

# Ground Covers for Alabama Landscapes

► Ground covers are used to provide edgings to pathways, control erosion, and add interest to landscape design.

In agriculture, ground cover is the name given to plants that are low growing and are used to cover a large area, giving a carpeted effect. Using several ground covers can add variety to the landscape and prevent soil erosion. Many ground covers also grow well in shady areas where turfgrass will not grow.

## Landscape Uses

Ground covers used as edging for pathways help regulate foot traffic in the garden. They also visually tie unrelated shrubs and flowerbeds together in the landscape. They can be used between steppingstones to provide color and for accent areas under trees where turf does not grow very well. For steep hillsides or banks where mowing is difficult, ground covers may be a solution. A homeowner trying to create an interesting landscape design will find the use of ground covers rewarding.



**Figure 1.** Dwarf mondo grass works well as a ground cover or in between steppingstones.

## Planting Ground Cover

Plan to install ground cover plantings 6 weeks before the first fall frost. To prepare the soil, simply till up the entire area you expect to cover and work in 3 inches of soil conditioner, compost, or peat moss. Apply fertilizers according to soil test recommendations and work them in well. After planting, water the area thoroughly, and apply 2 inches of mulch. Once established, ground covers usually maintain themselves with minimal care.



**Figure 2.** Southern shield fern as a ground cover for moist, shady areas provides an interesting foliage texture.

## Plants No Longer Recommended as Ground Covers

There are a handful of ground cover plants that were recommended in previous years, but are now viewed as poor choices. These plants easily invade nearby wooded or naturalized areas and take over ground that should be populated with native plant species. A complete listing of all invasive plants in your county or state can be found at [www.invasive.org](http://www.invasive.org). Some of these species not recommended for Alabama landscapes include:

- English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)
- Vinca (*Vinca major*)
- Lantana (*Lantana camera*)
- Wintercreeper euonymus (*Euonymus fortunei*)

## Recommended Plants

Many perennials or shrubs serve as ground covers. Choose those that are adapted to your soil type and fit with the area's sunlight and water availability. The following is a partial list of plants that work well as ground covers in Alabama landscapes.

**Table 1. Ground Covers for Alabama Landscapes**

Name	Type	Height	Sun/Shade
Bugleweed <i>Ajuga reptans</i>	Creeping perennial; bears blue or purple flowers	4 to 8 inches	Part sun to shade
Daylily <i>Hemerocallis</i> sp.	Perennial, dies back in winter	24 to 36 inches	Full sun
Dwarf Mondo Grass <i>Ophiopogon japonicus</i>	Grass like, evergreen perennial	Up to 10 inches	Part sun to shade
Golden Stonecrop <i>Sedum acre</i>	Perennial evergreen, prefers well-drained soils	Up to 4 inches	Full sun
Shore Juniper <i>Juniperus conferta</i> 'Pacific Blue'	Evergreen	Up to 24 inches	Full sun
Blue Rug Juniper <i>Juniperus horizontalis</i>	Evergreen	Up to 12 inches	Full sun
Monkey Grass <i>Liriope muscari</i>	Grass like, evergreen perennial, variegated variety available	Up to 18 inches	Full sun to full shade
St John's wort <i>Hypericum calycinum</i>	Semievergreen; turns red in fall; yellow flowers in summer; well drained soils only	12 to 18 inches tall	Sun to part shade
Strawberry Begonia <i>Saxifraga stolonifera</i>	Perennial; for well drained soils with acidic pH; white spring flowers	Up to 12 inches	Part shade to shade
Candytuft <i>Iberis sempervirens</i>	Perennial; white spring flowers	Up to 12 inches tall	Full sun to part shade
Groundcover Roses <i>Rosa</i> x 'Drift' or 'Carpet' Series	Horizontal-growing shrub	Up to 24 inches tall	Full sun
Creeping phlox <i>Phlox subulata</i>	Semi-evergreen perennial; showy spring flowers	Up to 8 inches	Full sun
Spotted Deadnettle <i>Lamium maculatum</i>	Perennial; trailing vine; purple flowers in spring	Up to 12 inches	Part shade to shade
Southern Shield Fern <i>Thelypteris kunthii</i>	Perennial fern with arching fronds; best in moist, acidic soil.	Up to 36 inches	Part shade to full shade
Partridge Berry <i>Mitchella repens</i>	Evergreen perennial ground cover, native, with red berries in fall/winter	Up to 5 inches	Full shade



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