Ground Covers

Spring and fall are ideal times to establish ground covers in Rockland County. Many will thrive in locations that are hard to maintain or where soil or other conditions are not ideal, such as sites with exposed tree roots and considerable shade, rocky ledges or steep banks. Ground covers also add considerable interest and charm, creating a neat, attractive landscape.

If they are to be relatively carefree, groundcovers must be selected with the growing conditions of the site in mind, especially light and soil conditions. Plants should be set in well-prepared weed-free soil and should be carefully nurtured while they are becoming established.

Soil Preparation

Most ground covers will thrive without any soil amendments, although you may incorporate organic matter such as compost, leaf mold, or well-rotted manure into the bed for plants that prefer richer soil. Be sure to avoid soil layering by adding no more than one part compost or other amendment to two parts native soil, and mixing any amendments thoroughly into the native soil. Even varieties that tolerate poor, unamended soil should be planted in well-tilled soil.

A soil test should be done to determine whether the pH (acidity level) is optimal for the plants you wish to grow. Cornell Cooperative Extension’s Horticulture Lab can test the pH of your soil for a nominal fee; call the lab to get instructions for properly collecting a sample. If desired, a complete soil nutrient analysis may be done at Cornell University (through Cooperative Extension).

Plant Spacing

An important part of establishing a ground cover is proper spacing of plants. The sooner the plants grow to form a solid mat, the less chance there is for weeds to invade or erosion to occur. In general, space vigorous low growing plants 12 inches apart, and slow growers six to eight inches apart. Ground covers that form gradually enlarging clumps, such as hosta and daylily, may be spaced 18 to 24 inches apart. Spreading shrubs such as cotoneaster, dogwood or juniper should be spaced at least three feet on center.

Year-Round Care

Once properly set out, the plants should be well watered and mulched. In December, after the ground has frozen, you may lay evergreen branches or clean straw over newly planted beds to prevent heaving and winter burn. In early spring, before growth begins, remove the branches or straw
Plant Selection
Ground covers vary in height and texture. Taller growing forms may be used to good effect on slopes and banks, while shrubby forms may be combined with low spreading perennials for interesting contrast.

Selected Groundcovers
Sunny Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
<th>Non-Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aster ericoides</td>
<td>3-6 in.</td>
<td>Ajuga spp. (can take shade)</td>
<td>2-6 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heuchera spp.</td>
<td>1-2 ft.</td>
<td>Arabis spp.</td>
<td>6-10 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itea virginica</td>
<td>3-5 ft.</td>
<td>Cerastium tomentosum</td>
<td>6-10 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opunitia humifusa</td>
<td>12-18 in.</td>
<td>Cotoneaster spp.</td>
<td>2-6 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenthocissus quinquefolia</td>
<td>6-8 in. on soil</td>
<td>Festuca spp., Miscanthus spp., Panicum spp., Pennisetum spp., and others</td>
<td>6 in.-8 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phlox subulata</td>
<td>2-6 in.</td>
<td>Hemerocallis spp. (can take some shade)</td>
<td>2-3 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizachyrium scoparium</td>
<td>20-40 in.</td>
<td>Hypericum spp. (H. ascyron, boreale, and canadensis are native)</td>
<td>1-6 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisyrinchium angustifolia</td>
<td>6-8 in.</td>
<td>Juniperus spp. (disease resistant var.)</td>
<td>1-2 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidago spp.</td>
<td>2-6 ft.</td>
<td>Liriope muscari</td>
<td>8-10 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sporobolus heterolepis</td>
<td>2-4 ft.</td>
<td>Mazus repens</td>
<td>2 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinium macrocarpum</td>
<td>2-6 in.</td>
<td>Nepeta spp.</td>
<td>1-2 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinium spp.</td>
<td>6-12 ft.</td>
<td>Rosa wichuraiana</td>
<td>2 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waldestinia fragaroides</td>
<td>4 in.</td>
<td>Salvia neroosa and S. sylvestris</td>
<td>18-24 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sedum spp. (Sedum ternatum is native)</td>
<td>2 in. - 2 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stachys byzantina</td>
<td>6-12 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thymus spp.</td>
<td>1-6 in.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Shade Tolerant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
<th>Non-Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthurium felix-femina</td>
<td>18 in. - 3 ft.</td>
<td>Alchemilla mollis</td>
<td>Lady’s Mantle (can take sun) 1-2 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asarum canadense</td>
<td>4-9 in.</td>
<td>Astilbe hybrids</td>
<td>False Spiraea 2-6 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carex spp.</td>
<td>6 in. - 5 ft.</td>
<td>Bergenia cordifolia</td>
<td>Heart-leaved Bergenia 1-2 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dryopteris marginalis or D. intermedia</td>
<td>1-2 ft.</td>
<td>Brunnera macrophylla</td>
<td>Siberian Bugloss 12-18 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heuchera spp.</td>
<td>1-2 ft.</td>
<td>Ceratostigma plumbaginoides</td>
<td>Leadwort, Plumbago 6-12 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leucothoe fontanesiana</td>
<td>3-6 ft.</td>
<td>Epimedium spp.</td>
<td>Barrenwort, Bishop’s Hat 8-12 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchella repens</td>
<td>1-2 in.</td>
<td>Hosta spp.</td>
<td>Plantain Lily 6 in. - 3 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phlox stolonifera</td>
<td>4-6 in.</td>
<td>Iris cristata</td>
<td>Crested Iris 4-8 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polystichum acrostichoides</td>
<td>2 ft.</td>
<td>Lamium spp.</td>
<td>Dead Nettle 8 in. - 2 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thelypteris noveboracensis</td>
<td>1-2 ft.</td>
<td>Pulmonaria spp.</td>
<td>Lungwort 8-12 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiarella cordifolia</td>
<td>6-10 in.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinum spp.</td>
<td>6 in. - 2 ft.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viola spp.</td>
<td>4-12 in.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Moist Locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
<th>Non-Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caltha palustris</td>
<td>12-18 in.</td>
<td>Astilbe hybrids</td>
<td>False Spiraea 2-6 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornus canadensis</td>
<td>3-9 in.</td>
<td>Hemerocallis spp.</td>
<td>Daylily 2-3 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornus sericea</td>
<td>7-9 ft.</td>
<td>Hosta spp.</td>
<td>Plantain Lily 6 in. - 3 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equisetum spp.</td>
<td>2-6 in.</td>
<td>Lysimachia nummularia</td>
<td>Moneywort 2-4 in.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Moist Locations, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ilex glabra</td>
<td>Inkberry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris pseudoacoris</td>
<td>Yellow Flag Iris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onoclea sensibilis</td>
<td>Sensitive Fern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osmunda cinnimomea</td>
<td>Cinnamon Fern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osmunda claytoniana</td>
<td>Interrupted Fern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pachysandra procumbens</td>
<td>Allegheny Spurge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viola spp.</td>
<td>Violet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Dry Conditions – Sun, unless noted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
<th>Non-Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opuntia humifusa</td>
<td>12-18 in.</td>
<td>Arabis spp.</td>
<td>6-10 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenthocissus quinquefolia</td>
<td>6-8 in. on soil</td>
<td>Festuca glauca</td>
<td>6 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaccinum spp.</td>
<td>6 in. - 12 ft.</td>
<td>Epimedium spp.</td>
<td>8-12 in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juniperus spp.</td>
<td>1-2 ft.</td>
<td>Barrenwort, Bishop’s Hat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(disease resistant var.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(grow in shade)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liriope muscari</td>
<td>8-10 in.</td>
<td>Lily turf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(can take some shade)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(can take some shade)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedum spp. (Sedum ternatum is native)</td>
<td>2 in. - 2 ft.</td>
<td>Stone Crop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stachys byzantina</td>
<td>6-12 in.</td>
<td>Lamb’s Ears</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thymus spp.</td>
<td>1-6 in.</td>
<td>Thyme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Erosion Management

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
<th>Non-Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comptonia peregrina</td>
<td>2-4 ft.</td>
<td>Forsythia spp. (dwarf varieties)</td>
<td>3-6 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornus sericea</td>
<td>7-9 ft.</td>
<td>Forsythia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Twig Dogwood (good for stream sides)</td>
<td>St. John’s Wort</td>
<td>Hypericum spp. (H. ascyron, boreale, and canadensis are native)</td>
<td>1-6 ft.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Erosion Management, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
<th>Non-Native</th>
<th>Ht.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Parenthocissus quinquefolia</em></td>
<td>Virginia Creeper</td>
<td>Juniperus spp. (disease resistant var.)</td>
<td>1-2 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-50 ft. climbing vine (can take some shade)</td>
<td>6-8 in. on soil</td>
<td>Juniper (spreading var.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Salix discolor</em></td>
<td>Pussy Willow</td>
<td>Rosa wichuraiana</td>
<td>2 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(shrub for wet areas)</td>
<td>6-25 ft.</td>
<td>Memorial Rose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vaccinium spp.</em></td>
<td>Blueberry</td>
<td>Salix caprea</td>
<td>15-25 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(creeping varieties)</td>
<td>6 in. - 2 ft.</td>
<td>Goat Willow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(shrub for wet areas)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Neither Cornell Cooperative Extension, Cornell University nor any representative thereof makes any representation of any warranty, express or implied, of any particular result or application of the information contained herein or regarding any product. It is the sole responsibility of the user to read and follow all product labeling instructions and to check with the manufacturer or supplier for the most recent information. Nothing contained in this information should be interpreted as an express or implied endorsement of any particular products or criticism of unnamed products.

The information on pest management for New York State contained in this publication is dated January 2009. The user is responsible for obtaining the most up-to-date pest management information. Contact any Cornell Cooperative Extension county office or PMEP (http://pmep.cce.cornell.edu/), the Cornell Cooperative Extension pesticide information website. The information herein is no substitute for pesticide labeling. The user is solely responsible for reading and following manufacturer’s labeling and instructions.

Hort 85 01/09