



3415 E 500 S
Peru, In 46970
765-473-4992
www.egardengate.com

Ground Cover Culture Tips

Ground covers are low-growing plants that are useful for covering large areas in the landscape. They can also provide a planting solution for many difficult sites. Ground covers can replace turf grass in shady locations, provide erosion control on dry slopes, and provide cover under trees, shrubs, or in narrow spaces where grass mowing is impractical. The wide variety of low-growing plants available as ground covers presents many special effects in form, texture, color and mass. Ground covers can provide a “finishing touch” to a landscape.

Preparation: Vegetation that covers the area should be cleared before planting ground covers, since most cannot compete against established perennial plants. Spraying the area with a herbicide like *Roundup* about 7 to 10 days prior to soil preparation will do a good job at killing existing weeds. On level sites, the soil should be worked to a depth of 4-6 in. On heavy, compacted areas incorporate a 2-inch layer of peat moss, compost or well-rotted manure thoroughly into the soil. Also incorporate a complete fertilizer, such as 12-12-12, at the rate of 1 ½ to 2 pounds of fertilizer per 100 sq. ft.

Planting: In general, most ground covers can be planted at any time of the year. Space the plants according to their size, the immediate effect desired, and their rate of growth and habit. Herbaceous ground covers such as pachysandra and vinca (myrtle) purchased in 2-inch liner pots usually are spaced 12 in. apart; one-quart plants of the same type can be spaced 16-18 inches apart. Shrubs such as cotoneaster and juniper are spaced 3 ft. or more apart. If you intend to use an organic mulch to help control weeds, we have had good results by working the ground, covering the entire area with mulch, and then planting through the mulch. This method is a little easier than planting first, since it can be very time consuming to work mulch around small plants spaced 12 inches apart.

Care: Weed control is a must until the ground cover is fully established. When weeds are allowed to invade ground cover plantings, they are not only unsightly, but they also compete with the newly planted ground cover. Often, it's impossible to remove weeds once they become established. A 2-inch layer of shredded hardwood or cypress mulch will control 90% of the weeds. An application of pre-emergent herbicide such as *Preen* will help control weeds. New plantings will need weekly irrigation until well established. Generally, an inch of water applied weekly will do. Dry slopes and areas of severe competition may need watering during any dry periods. Ground covers benefit from yearly fertilization. Apply a complete fertilizer such as 12-12-12 at the rate of 1 ½ to 2 pounds per 100 sq. ft. of area every spring or late fall. Be sure that the fertilizer does not remain on the foliage of the ground cover. Work the fertilizer off the foliage by brushing it with a broom, rake, or even a tree branch. You can also wash it off with a good watering. Dry fertilizer left on the foliage can burn the plant and could possibly kill the entire planting.

Information taken from Purdue Extension Bulletin HO-105.
For more information: www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/conhort.html