



Spreading Floral Delight

Ground Cover Plants

G. Edwin Varner

Spreading Floral Delight: Ground Cover Plants

G. Edwin Varner

Published in 2023.

While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this book, the author assumes no responsibility for errors or omissions, or for damages resulting from the use of the information contained herein.

SPREADING FLORAL DELIGHT: GROUND COVER PLANTS

First edition. August 22, 2023.

Copyright © 2023 G. Edwin Varner.

Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

This entertaining and informative ebook describes some popular hardy perennial and annual garden plants suitable for colorful ground cover landscaping. The emphasis here is on those that provide outstanding floral displays along with their horizontal leafy growth.

Portions of this publication's content are from my previous works on different floral subjects. I revised the wording and corrected some now-noticeable errors while researching the following plants.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, public gardens, many nurseries within my area, and Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction

Ground-covering plants (especially those with profound blooming) are ideal solutions for difficult landscaping problem areas. The interlocking growing plants will smother weeds, cool the soil for better root development, and restrict water evaporation loss, so you water less often. If you are planting on a slope, these plants will also control or prevent soil erosion.

Blanketing an area with any ground cover may require purchasing several plants or a large quantity of seed. This will require money and more initial work to get the ground suitable for planting. But think of this as an investment for greater rewards. Within time, the result is an extensive carpet of beauty that will eventually require less maintenance and labor, depending on which plants you use.

Your best bet is to use hardy perennial plants that return yearly. Most offer vibrant flower colors that add to the enjoyment of a usually dull area. Some colorful annual bedding plants also spread, but covering a less extensive area is more prudent. Consider them when preparing an enlarged bed and replace them with other annuals each year.

Finally, a word of warning concerning the potential for excessive or invasive growth of a few specific ground covers. Depending on your climate, some plants, under ideal environmental growth conditions, can overextend the boundaries you impose. That overgrowth can reach beyond your neighbor's lot or, theoretically, in a worst-case scenario, in your general region. Any plant has that potential, so observe how well your ground cover spreads. It's time to cut off those excessively growing horizontal shoots if they extend too far out of bounds.

Before purchasing the following plants in many larger garden centers and online, please check your local agricultural extensive office for updated information if any are problematic in your location.

Anthemis – Chamomile

Anthemis nobilis



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Also called Creeping Chamomile, this very hardy (zones 4 to 9) perennial grew as a lawn before we discovered grass more practical. We consider these hardy plants a groundcover, but if they grow too tall (over six inches), clip them back with a lawnmower. The more disturbed, the better the plants appear to grow. Don't you wish every plant was like this? When properly controlled, the extensively spreading mat will also smother weedy plants.

The plant produces many small white daisies and, when dried as a powder, makes chamomile tea, reputed to make you sleepy unless

reading this ebook does this faster.

The entire plant releases a rich, fruity perfume when you walk, roll, line-dance, break-dance, or “do the Hokey-Pokey” on it. This herb is terrific for planting along and within pathways or sidewalks.

Used in Tudor England, this herb became scented bowling lawns and as a “strewing herb.” The dried or fresh herbal parts released the fragrance when scattered on the floor or ground and walked on during public celebrations. You can do this the next time you have a dinner party. Your carpeting will look horrible, but the air will be fruity-fresh.

Here’s a thought: if you live in mild winter locations and are constructing or planning to reorganize a border or several beds, why not substitute a grassy lawn with this evergreen ground cover? Think of all the possibilities of creating this scented lawn! You have only a few times to mow and enjoy the heavenly apple scent while walking on it. Your neighbors will be envious — well... maybe.

Aurinia – Yellow Alyssum

Aurinia saxatilis



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

You can always tell when a plant has been popular when listing its common nicknames. This plant is often called Basket-of-Gold, Gold Dust, Madwort, Goldentuff, and the above name Yellow Alyssum. Who knows? There may be other names attached to this plant elsewhere throughout the world. The root descriptive name is usually based on gold or yellow, which is apropos since a galaxy of brilliant yellow blossoms blooms in the spring.

It is said the flowers have a terrible smell, but I can't verify this opinion since it has been ages since I grew this plant, and I can't remember if it

does.

Aurinia is a hardy perennial (zones 4 to 7) growing to a maximum of 12 inches but extending outward into a ground-covering mat of grayish foliage. This plant is famous for blanketing rock gardens or cascading over walls or slopes.

Although its primary attractiveness is those abundant golden springtime flowers, the remaining gray-green foliage creates an attractive ground covering for the rest of the growing season. But – there is always the fine-print caveat – this plant cannot tolerate hot and humid climates. You can get the hint from the maximum heat zone is 7. That is highly irregular for most perennials, but this one is the exception to the rule.

It is best to grow this plant in exceptionally well-drained soil for constant wet soil (usually clay-based) will rot the roots and underground shoots.

Since the plants bloom in the spring, the spent blossoms and stems will look rather tacky by summer, so landscapers advised it to use a string trimmer to cut them back to the leaf area. Leave some seed capsules to help self-seed the ground for future plants.

I have never seen this plant in garden centers, but some larger seed companies will sell seed packets. You can sow them indoors during the winter (under grow lights) and later set the plants out in the late spring or broadcast the seeds onto the well-prepared sand or gravel-enriched ground.

Brunnera – Siberian Bugloss or False Forget-Me-Nots

Brunnera macrophylla



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

At home in shady, woody locations, this zones 3 to 8 perennial groundcover has gorgeous, bountiful clusters of small, azure blue flowers with yellow centers in the spring. These blossoms are showy for several weeks resembling Forget-Me-Not flowers and are sometimes mistaken for them. Well, that is not a bad thing considering both types are beautiful. We cannot have enough blue flowers in the garden!

Brunnera thrives in partial to entirely shady areas, but needs to have constantly moist, well-drained, and fertile soil. The plants appreciate morning sunshine but avoid hot, bright afternoon locations, for they will suffer by developing brown leaves. Individual plants grow to about one foot tall and wide, forming an attractive mound.

Over time, neighboring clusters will grow together and look like a green and blue carpet in the springtime sun-dappled shade. What an unforgettable sight!

With so many flowers produced, there is also a respective abundance of seeds which help to form new colonies. You can purchase seed packets if your nearby garden centers do not sell these plants.



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

These plants are great to raise in any shade garden for the flowers and their heart-shaped leaves. One variety, “**Jack Frost**” (shown above), has

beautiful, whitish-silvery leaves veined in green. You need to add this plant to your garden! Please remember its self-sown seed will revert to the regular green-leaf plants. Within a few years, they would outgrow poor Jack. It would be wise to take the time to cut off old flower stems to prevent self-seeding from this plant.

Cerastium – Snow in Summer

Cerastium tomentosum



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

This plant blankets the ground with billowing drifts of brilliant star-shaped white blossoms from spring to mid-summer. Even the evergreen foliage has a frosty silvery appearance. If you need to brighten parts of your garden, even if exposed to plenty of sunshine, this ground cover will highlight those areas.

Hardy to a remarkable range of zones 3 to 7, *Cerastium* is not impressive for its growing conditions. It needs plenty of sunlight and exceptionally well-drained soil in cooler climates, areas not having sweltering hot and muggy summers. Soil that retains water for

extended periods (especially over the winter months) will cause root rot. The ground must be gravelly or sandy and not clay-based for successful results. This plant looks stunning when spilling over a wall or flowing down a slope.

Underground runners spread the plants or by self-seeding. Compared with other ground covers, landscapers do not consider this plant invasive, even in fertile soil. It is drought resistant and relatively maintenance-free, but will look shabby by summer if you do not trim off the spent flower stems.

If grown in a level bedding area, you can use a lawnmower (the deck set at the highest setting) or a string trimmer, which is also best used for rock gardens. The cutting height should be six inches (or slightly less) to keep the silvery leaves and stems intact.

Your local garden center “may” have this plant or seed packets available for purchase.

Ceratostigma – Plumbago or Leadwort

Ceratostigma plumbaginoides



I first fell in love with this China native perennial plant seeing it covering a large patch of ground under a cluster of small trees. The multitude of sky-blue blossoms was mesmerizing. All blue flowers are eye-catching, but these were a “perfect” true blue.

Plumbago provides an excellent choice for those partially shady locations. You can plant it in full sun, but the leaves and the flowers develop a pale color, especially in hot climates. In a partially shady location, the leaves are deeper green, and the flowers are bluer. The plants should never grow in deep shade or soggy soil conditions.

Hardy to zones 5 to 9, this plant is late to leaf out in spring and may fool you into thinking it is dead. The intermingling stems are brown, but by late spring, fresh growth begins, and by midsummer, those five-petaled Honolulu-blue flowers bloom. This display continues until fall, then a surprising change occurs to the leaves. They transform to a brilliant reddish-orange color.

Although this plant does not have evergreen foliage, you can use this late-awakening foliage by underplanting it with spring-blooming bulbs. The bulbs will grow and bloom before *Plumbago* begins active growth. Hey, you get two colorful floral displays for the same ground area. By fall, you get the bonus of enjoying the colorful leaves.

The plants are spread by underground rhizomes, which could become unmanageable when grown in fertile soil, so be prepared to take necessary maintenance measures to contain growth. The shoots will spread horizontally, but the flower stems grow vertically, so try to prevent walking on this ground cover.

Convallaria – Lily-of-the-Valley

Convallaria majalis



This plant is among the most loved and appreciated groundcover perennials. It is excellent for planting in those tricky shady spots around your home, for they are long-lived with no pest or disease problems.

The medium-sized deep green leaves unfurl in the spring and produce several 'waxy' white, bell-shaped flowers by late spring or early summer. These dangling blossoms release a heavenly sweet perfume. If you have never inhaled this stupendous fragrance, you miss out on one of life's pleasures.

Hardy from zones 2 to 9, plant this ground cover in partial shade and moist loamy soil. You can adapt plants to full sunlight, but they can suffer in leaf and flower health. Years ago, I had a large, aging but diseased tree removed near my house. Underneath it was a well-established colony of these plants. A few years later, subjected to constant sunlight, they eventually died out – even with continuous tender loving care.

On one delightful spring day, as I was taking a long walk in a woodland park, the familiar perfume of these white blossoms overwhelmed me. I discovered a huge colony, a floral megalopolis in full bloom, thriving under the trees. They received partially dappled sunlight and were thriving.

A recommended variety to find and grow is “**Bordeaux.**” Growers consider it an improvement over the regular species with more substantial, pure white, bell-shaped, scented flowers. They bloom above the foliage instead of between the leaves. It also blooms more than the spring species, so you will have many flowers for several weeks. The foliage is also darker green and more prominent than the species. Because the flower stems rise above the foliage, you will have no problem picking many bouquets over the years.

Many garden centers offer bare root “pips” or shoots of the species plants in the spring, and plant as many as you can for many years of enjoyment.

Coronilla – Crownvetch

Coronilla varia or *Securigera varia*



Crownvetch (or Crown Vetch for those of you preferring a two-word name) arrived in the United States in the mid-1800s from Europe, North Africa, and Asia. In the 1950s, it became advertised as a quick method to control erosion. Yes, it does so, but it became a potential invasive problem in some areas. It can become a serious problem that is difficult to eradicate if not carefully cultivated.

As a member of the Pea-Bean family, this low-growing groundcover vine can incorporate nitrogen from the air and add it to the soil. It forms its own fertilizer and grows like mad. Its saving grace is growing exceptionally well in disturbed or less-than-ideal areas that other

plants have trouble growing and in too steep or sharply inclined areas that are hazardous or impossible to mow.

Other areas for its growth include well-drained reclamation acreage and roadside plantings. Here, in these areas, under proper management, it provides a remarkable job stabilizing and improving poor soil. The only recommendation is not to plant seeds in fertile areas where the vines can rapidly spread. Lately, more landscapers are taking the hint not to plant this vine any longer.

So, can we plant them as a ground cover? Discretion is the better part of valor, which would be my advice, but those clusters of pale to dark pink blossoms are so darn pretty. I would not plant them in the flower garden nor as a border planting by the house.

The flowers bloom all summer and into early fall in most regions. The plant is hardy, growing in zones 3 to 9. Just be cautious if you grow this vine to prevent unwanted spreading to other areas.

Delosperma – Ice Plant

Delosperma cooperi



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Some ground cover plants listed in this ebook specifically prefer to grow in cooler climates. This one thrives in warmer climates despite its common name suggesting the opposite. It gets this “cool” name for how sunlight sparkly reflects off the evergreen needle-like foliage like ice crystals.

Hardy to zones 5 to 10, Africa-native *Delosperma* displays small, iridescent pink, yellow, orange, purple, white, and attractive bicolor daisy-like blossoms sporadically blanket the ground from spring to fall.

The plants grow under six inches but spread outward, forming an expanding carpet throughout the growing season. It is not listed as invasive, but if it does get out of bounds, sever the shoots with a shovel or clip them off. If these shoots have attached roots, transplant them to another area. More-the-merrier for your garden!

This plant may not survive the winter in cooler climates, but it still can be enjoyed as a smaller growing annual. No matter your climate, this ground cover must grow in a sunny location with well-drained gravelly or sandy soil to prevent root rot.

Finding potted plants ready for transplanting may depend on where you live. It may not be offered in colder regions, but purchasing them in warmer climates should be easy. Sowing seeds is another, but a slower developing, consideration. You can buy seed packets in several online and published catalogs.

Dianthus – Cheddar pink and Maiden Pinks

Dianthus gratianopolitanus



Suppose you need to begin a conversation with someone, oh, let's say, at a garden party. In that case, you can always relate the tidbit of botanical fact that Cheddar Pink Dianthus and Cheddar cheese are closely related. When hearing such a statement, you will probably receive a confused look from whomever (probably thinking you have had too much wine or are dangerously off your meds). That obscure comparison is accurate, for both items are historically found and made in Cheddar, England, within the beautiful Somerset region.

For our purpose here, this species of mini-carnation was initially discovered growing within the limestone nooks and crannies of Cheddar Gorge. Because of the rough terrain and limited soil, this dianthus develops grass-like mats of blueish-green leaves and many foot-tall wiry stems of tiny, lightly clove-scented, rose-pink blossoms. They appear as a vivid blooming blanket from mid-spring to early summer.

The entire display is mesmerizing when in bloom, but (yes, there is always a troublesome “but” addition) their appearance looks frightful when the stems and flowers die and turn brown. To remake decorative decorum, you need to trim off these brown parts to restore the grandeur of those mats of blueish foliage. Some knee-bending and back-arching labor will establish a quality ground cover look. You can quickly trim off the dead stems with a string trimmer (or borrow your neighbor’s). Light foot traffic will not harm the plants too much.

Since you do not have your own rocky gorge to raise this plant in, ensure the area you wish to establish this plant as a ground cover is sunny with very well-drained soil with added limestone chips or gravel. Although listed as being hardy from zones 3 to 9, this dianthus can die not from winter cold but from excessive winter wet soil. Soggy soil is always fatal to these plants by rotting the roots and growth crowns.

Conversely, if not ironic, these plants will also die during the summer without occasional watering. Drought-prone areas are problematic for establishing extensive growing.

Garden centers may — and I do mean may — offer plants for you, but seed sowing is the best and quickest way to establish ground-covering populations. You can obtain seeds from online wildflower nurseries and catalogs.

Fragaria – Wild Strawberry; “Pink Panda”

Fragaria vesca; alpina; other species and hybrids



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

This plant may not quickly come to mind when considering a ground cover near your home. In some rural locations, especially near woods or forests, this diminutive spreader grows in moist areas exposed to some sunlight. This cover does not crowd out other ground-hugging plants, including grass, but it still thrives.

Unlike most (if not all) other ground covers, with no surprise for the common name, this one forms fruit. Well, duh! Need I explain? The genuine wild strawberry (or “fraise de bois” in French lingo) does not form large red fruit, as we all expect, but the size of your thumbnail. The strawberry flavor is definitely there!

There is no law against growing our regular strawberry plants as a ground cover. They also form runners to root here and there but are developed mainly for agriculture. Unfortunately, they are also productive for only, on average, two years. The older or mature plants remain but do nothing for further growth.

Fear not for enterprising English breeders performed genetic magic to develop a long-lasting “true” ground cover strawberry that emphasizes the blossoms. Regular strawberry flowers are white, but the hybrid variety, **Frel**, or garden center renamed “**Pink Panda**,” sports light to bright pink blossoms. They are also slightly larger and longer blooming. There is disagreement if any fruit develops; some authorities say no, while others say “maybe.” Never mind. Let’s enjoy those colorful blossoms.

I must stress that planting this strawberry in very fertile soil will limit flower formation in favor of producing more foliage. The leaves will hide the flowers. The plants will send out numerous rooted stolons or runners to establish clones, but unlike most ground covers, they don’t form a solid carpet of green. “Weedy” plants occasionally pop up, so you must pull them out.

The important thing is to plant this strawberry in a sunny to partly shady and well-drained location. I recommend experimenting with this plant first in a container and determining if you like it and eventually wish to graduate it to a small ground-covering area. You can plant larger areas with more reliable full-exposure covers listed within this ebook.

You may locate the Pink Panda strawberries in larger garden centers and investigate online sources.

Galium – Sweet Woodruff

Galium odoratum



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

This hardy foot-tall perennial (zones 4 to 8) typifies what a ground cover can achieve when grown in ideal conditions. It can spread quickly to become a nuisance invasive problem. It grows best in partially shady, fertile, moist, well-drained soils but tolerates drier areas.

If the ever-expanding mat of leafy whorls and stems gets out of bounds, it is time to arm yourself with a twirling string trimmer, or if desperation ensues, set the cutting deck up high and use the lawnmower. This sounds horrible, but “desperate times require desperate measures.”

The above warning is not absolute but only a possibility. You only need to be vigilant when using this plant as a ground cover, for it does spread quickly via underground shoots and self-seeding, which is ideal for those problematic locations where other ground covers suffer. These areas include under large shade trees, shrubs, overhangs, or shady steep sloping regions.

Sweet Woodruff has been famous for ages, not primarily as a ground cover but as fragrant material for perfumes, food and drink additives, and home decorations. When cut and dried, the leaves release a strong scent (or odor, depending on your nose) of “newly mown hay” or vanilla. The fragrance increases as the leaves dry, much so when thoroughly dried, and is used in potpourri or sachets. The scent also carries over when the leaves are steeped as tea and included in wine or punch. Let the party begin!

This plant also has another nickname called Bedstraw. An old-time practice was stuffing mattresses, beds, pillows, and linen closets with this dried leafy material. The idea of doing this was transferring the perfume to clothing and bedding to make you smell better, sleep peacefully and keep unwanted household livestock (such as moths, fleas, bedbugs, and other creepy buggies) from infesting yourself and the home. There is no reason not to continue doing this, except the plant material will eventually become pulverized and dusty, requiring frequent washing.

By late spring or early summer, the leaves and stems form attractive clusters of fragrant white four-petaled flowers, adding a pretty sight in those shady locations. If only the plant did not have such potential invasiveness and the top growth did not die back by winter and remain evergreen, it would be considered an ideal ground cover. Oh well, we can't have everything.

You may not find *Galium* plants in garden centers, but they are available in wildflower plant and seed catalogs, plus their websites.

Geranium – Bigroot Geranium

Geranium macrorrhizum



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Now, wait one moment. Don't get excited into thinking this is a ground-covering type of those familiar annual bedding or windowsill container plants. Those are actually named *Pelargonium*, even though related, and we call them geraniums. This is a prime example of how common names will confuse new gardeners.

This true geranium is a hardy, low-maintenance perennial (zones 4 to 8) which spreads by thick underground shoots called rhizomes. This gives it the common name of Bigroot Geranium. Don't make an embarrassing Freudian slip by calling it 'Bigfoot Geranium.'

This underground expansion forms above-ground 12 to 18-inch shoots with multi-indented lobed leaves bearing summer-long, long-lasting, purplish-pink inch-wide flowers. New varieties exhibit other intermediate shades, including pinkish-white to pure white. The leaves also provide a colorful display in the fall, showcasing bright shades of red, orange, and bronze.

Like most other family members (including your pot-grown Pelargonium), it enjoys partial sunlight and well-drained, dryish soil. This is key to long-term survival, for constant wet ground will rot the rhizomes, especially during the winter. Because of their thick roots, these plants can tolerate extended drought conditions. Hey, that is a great bonus for any plant!

This extensive above-ground growth makes a perfect weed-free ground cover under shrubs, trees, roses, and taller-growing perennials. Try this perennial if you have a troublesome area that is a pain for anything to grow on.

If so inclined, there are a few maintenance chores, such as removing spent flower stems or discolored or yellowed leaves. Some varieties will fling seeds elsewhere to begin new generations, so be on the lookout for start starter plants in places you wish they were not to grow.

Deer and bunny rabbits prefer to dine elsewhere because the leaves have a strong herbal odor when handled (like your common “geraniums”).

So, when you add up all these advantages being low growing, low maintenance, and able to grow in drier soils, many landscapers feel this is the perfect ground cover for any home. And the flowers are so-darn-pretty as well!

Hedera – English Ivy

Hedera helix



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

***** WARNING ***** Although this ebook is primarily associated with describing flowering ground covers, I would be negligent in mentioning this popular vegetative-only choice in covers. I list it only as a warning not to plant it.

Is our common ivy listed as a not-to-grow vine for landscaping? Say it isn't so! Sorry, it is so. This evergreen plant is native to northern Europe, Russia, and Scandinavia — which translates to being very hardy from zones 3 to 9. It can grow in full sun to shade in practically any soil type. It can cover the ground and is a familiar sight growing on

house stone walls and encasing tree trunks. It uses aerial rootlets that secrete a “glue-substance” that sticks tightly to a structure.

Based on these facts, it sounds terrific to grow in any garden. But let’s get to the heart of the “do-not-grow” matter. It’s self-clinging, fast-growing, and capable of causing severe damage to house structures. It hides potentially dangerous problems such as deep holes and power cables and is a prime real estate for hiding unwelcome pests. And for personal observation, it isn’t lovely, mainly when covering vast stretches of ground and tree trunks. Some areas in the United States view this vine as an invasive weed. The state of Oregon bans its sale for it does overrun forests.

I once planted these vines around the house foundation to control weeds around my newly planted shrubs. I mistakenly thought it would “behave itself” and I could manage it. At first, yes, it looked great filling in the area. But, after two years, problems developed. The vines grew tired of growing horizontally and climbed vertically into the shrubs and the house vinyl siding. I was continually pulling down vines!

The mat of vines on the ground provided the perfect, cool, dark habitat for sowbugs, beetles, and other mini-beasts. They, in turn, attracted nightmarish, ravenous packs of wolf spiders, then field mice, and, eventually, garter and black snakes. I had created a perfect storm of food-chain pests outside my door and inside my siding. NO MORE! So, I ripped out the vines during the winter and replaced them with attractive, pea-sized gravel. Be very cautious when planting this vine near your home.

Heuchera – Coral Bells

Heuchera sanguinea



It's pronounced 'HOY-ker-ah'... or 'HEW-ker-ah'... or 'HOO-chair-ah'... or 'Hoo-CHEER-ah'... or 'Who-KER-ah'... oh, never mind.

Years ago, this evergreen North American native perennial was a dull green to lightly copper-colored plant. The only redeeming quality was the many little red, bell-shaped flowers on slender stems. Breeders and growers knew it had the potential to form low-growing, beautiful shade plants. They proved correct and later created many stunningly colorful plants. A prime example is **Georgia Peach**, shown above

Most of the attention has been on variations of leaf colors. Some plants have solid monochromatic colors, while others sport multiple shades.

Chartreuse, bright coppery-orange, rusty-red, silvery-white, and purple-black varieties exist. You can create a fantastic patterned ground cover by planting several types near each other.

To get the best leaf colors, this hardy perennial (zones 3 to 8) appreciates growing in partial shade, morning sunlight, and then shade for the afternoon. Constant sunlight (along with dry soil) will “burn” the leaves – making large brown grotesque splotches and leaf edges.

Flower colors vary from bright red to pink and white. Blooming begins from late spring to mid-summer. Don’t worry if you have a problematic shady area that may be too dark. Here, concentrate on the flowers instead of the leaf colors. I have seen stunning displays of green-leaf Coral Bells with bright white blossoms. The small but numerous flowers resembled strings of bright LED lights. It was mesmerizing!

These low-maintenance plants will grow best in well-drained, fertile, moist to occasional dry soil. Mature plants will grow into bushy, one to two feet tall clumps and have few, if any, insect or disease problems.

Many colorful varieties are available as bare-root rhizomes or potted plants in most garden centers. You can also raise the species from seed, available from several seed companies.

Heucherella – Foamy Bells

Heuchera x Tiarella hybrid varieties



Though sounding like a name of a not-so-famous sister of Cinderella, this is a beautiful creation of low-growing, colorful leafy plants, some with contrasting colors. The plants grow (and look) best in partly to entirely shady locations. However, modern hybrid varieties display larger maple-shaped leaves with vivid colors and patterns with higher tolerance to sunlight.

These *Heuchera sanguinea*-related plants are gaining popularity for growing them as multi-colored groundcover. Several new varieties are smaller, bushy, and slowly spread. Look for the above pictured variety called **Mojito**.

As for the flowers, they are abundant on tall but branching, slender stems. The blossoms are much smaller than those of *Heuchera* but compensate by having more. American growers called them “Foamy Bells” because the flowers resemble sea foam instead of coral. They bloom from mid-to-late spring with shades of pink and white. Hummingbirds and butterflies in your neighborhood will happily visit these blossoms.

Raise these colorful plants in well-drained, fertile, and moist soil. They can tolerate dry ground but can quickly perish in soggy locations. Their hardiness is still extreme — from zones 4 to 9.

There is an increasing number of new, colorful varieties introduced each year. Garden centers and nurseries may offer only a few, but specialist online nurseries will provide plenty.

Hosta

Hosta species and hybrids



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

We are all familiar with typical large-leaved species and hybrids, but with the genetic wizardry of breeders, new smaller hybrids are now available. They still resemble a typical Hosta having pure green or variegated leaves with white or pale blue flowers but are now “Lilliputian” in size. Most nurseries and garden centers call them **Miniature Hostas**.

These hybrids are perfect for small garden beds or borders, including rock gardens. If you purchase several plants, you can also incorporate them as a striking ground cover or border design. It may take a few

years to fill in an area, but these plants do, like any other Hosta, quickly develop new side shoots. The large-leaved types can also be displayed this way but will look rather unattractive and “jungle-ish.”

All Hostas prefer to grow in partly shady areas with well-drained, fertile, moist soil. Always ensure the ground never collects pools of water, which causes the roots to rot. Try to avoid planting variegated varieties in full sunlight.

This perennial is number one for low-maintenance garden enjoyment with hardiness (zones 3 to 9), adaptability, gorgeous flowers, and beautiful leaves.

Today, there is a gazillion (well, close to it) Hosta species and their varieties for any sized garden. The trouble is, which plants will you grow? A trip to your nearest garden center and online mail-order nursery will give you a confusing assortment. Several types have various degrees of white or yellow variegation. Don't be surprised if you encounter some with almost no green in their leaves. How they manage to grow is a wonder.

Houttuynia – Chameleon Plant

Houttuynia cordata



CC0 Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

***** WARNING ***** If you ever encounter this plant in your nearest nursery or online store, move on and forget about it. Seriously, avoid it! Once planted in your garden, you will have it forever. You will appreciate growing poison ivy more so than this plant.

For your curiosity, this plant resembles the looks and excessive growth of mint (*Mentha*) plants — but is unrelated to them. The species has dark green heart-shaped leaves, but the **Chameleon** variety has multi-colored variegated ones. Its vivid colors include yellow, orange, red, and occasionally pink. This attractive rainbow coloration draws gardeners to plant it. Let's think of this plant as a type of botanical-induced shiny-object syndrome. That was my stupid reason for growing it several years ago, and I regret it.

Another reason to avoid growing it is for the leaf and stem fragrance. If you think the mint plants have a pronounced aroma, this ground-

covering plant goes to the extreme by exuding a horrible sickly sweet orange blossom smell. Orange blossoms smell heavenly, but this plant can turn your stomach.

The strange reason why people grow this plant is for food preparation, especially in northeastern India. It is a leafy vegetable served alone or cooked with other items. Gourmets describe the flavor as being “fishy.” One common name for *Houttuynia* is “Fish Mint.” OK. That sounds and probably tastes disgusting.

So, I have warned you. No matter how you use this plant, it stinks. Period.

Lamium – Spotted Dead Nettle

Lamium maculatum



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

If you need to brighten a partially shady area, this hardy perennial (zone 3 to 8) is sure to please. It will best grow in problematic shaded areas such as under trees, tall shrubs, overhangs, and other low-light areas. Some varieties with speckled or silvery variegated leaves reflect dappled sunlight and look sparkly. Under some conditions, the mass of leaves appears to glow. This silvery appearance will suffer if raised in full sunlight (especially in hot climates), for the leaves will brown, and the overall look is ghastly.

From spring and throughout the summer, small eight-inch or less tall petal-hooded spikes of pink, light purple, or white flowers add to the attractiveness of this ground cover.

The plants can spread rapidly in fertile, well-drained soil, but you can contain them if regularly supervised. For the best low-maintenance means, try to locate this plant in a less fertile location, but never in wet soil, for this will rot the root system. Growing it in a recurring dry area is not advised either, for like any other plant, it needs occasional irrigation during drought.

Unlike other ground covers with similar growing habits and requirements, *Lamium* does not retain its leaves over the winter in colder climates, but this is fine for you since this growing area can be under-planted with spring-blooming bulbs.

I recommend purchasing plants from nurseries and garden centers instead of broadcasting seeds within the ground cover site. Seeds usually revert to the standard and non-eye-catching green leaf plants, while nurseries offer the newest silvery-green leafed types with different flower colors.

Please be aware that your local agricultural extension office may list this plant as invasive in your locations.

Lathyrus – Everlasting Sweet Pea

Lathyrus latifolius



This beautiful vine can create a lot of confusion for many people. The problem lies with its name. First, we assume it is an actual Sweet Pea (*Lathyrus odorata*), having very fragrant flowers. It does not.

Second, people (including new gardeners) assume it is a perennial variety of the Sweet Pea instead of being an annual. Who wants to grow an annual plant when a perennial type (with an attractive descriptive name as “everlasting”) is available? And so, the disappointment begins when people realize this species has no trace of scent and is limited in flower color to rose-pink or white. What a bummer!

This confusion may be why this vine became popular and spread to almost all areas. Native to the Mediterranean regions of southern Europe (just like *Lathyrus odorata*), it spread to other continents – possibly via the exchange of garden flower seeds.

First reported growing in early American and Canadian gardens by the late-1700s, the plant became a weed when it escaped gardens and established itself in the countryside. Any pampered plant leaving the comfort of a garden to “go it alone” in the world has to be tough, and this species is.

Today, we find it growing wild—to the point of being labeled as invasive in some areas—near roadsides or road banks, railways, farm fence rows, and other disturbed soil sites.

The plant is almost indestructible, for it survives in zones 3 to 9, quickly spreads by excessive re-seeding (from blooming all summer), and slowly creeps underground by rhizomes in most types of soil.

Well, it’s here to stay, but from a garden plant standpoint, grow and enjoy it. If you have a problematic area where it is difficult to grow anything of floral beauty, this plant will suffice. Wildflower seed businesses will usually have bulk seeds to establish a planting quickly. The flowers are usually rose-pink, but white can occasionally occur. One bonus is they make excellent cut flowers to brighten a room in your house.

As a pea-bean family member, the plants can capture nitrogen from the air and self-fertilize the soil. If they grow in a mostly sunny, well-drained area, such as a slope or bank, they will be suitable for something you cannot establish as a ground cover for isolated and troublesome locations.

Liriope – Creeping Liriope; Lilyturf; Monkey Grass

Liriope spicata



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

***** WARNING ***** This plant's leaves resemble grass blades, even though the common monkey name refers to it as a type of grass. It is not, but it is a type of lily. My major dislike of *Liriope* is the clump-forming nature of it, with the outer blades turning brown while the innermost clump of blades is green.

Growing on the side of one of my nearby libraries has hundreds of growing clumps. The older leaf blades were dead, while the innermost ones were green. Agh! I thought about dropping on my hands and knees

and stripping off the dead blades to improve their looks. Photos of *Liriope* in flower gardening books look beautiful, but my observation is of the opposite opinion.

I have never seen it in flower, which is a shame since it flaunts very attractive white to various shades of blue or purple spiked blossoms.

Well, that's my "take" on this plant, but it also has a lousy reputation growing in warmer locations, particularly in the southern USA, for it can be highly invasive. It is so invasive that if you decide to rip it out, any remaining root, rhizome, and seed will eventually re-establish new colonies continuously. The plant is more restrained in northern climates but will take longer to develop an extensive cover.

If you insist on adding it to your home, look for the variegated varieties, for they will add some eye-catching appeal instead of the regular green-bladed types.

The plant is hardy from zone 4 to 9, grows under 12 inches — higher with the flower spikes, and thrives in full sun to shade and well-drained soil. Under no circumstance, grow it in very fertile soil, for it will expand the rhizome spreading, clump-like colonies. Drier and less fertile soil, like those on slopes, will help to contain it and eventually cover those troublesome areas.

Lotus – Birds Foot Trefoil

Lotus corniculatus



By midsummer, while driving here and there, I always see large splotches or meandering trails of this wildflower ground cover bordering the roads or interspersed within meadows and neighborhood lawns. The main attraction of this diminutive blanket is gorgeous clusters of bright yellow pea-like flowers. As the individual blossoms age, their color can change to deep orange and sometimes red, but you must get close to see these additional hues. Blooming begins in early summer and extends for about two months in many locations.

This plant's name has two appearances: the "bird's foot" refers to a rough resemblance of the ripe brown seed pods to that of wading birds'

feet. Stretch your imagination a little to see the likeness. I'll try...no, I don't see the similarity. The other name, "trefoil," refers to the compound leaf's three upper leaflets (looks like clover). Now that I can see.

Native to Europe and Asia, this low-growing plant spreads almost everywhere and can survive from zones 4 to 9, flourishing in full sun to light shade and thriving in many types of soils.

Although considered invasive, you can grow this plant in your garden — or better yet, the exterior of the garden, for it looks great contouring around the beds or borders and in rock gardens. You can insert plants between stepping pavers or stones or make them into a small lawn since they can tolerate some foot traffic.

They usually grow less than the lawnmower deck height, so you need not be concerned about disturbing their flowers. They are a pretty ground cover, even if not universally recognized.

It is rarely, if ever, available in garden centers or regular flower seed catalogs; the only resource is wildflower seed catalogs.

Lysimachia – Moneywort; Creeping Jenny

Lysimachia nummularia



CC0 Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

When the ideal conditions, such as fertile, moist but well-drained soil and plenty of sunshine, are present, dear Jenny wastes no time spreading out and about. This perennial plant (hardy from zones 3 to 9) can become invasive in a garden setting. Still, it can be ideal for covering difficult-to-manage hillsides or slopes since it produces several extensive branching stems. At each leaf node or "joint," roots develop and establish a new series of cloned plants.

What makes this ground-hugging ground cover unique is producing ever-blooming bright buttercup-yellow, one-inch cup-shaped flowers all summer.

You do not have to grow it as a ground cover and apply it in a rock garden or containers. You can control its growth in these locations and better appreciate those flowers.

One other possibility is using it as an edging plant. I have seen it extend the blooming branches across a cemented walkway. The shoots cannot form new rootlets on this rock-hard pavement but only from the original soil growing area. Where unwanted side shoots extend into the lawn or garden, they can be more manageable in removal. Yes, some maintenance is required, but the look of the blooming growth within the cemented walkway is pleasantly “untidy.” Don’t worry — the shoots can withstand occasional foot traffic.

The regular species is the most invasive, producing more leafy shoots than flowers. Still, the cultivated variety or cultivar named “**Aurea**” (or the **Golden Creeping Jenny**) has chartreuse or yellowish-green leaves and more flower power. It is more manageable with less excessive growth. Surprisingly, it has received the Royal Horticultural Society’s Award of Garden Merit. Imagine that! A “somewhat” invasive ground cover wins an award. Will wonders never cease?

You might purchase Aurea from larger garden centers or online nurseries. But make sure you can legally (and ethically) purchase and grow this plant (along with the regular Creeping Jenny,) for your local authorities may deem it highly invasive.

Mentha – Mint

Mentha piperita; spicata and related species



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

***** WARNING ***** Mints are the ‘wild ones’ of the plant world. These herbs enjoy a fast life, carefree and relaxed. They don’t care where they roam; they’re tough, daring, and aggressive. This description may sound like a motorcycle gang, but we have grown these tenacious herbs in gardens for a long time.

They will grow willy-nilly everywhere if not confined, so please don’t plant them near your prized perennials. Plant them in those problematic growing areas where you do not mind where they will spread.

They are the perfect aromatic groundcover plants when touched, walked on, or brushed against with your foot. The fragrances are soothing yet excitable; their leaves can help flavor foods, desserts, and drinks.

Plant them in full sunlight to shade, wet soil, dry soil, rich or poor ground, who knows — radioactive-contaminated soil – it doesn't matter! They will grow where they want to grow. As expected, they are hardy to almost all growing zones on Earth and Mars.

One recommended variety to grow (only because I have a sweet tooth) is **Chocolate Mint**. Sorry, it does not smell like a Hershey bar but is a variety of **Peppermint**. It smells like those yummy chocolate-covered thin mint patties. The foliage is a deep green with a slight bronze cast. If they had foil wrappings, it would be even better! Many other name-scented varieties exist, such as Apple, Pineapple, Orange, and **Spearmint** (*Mentha spicata*).

All species and varieties will form bountiful tiny flowers on upright stems during the summer, attracting plenty of bees and butterflies to the nectar.

Nepeta – Catmint

Nepeta cataria



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

One of the best ground covers any landscaper can recommend to homeowners is this purrrfectly hardy relative of the mint (*Mentha*) family. Although not as rowdy in invasive growth as mints, this plant will spread but is controllable.

Related to that kitty-favorite Catnip, it will not become an addictive feline herb attracting all the neighborhood cats. The fragrant greyish-green leaves and purplish flowers will attract plenty of human attention from spring to fall.

This hardy perennial (zones 3 to 8) prefers a sunny, well-drained location and is not picky about soil fertility. As always, the more fertile the soil, the greater the degree of invasive growth, but growing it in “regular” garden soil with sand or gravel will help slow its spread. It can also adapt to drought, but the occasional drink of water is advised.

One ground-hugger variety recommended to grow is “**Walker’s Low**” (I know, it could have a catchier name) which develops a relatively rapid growth rate, so it will fill in an area more rapidly with less need to purchase several plants. Surprisingly, for any ground cover, it was awarded The Perennial Plant Association’s coveted “*Plant of the Year Award*” in 2007. Surprisingly, unlike the Oscars and the Emmy Awards, the ceremony was not televised. That’s a shame, for I would have watched it if shown. There’s never anything good on TV anymore.

Anyway, this plant eventually forms a sizeable low-maintenance carpet. The cataria species and various varieties only rise to a few inches. Still, a hybrid (*Nepeta x faassenii*) called ‘**Six Hills Giant**’ towers nearly three feet tall but branches out repetitively to cover a vast expanse relatively quickly. It, too, eventually forms a decorative purple summer blooming low-maintenance carpet — well, make that an excessively thick shag carpet.

As with all, if not most, members of the mint family, Catmint is not favorable to deer or rabbits, so that it will make a good boundary deterrent.

Pachysandra – Japanese Pachysandra

Pachysandra terminalis



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Although the primary purpose of this ebook is to highlight floriferous ground covers, I can't neglect to mention this popular evergreen perennial. Then again, it does provide some noticeable white flower spikes in late spring. Popular may be an understatement, for it has become an invasive plant in several areas of the eastern USA.

It performs its ground-covering duties too well for ideal conditions, which, ironically, are those problematic locations that limit the growth of other ground covers. This foot-tall plant thrives in partly shady areas, such as under trees and taller shrubs. If grown in fertile soil (which

benefits these taller woody plants) will cause it to kick into high growth gear to quickly spread unless surrounded by non-growable areas such as concrete sidewalks.

One of my favorite libraries has a large expanse of Pachysandra growing in a no-maintenance large bed exposed to the full sun most of the day. The plants cannot spread outward but still look outstanding each year. Since your garden area is most likely surrounded by lawn grass, you must be vigilant in preventing its outward spread.

Depending on your climate, its hardiness is from zones 5 to 9, but zone 4 can squeak through in more protected south-facing plantings. Try only to perform yearly fertilizing if the leaves begin to yellow or dead patches are noticeable after a severe winter.

Larger garden centers “may” offer plants depending on regulations imposed by those areas that are serious about preventing its invasive spread. I am unsure if seeds are available to establish a planting, for I have never seen them available.

Petunia

Petunia hybrida “Supertunia Vista®”



I will be daring and proclaim if you wish to fill in a moderately sized bedding area, not with a perennial but an annual, you can look no further than planting the *Supertunia Vista*® series of Petunias. This series has the remarkable ability to cover — make that totally cover — the ground with vividly colorful blossoms, so much so that you may not see any foliage! The above photo shows the variety called **Bubblegum**.

The breeders of this type of petunia accurately named it “super” and “vista” for it is ever-blooming and has extensive branching growth. The plants can grow to about a foot tall, but a single potted plant will spread outward to over four feet in all horizontal directions.

Regular petunias are great for smaller beds and containers, but the Supertunias are outstanding for planting in more extensive areas that need a jolt of vivid color. How do they do this impressive feat? They are sterile, unable to form seeds, and apply all their energy to develop new flowers. Our regular petunias are fertile, and as the growing season progresses, many seeds develop, exhausting the plants to stop blooming. Let's face it — not very pretty by midsummer.

Another reason for their excessive growth is their much larger root system than other bedding petunias. This extensive root system can support enough water for all the stems, leaves, and those abundant flowers.

Like all petunias, they need as much sunlight as possible and very fertile, well-drained soil. They can't thrive in drought conditions, but the occasional watering will make them thrive. Plan on adding some time-release fertilizer granules to the soil to provide enough minerals for outstanding growth. Compared to what I have advised for all the other ground cover plants listed in this ebook, this is the exception to the rule on not having excessively fertile soil.

Growers sometimes label these petunias as low maintenance since they prevent weed and grass growth when fully established. Since the flowers do not form seed capsules, there is no need to deadhead the entire bed, for new blossoms quickly substitute the wilted and dead ones. Talk about being Super Petunias — they certainly are!

The Vista petunias have a downside for you cannot grow them from seed; they are unique and sold only as potted plants. Yes, they can be pricey, so you must do finger-counting arithmetic calculations on how many plants you will need to fill in an extensive area. Remember, well-grown plants will spread several feet outward, but always plan on transplanting a few more than you need. For visual amazement, they are worth every penny.

Phlox – Creeping Phlox

Phlox subulata



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

This fabulous hardy perennial (zones 3 to 9) will always be, in most cases, the most popular ground cover to plant near a house or outlining a border. It is an easy-to-grow and very low-maintenance species of Phlox. The unfortunate thing about this plant (there is always a negative feature with everything enjoyable, isn't it?) is it is slow-growing, but when planted in quantity, it will fill in an area faster.

It forms condensed evergreen ground-hugging, spruce needle-like leafy mats. By early to mid-spring, the shockingly colorful carpet of white, vivid rose-pink, pale pink, or pale-lavender blue petals provides a show

(and traffic) stopping extravaganza display. A few available varieties have bi-color petals of pink and white.

Over the years, I have noticed some gardeners have used some imagination by using the blue-shade variety to represent “flowing” water emptying from an inverted wooden tub or barrel. Or, the blue mixed with some white petaled type represents a small, fast-flowing stream coursing down a slope bordered by a few large rocks. Let your imagination run wild with this plant!

By late spring, the show ends, and only that green mat of leaves remains for the remaining growing season. But that is okay, for the leaves make further growth and next spring’s fantastic bloom.

This plant (and *Sedum*, described shortly) performs perfectly by filling a bed or space and crowding out weeds and possibly grass.

Besides the occasional watering and light-fertilizing, this plant is a welcome, carefree addition to any garden. It grows best in as much sunlight as possible and with well-drained, fertile soil. It can tolerate some dry soil but appreciates the occasional refreshing drink of water throughout the hot summer. Well, don’t we all?

Portulaca – Moss Rose

Portulaca grandiflora



Let's say your garden soil is sunbaked, sandy, gravelly, or chunky with stones. What could grow well in those less-than-ideal conditions that would not require constant irrigation and full-time maintenance? Well, some plants listed in this ebook will work, but here is one of the easily overlooked annuals that can thrive and bloom non-stop for you.

Native to South America, specifically to Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina, Portulaca grows as a groundcover with small succulent leaves. This absorbent nature is critical for their survival in those inhospitable, hot, dry places. This does not mean they can behave like cactus plants, for they need occasional watering, but you can save on your water bill growing these gorgeous plants.

They detest growing in heavy-clay-based soil, for clay can retain water too long and rot the roots and stems. If your soil is mainly clay, take the time (and, yes, some work) to add plenty of coarse sand. Come to think of it — this would be good when planting all the other flowers and vegetables in a garden. Respect your soil; it's the most essential thing concerning gardening!

Portulaca's common name explains everything about them. They look like moss, but their flowers appear like single to semi-double roses. Their colors range from white, red, rose pink, orange, yellow, and a slew of bicolors with streaks and stripes. They will bloom all summer and into the fall and self-seed plenty, so expect new plants each year.

After the last frost of spring, sprinkle seeds across the tilled soil and either water or let the rain settle them into place. Then it is a waiting game to enjoy their beauty.

Each summer, I will drive by a home with a long driveway having separate entrances and exit ways. Each area contains flower beds showcasing these gorgeous plants. I never see if someone waters them, for the house is about a half-mile away. Who wants to carry water that distance? So, these plants are at the mercy of Mother Nature to give them a drink, but they thrive — each year!

Go wild and crazy by sowing these seeds in your rock garden, edges of sidewalks, or other areas that prove difficult to grow many other flowers.

Sedum – Stonecrop

Sedum ternatum or *Sedum acre*



We do not acknowledge some perennials as “the most popular plant” to grow in gardens. Sedum is a textbook example of this misguided appraisal. They are one of the most carefree garden and landscaping plants. Once planted, they usually thrive (and multiply) with little help — but they would appreciate some attention and admiration now and then. Who doesn’t?

All Sedum species and varieties have excellent qualities for growing in all gardens. They tolerate full sun and dry soil with succulent leaves, so you do not have to water them often. This is ideal when planting in sandy or gravelly soil exposed to dry locations.

There is an old joke about why they have the common name of “stonecrop.” The punchline is they live longer and need less care than stones and rocks. (Insert drum rimshot and cymbal “ba-dum-ching” sound here.) There is only one precaution to remember when growing all Sedum: never plant them in consistently moist or wet soil, for the stems will rot.

The succulent leaves can exhibit beautiful colors, including variegations. Most varieties display shades of dark purple, reddish-orange (or a dull copper,) golden yellow, and green blended with white or yellow. Depending on the species and type, a plant will have clusters of star-shaped rose-pink, white or yellow flowers.

Now, let’s determine what type of Sedum to grow in your garden. It depends on how you want to display them. There are two classifications of these plants. You can choose upright growth or relaxed or sprawling varieties. For our purpose here, the creeping or groundcover types (such as *Sedum ternatum* or *Sedum acre* “**Golden Carpet**”—shown above) typically have small moss-like leaves that can quickly cover pathways or as an under-planting in rock gardens. At the same time, they usually blanket themselves with masses of tiny white or yellow blossoms.

The time of blooming is also different among Sedum species. The upright varieties bloom spectacularly in the late summer through the fall. In contrast, the ground-covering growers typically bloom from spring to early summer.

Stachys – Lamb's Ears

Stachys byzantina



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

Considered one of the easiest perennials to grow, *Stachys* is also one of the more enjoyable. The reason is with those thick, snow-white felted leaves that children (and us Peter Pan-ish adults) enjoy touching. You can't go wrong in adding this plant to a garden for lovers of fuzzy-wuzzy, wooly, silvery-white leaved perennials or baby sheep (hey, who doesn't?).

Primarily grown as an edging plant, you can also transform it into a groundcover if you have enough plants. Over the growing season, a single plant can spread to four feet wide. Since it is very hardy (from

zones 4-9), each succeeding year will make it spread outward even more. Some growers feel it can become invasive, but regular pruning of out-of-bounds creeping plants should be fine.

One of its best uses is planting this perennial in problematic areas where other plants cannot grow well. It tolerates many soil types but prefers well-drained and sunny locations. One problem — if not fatalistic — is the area with constant wet soil.

Lamb's Ears produce tall, soft-pink to purple flower spikes in the summer and are beautiful cut flowers since they last long in arrangements.

Thymus – Creeping Thyme

Thymus serpyllum



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

If there is one plant that many landscapers and gardeners agree on as possibly being the best ground cover, *Thymus serpyllum* would be it.

Here is a listing of its attributes:

- It is a woody perennial and hardy from zones 4 to 9 and able to survive for several years.
- Extremely low-growing to only four inches but can quickly spread outward.
- Not considered invasive and can be easily trimmed to control any unwanted spreading.

- It can form complete low-maintenance carpets suppressing grass and weed growth, including being employed as a lawn substitute. I like this idea!
- It adapts to regular foot traffic, such as planting along pathways, within stepping stones, etc.
- The soft felted leaves are highly aromatic and are “somewhat” edible, but *Thymus vulgaris* varieties are best for cooking.
- It is an excellent deer and rabbit deterrent, for they hate the leaf smell.
- It forms beautiful pink, white, or purple flower spikes in early summer and is highly beneficial for pollinators, such as native bees and butterflies.
- The plants can quickly adapt to various soil conditions if well-drained and grown in as much sunlight as possible.
- Able to adapt to drought conditions but would still enjoy the occasional drink of water.

My goodness, that is an impressive list! I am sure there are other accolades for growing this plant near your home. Still, the above reasons should whet your appetite to consider applying this perennial for any ground cover applications.

Vinca – Common Periwinkle

Vinca minor



A shade garden is complete with a maintenance-free, evergreen groundcover, hardy perennial. That quickly sums up why to grow it in those tricky shady areas. A few extra descriptive facts may be suitable.

These low-growing vines (three to six inches tall) can quickly cover the ground, whether grown in partial sunlight or deep shade. It needs reliably moist soil, but it can tolerate dry soil in partial to deep shade. Like most plants, make sure the ground is well-drained.

The plants can become invasive, especially in fertile soil, but not uncontrollably. Regular clipping back will keep this zone 4 to 8

perennial looking neat and tidy. Another similar species, *Vinca major*, has larger leaves and flowers but is less hardy from zone 7 to 9.

A beautiful display of “periwinkle blue” tubular blossoms will carpet the ground each spring. New varieties have pink or white blossoms, but you can’t top that stunning shade of blue. For a flashy display for shady areas, look for the variegated-leaf variety called “**Variegata**.”

Where I previously lived, *Vinca* grew extensively inside a part of the woodland near the house. The leaves were evergreen throughout a cold, snowy winter, looked outstandingly beautiful with fresh, new growth and blue flowers in the spring, and kept the woodland looking fabulous in the summer. It behaved well, for we never had to manage it—a welcomed benefit of any plant.

My brother later dug up several sections and transplanted them into a sloped area near his home's swimming pool. They grew and bloomed okay—not great, but being in full sun and humidity from the pool, they did not look as lovely as the woodland plants.

Not all garden centers sell these plants, but some specialty nurseries should stock them. Growers usually offer them as “plugs” or in plastic pots. You may have to search for them in your area.

Viola – Wild Violets

Viola species; odorata



I am hesitant to include these small perennial plants for gardeners (and especially non-gardeners) who have a love-hate relationship with them. We love to see them bloom but also call them weeds and try to eradicate them.

There are over 500 species and varieties of violets worldwide. Many are perennial (hardy from zones 3 to 7) and prefer cool, moist, sunlit dappled woodland-like growing conditions. They can tolerate full sunlight only if the ground remains moist, suffering if it becomes dry. They bloom only in the spring, self-seed, and slowly grow outward during the summer.

Native violets, such as the common woodland species, have shades of blue or purple, yellow, and white. They can also spread outward to new territories—other garden and lawn areas—by self-seeding a-plenty.

I once mowed my elderly neighbor's lawn during the spring and discovered several large drifts of wild purple violets blooming in the grass. I hated to perform violet homicide, so I raised the cutting deck an inch or two higher. The lawn may have looked like a bad haircut, but I told my neighbor to enjoy the colorful sight of all those violets for a few weeks. She hadn't noticed them but was thrilled to view their beauty. Being an artist, she later incorporated them into a painting.

The European native *Viola odorata* varieties have an overwhelmingly sweet perfume. Originally called Florist Violets, they have escaped into the wild and our gardens and lawns. Although not as hardy in some areas, they can adapt to new places.

I sold blue and rosy-pink varieties years ago while operating my fragrant flower nursery. I rescued the unwanted plants from the fate of a compost bin to spend their years in the flower gardens. They self-seeded with gusto, spreading new generations everywhere, including onto the surrounding lawn. Each spring, more plants bloomed, spreading a delicious perfume into the air. How can we hate a weed that does this?

I have never seen wild violets sold in garden centers, including the fragrant *odorata* varieties. I guess it's because of that weed phobia problem. You should be able to find plants from specialized mail-order nurseries. Fortunately, several seed companies, especially those specializing in wildflowers, offer seeds of several species. Scattering these seeds about a shaded garden can establish colonies within two or three years.

Don't be too concerned about these charmingly wild-and-crazy ground-covering perennials spreading here and there in your garden. I can think of many other plants being weedy and unwelcome. I say, embrace the wild violet for our shady gardens, and I hope you agree.

Conclusion

The above list of garden plants is a fraction of what other types can cover the ground. I listed some popular herbaceous species and varieties, but other ground spreaders are related to trees and tall shrubs.

Developing an enlarged area to establish a low-maintenance ground cover takes time, money, and labor. You must declare truthfully if the plan is feasible based on your lifestyle. The job could become overwhelming and over budget, even if you are a DIY (do-it-yourself) person.

My advice is to contact your local larger garden center and ask their advice on which ground covers would thrive in your area. Better yet, seek a professional landscaping service with free consulting assistance to review your garden's layout, soil chemistry, structure, and sun-to-shade ratio requirements.

Although we think we can handle all the work involved in developing a sizable ground cover, it can become a "what have I got myself into?" nightmare. Professional landscaping businesses have the person-power, machinery, and tools to develop an area in less time and expense than DIY projects.

As for choosing the best plants and quantity, landscapers will also be of valuable service to you. Please remember they can obtain wholesale-priced plants of what you wish or what they recommend growing. Take their help and advice for less worry and work-related issues.

With the information presented in this ebook and help from professional landscape businesses, you can change that drab eyesore plot of ground into an area of pride, pleasure, and a vast vista of outstanding color.

Thank You for reading this ebook

I hope you have enjoyed this ebook on the ground covering garden flowers

Take the time (and patience) to grow these outstanding flowers in those problematic areas around your home. Within a couple years, you will be glad you did!

Please visit my author website, <https://gedwinvarner.com> concerning my other gardening ebooks and contact information.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This early experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

For twenty years he successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs." Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is "read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!"

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.