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Cooperative Extension
Rockland County

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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

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities, NYS College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, NYS College of Human Ecology, and NYS College of Veterinary Medicine at Cornell University, Cooperative Extension associations, county governing bodies, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating.

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

Native		Ht.	Non-Native		Ht.
<i>Aster ericoides</i>	White Heath Aster	3-6 in.	<i>Ajuga</i> spp. (can take shade)	Bugleweed	2-6 in.
<i>Heuchera</i> spp.	Coral Bells (dark leaved var.)	1-2 ft.	<i>Arabis</i> spp.	Rock Cress	6-10 in.
<i>Itea virginica</i>	Virginia Sweet Spire (can take some shade)	3-5 ft.	<i>Cerastium tomentosum</i>	Snow-in-Summer	6-10 in.
<i>Opuntia humifusa</i>	Hardy Prickly Pear Cactus	12-18 in.	<i>Cotoneaster</i> spp.	Cotoneaster	2-6 ft.
<i>Parenthocissus quinquefolia</i>	Virginia Creeper 30-50 ft. climbing vine (can take some shade)	6-8 in. on soil	<i>Festuca</i> spp., <i>Miscanthus</i> spp., <i>Panicum</i> spp., <i>Pennisetum</i> spp., and others	Ornamental Grasses	6 in.-8 ft.
<i>Phlox subulata</i>	Creeping Phlox or Moss Pink	2-6 in.	<i>Hemerocallis</i> spp. (can take some shade)	Daylily	2-3 ft.
<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	Little Bluestem	20-40 in.	<i>Hypericum</i> spp. (<i>H. ascyron</i> , <i>boreale</i> , and <i>canadensis</i> are native)	St. John's Wort	1-6 ft.
<i>Sisyrinchium angustifolia</i>	Blue Eyed Grass	6-8 in.	<i>Juniperus</i> spp. (disease resistant var.)	Juniper (spreading var.)	1-2 ft.
<i>Solidago</i> spp.	Goldenrod	2-6 ft.	<i>Liriope muscari</i>	Lily turf (can take some shade)	8-10 in
<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	Northern Dropseed	2-4 ft.	<i>Mazus repens</i>	Mazus	2 in.
<i>Vaccinium macrocarpum</i>	Cranberry	2-6 in.	<i>Nepeta</i> spp.	Catmint	1-2 ft.
<i>Vaccinium</i> spp.	Blueberry (upright var.)	6-12 ft.	<i>Rosa wichuraiana</i>	Memorial Rose Spreads to 16ft.	2 ft.
<i>Waldestinia fragaroides</i>	Barren Strawberry	4 in.	<i>Salvia nemerosa</i> and <i>S. sylvestris</i>	Meadow sage	18-24 in.
			<i>Sedum</i> spp. (<i>Sedum ternatum</i> is native)	Stone Crop	2 in. - 2 ft.
			<i>Stachys byzantina</i>	Lamb's Ears	6-12 in.
			<i>Thymus</i> spp.	Thyme	1-6 in.

Shade Tolerant

Native		Ht.	Non-Native		Ht.
<i>Anthurium flexifemina</i>	Lady Fern	18 in. - 3 ft.	<i>Alchemilla mollis</i>	Lady's Mantle (can take sun)	1-2 ft.
<i>Asarum canadense</i>	Canadian Wild Ginger	4-9 in.	<i>Astilbe</i> hybrids	False Spiraea	2-6 ft.
<i>Carex</i> spp.	Sedge	6 in. - 5 ft.	<i>Bergenia cordifolia</i>	Heart-leaved Bergenia	1-2 ft.
<i>Dryopteris marginalis</i> or <i>D. intermedia</i>	Wood Fern	1-2 ft.	<i>Brunnera macrophylla</i>	Siberian Bugloss	12-18 in.
<i>Heuchera</i> spp.	Coral Bells	1-2 ft.	<i>Ceratostigma plumbaginoides</i>	Leadwort, Plumbago	6-12 in.
<i>Leucothoe fontanesiana</i>	Drooping Leucothoë	3-6 ft.	<i>Epimedium</i> spp.	Barrenwort, Bishop's Hat	8-12 in.
<i>Mitchella repens</i>	Partridge Berry	1-2 in.	<i>Hosta</i> spp.	Plantain Lily	6 in. - 3 ft.
<i>Phlox stolonifera</i>	Creeping Phlox (can take part sun)	4-6 in.	<i>Iris cristata</i>	Crested Iris	4-8 in.
<i>Polystichum acrostichoides</i>	Christmas Fern	2 ft.	<i>Lamium</i> spp.	Dead Nettle	8 in. - 2 ft.
<i>Thelypteris noveboracensis</i>	New York Fern	1-2 ft.	<i>Pulmonaria</i> spp.	Lungwort	8-12 in.
<i>Tiarella cordifolia</i>	Foam Flower	6-10 in.			
<i>Vaccinum</i> spp.	Blueberry (creeping varieties)	6 in. - 2 ft.			
<i>Viola</i> spp.	Violet (many can take part sun)	4-12 in.			

Moist Locations

Native		Ht.	Non-Native		Ht.
<i>Caltha palustris</i>	Marsh Marigold	12-18 in.	<i>Astilbe</i> hybrids	False Spiraea	2-6 ft.
<i>Cornus canadensis</i>	Bunchberry	3-9 in.	<i>Hemerocallis</i> spp.	Daylily	2-3 ft.
<i>Cornus sericea</i>	Red Twig Dogwood	7-9 ft.	<i>Hosta</i> spp.	Plantain Lily	6 in. - 3 ft.
<i>Equisetum</i> spp.	Horsetail	2-6 in.	<i>Lysimachia nummularia</i>	Moneywort	2-4 in.

Moist Locations, continued

Native		Ht.
<i>Ilex glabra</i>	Inkberry	6-8 ft.
<i>Iris pseudoacoris</i>	Yellow Flag Iris	3-4 ft.
<i>Onoclea sensibilis</i>	Sensitive Fern	1-3 ft.
<i>Osmunda cinnimomea</i>	Cinnamon Fern	2-5 ft.
<i>Osmunda claytoniana</i>	Interrupted Fern	2-4 ft.
<i>Pachysandra procumbens</i>	Allegheny Spurge	6-12 in.
<i>Viola</i> spp.	Violet	4-12 in.

Dry Conditions –Sun, unless noted.

Native		Ht.	Non-Native	Ht.
<i>Opuntia humifusa</i>	Hardy Prickly Pear Cactus	12-18 in.	<i>Arabis</i> spp. Rock Cress	6-10 in.
<i>Parenthocissus quinquefolia</i>	Virginia Creeper 30-50 ft. vine (can take some shade)	6-8 in. on soil	<i>Festuca glauca</i> Blue Fescue	6 in.
<i>Vaccinium</i> spp.	Blueberry (creeping var. can take shade)	6 in. - 12 ft.	<i>Epimedium</i> spp. Barrenwort, Bishop's Hat (grow in shade)	8-12 in.
			<i>Juniperus</i> spp. (disease resistant var.) Juniper (spreading var.)	1-2 ft.
			<i>Liriope muscari</i> Lily turf (can take some shade)	8-10 in.
			<i>Sedum</i> spp. (<i>Sedum ternatum</i> is native) Stone Crop	2 in. - 2 ft.
			<i>Stachys byzantina</i> Lamb's Ears	6-12 in.
			<i>Thymus</i> spp. Thyme	1-6 in.

Erosion Management

Native		Ht.	Non-Native	Ht.
<i>Comptonia peregrina</i>	Sweet Fern	2-4 ft.	<i>Forsythia</i> spp. (dwarf varieties)	Forsythia 3-6 ft.
<i>Cornus sericea</i>	Red Twig Dogwood (good for stream sides)	7-9 ft.	<i>Hypericum</i> spp. (<i>H. ascyron</i> , <i>boreale</i> , and <i>canadensis</i> are native)	St. John's Wort 1-6 ft.

Erosion Management, continued

Native		Ht.	Non-Native		Ht.
<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	Virginia Creeper 30-50 ft. climbing vine (can take some shade)	6-8 in. on soil	<i>Juniperus</i> spp. (disease resistant var.)	Juniper (spreading var.)	1-2 ft.
<i>Salix discolor</i>	Pussy Willow (shrub for wet areas)	6-25 ft.	<i>Rosa wichuraiana</i>	Memorial Rose Spreads to 16ft.	2 ft.
<i>Vaccinium</i> spp.	Blueberry (creeping varieties)	6 in. - 2 ft.	<i>Salix caprea</i>	Goat Willow (shrub for wet areas)	15-25 ft.

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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.