx; 'Sunshine' has chartreuse-gold leaves; deer resistant; attracts butterflies
Sweet Woodruff (<i>Galium odoratum</i>)			X		6" - 8" tall; white flowers in May; dies back to crown in winter; low mx; fast spreader; 8 - 12 plants per sq. yard; tolerates wet soils
Spotted Deadnettle (<i>Lamium maculatum</i>)		X	X		6 - 12" depending on variety; interesting foliage dies back to crown in winter; pink, purple, or white flowers in late spring to late winter, depending on variety
Wormwood (<i>Artemisia 'Silver Mound'</i>)	X			X	1' tall; silver stems & leaves in summer; dies back to crown in winter; low mx; medium rate; 4 plants per sq. yard
Yellow Archangel (<i>Lamiastrum galeobdolon</i>)	X	X	X		12 - 18" tall; dies back to crown in winter; yellow flowers in spring
Astilbe (<i>Astilbe spp.</i>)		X	X		8 - 24" tall; many colors, blooms midsummer; dies back to crown in winter; low mx
Baby's Breath (<i>Gypsophila repens</i>)	X			X	4 - 8" tall; white or flowers in early summer to early fall; deer resistant; prefers slightly alkaline soil
Bellflower (<i>Campanula spp.</i>)		X	X		4 - 10" for groundcover varieties; dies back to crown in winter; blue, violet or white flowers in summer; hummingbird attractor; try 'Samantha' or 'Bavaria Blue'
Catmint (<i>Nepeta racemosa</i>)	X				18-36" tall; lavender to blue flowers, late spring to early summer; dies back in winter; has spreading to erect manner
Hosta, Plantain Lily (<i>Hosta spp.</i>)		X	X		3" - 2' tall; dies back to crown in winter; low mx; medium spreader; some tolerate wet soils. <i>H. 'Teeny-Weeny Bikini'</i> is 4" tall, 9" tall flower spike in late August, purple; dies back to crown in winter; low mx; fast spreader
Japanese Painted Fern (<i>Athyrium niponicum 'Pictum'</i>)		X	X		grows to 18" tall, 2' wide; metallic gray, suffused w/blue, red, or aquamarine; dies back to crown in winter; low mx; space 15 - 18" apart
Cinnamon Fern (<i>Osmunda cinnamomea</i>)		X	X		2 - 3' tall; asymmetric clumps; dies back to crown in winter; low mx; 1 per sq. yard
Geranium (<i>G. x 'Johnson's Blue'</i>)	X	X		X	12 - 18" tall; blue flowers (cut back in summer for more flowers); dies back to crown in winter; medium spreader; 3 - 4 plants 23 - 27" wide
Groundcover Roses (<i>Rosa spp.</i>)	X				1' - 4' tall; flowers in summer; loses leaves in winter; high mx; medium rate; 1 plant per sq. yard
Ladies' Mantle (<i>Alchemilla spp.</i>)		X			2 - 3" (<i>A. faeroensis 'Pumila'</i>) or 12 -18" (<i>A mollis</i>); dies back to crown in winter; delicate sprays of yellow-green flowers in mid to late spring; tolerates wet soils