

COVERING GROUND

We think about covering ground literally—planting over bare soil—and in the broader sense of making our landscapes more ecologically sound. A few bare patches in the garden help support wildlife, but too much invites weeds and erosion. Mulching requires regular applications and is resource intense. Our landscapes can be better when we choose a living mulch and cover the ground with plants.



Grasses and sedges are made for the job. Branching, fibrous root systems hold soil in place while also increasing water infiltration. Dense crowns and abundant foliage slow and filter runoff, reducing sediment and pollutants that flow into waterways. Planting densely reduces weed competition, which lowers labor costs and reduces herbicide use. Native grasses and sedges also help support wildlife with food, cover, and nesting material. Our landscapes can function better and be more beautiful when we cover the ground with plants.

We've curated a list of grasses and grasslike plants that are traditionally thought of as "ground covers," along with some not-so-obvious selections. We won't be picky about definitions. One person's ground cover is another person's lawn alternative or matrix plant. As you narrow choices using the chart, we suggest consulting the individual plant profiles on our website to finalize your selections. Lastly, not that we cover "lawn alternatives" specifically in our Plants for Green Infrastructure Chart. Check there if you're interested in selections that can be mowed periodically.



Key to the Covering Ground Chart:

OC Dense/Loose – an "on-center" measurement, or how far apart to plant liners. The shorter measurement should provide quicker coverage and/or mature plants will overlap. With the wider measurement, coverage is slower and/or mature plants will just touch. Growing conditions and the plant species will greatly affect size, coverage, and time to maturity. so these are estimates. Count on at least 3 years for a mature plant.

Spreader – plants with a symbol in this column will spread without any assistance, either via seed (●) or vegetatively (rhizome, tuberous roots, etc.) (▲), or both. Seed from cultivars may not be true to type.

Profile – selections that are notably low-growing or lie relatively flat are designated with the () symbol. Those with taller or bulkier profiles than traditional "ground covers" are indicated with the () symbol.

Exposure – sun exposure; some plants will take more sun with moister conditions, so check individual listings.

Showy – selections with a symbol in this column have especially showy foliage (), inflorescences (), or both.

N. American Native – Species is native to North America. Cultivars are listed with species nativity.

Plants for Covering the Ground	OC Dense	OC Loose	Exposure				Spreader	Profile	Showy	N. American Native
			Shade	Part Shade	Part Sun	Sun				
<i>Acorus gramineus</i> 'Minimus Aureus'	6"	12"					▲			
<i>Acorus gramineus</i> 'Ogon'	12"	18"					▲			
<i>Ammophila breviligulata</i>	12"	24"					▲			✓
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i> ssp. <i>bulbosum</i> 'Variegatum'	12"	24"					▲			
<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	8"	12"								✓
<i>Bouteloua dactyloides</i>	6"	12"					▲			✓
<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i>	6"	10"								✓
<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i> 'Blonde Ambition' PP22048	12"	24"								✓
<i>Carex amphibola</i>	12"	24"					●			✓
<i>Carex appalachica</i>	10"	18"								✓
<i>Carex cherokeensis</i>	12"	30"					▲ ●			✓
<i>Carex divulsa</i>	18"	30"					●			
<i>Carex eburnea</i>	8"	12"								✓
<i>Carex</i> Feather Falls™ 'ET CRX01' PP26199	2'	3.5'								
<i>Carex flacca</i>	8"	18"					▲			
<i>Carex flacca</i> 'Blue Zinger'	8"	18"					▲			
<i>Carex flaccosperma</i>	12"	18"					●			✓
<i>Carex grayi</i>	15"	24"					▲			✓
<i>Carex laxiculmis</i> 'Hobb' Bunny Blue®	10"	18"					●			✓
<i>Carex morrowii</i> 'EverColor®' 'Everglow' PP30466	12"	18"								

OC dense/loose - on-center measurement

Exposure - sun exposure

Spreader - via seed (●) and/or vegetatively (▲)

Profile - notably low () or tall/bulky ()

Showy - foliage () and/or inflorescences ()

N. American Native - native to North America



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Plants for Covering the Ground	OC Dense	OC Loose	Exposure				Spreader	Profile	Showy	N. American Native
			Shade	Part Shade	Part Sun	Sun				
<i>Carex morrowii</i> 'Ice Dance'	12"	24"					▲			
<i>Carex morrowii</i> var. <i>temnolepis</i> 'Silk Tassel'	12"	24"								
<i>Carex muskingumensis</i>	12"	24"					▲ ●			✓
<i>Carex oshimensis</i> EverColor® Everest (*Carlit01*) PP20955	18"	36"								
<i>Carex oshimensis</i> EverColor® 'Everillo' PP21002	18"	36"								
<i>Carex oshimensis</i> EverColor® 'Everlime' PP25622	18"	36"								
<i>Carex oshimensis</i> EverColor® 'Eversheen' PP25938	18"	36"								
<i>Carex oshimensis</i> 'Evergold'	18"	36"								
<i>Carex pensylvanica</i>	10"	15"					▲			✓
<i>Carex plantaginea</i>	10"	18"					●			✓
<i>Carex radiata</i>	12"	20"								✓
<i>Carex</i> Ribbon Falls™ 'ET CRX02' PP29950	18"	36"								
<i>Carex scaposa</i>	12"	18"								
<i>Carex</i> 'Silver Sceptre'	8"	12"					▲			
<i>Carex texensis</i>	12"	18"								✓
<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	18"	36"					▲ ●			✓
<i>Chasmanthium laxum</i>	12"	18"								✓
<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>	12"	18"								✓
<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i> 'Goldtau'	12"	24"								✓
<i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>	12"	18"								✓

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			Shade	Part Shade	Part Sun	Sun				
<i>Eragrostis elliottii</i>	18"	24"					●			✓
<i>Eragrostis spectabilis</i>	10"	15"					●			✓
<i>Festuca glauca</i> Beyond Blue ^{(^{'Casca11'}) PP23307}	12"	24"								
<i>Festuca glauca</i> 'Elijah Blue'	12"	18"								
<i>Hakonechloa macra</i>	12"	24"					▲			
<i>Hakonechloa macra</i> 'All Gold'	10"	20"					▲			
<i>Hakonechloa macra</i> 'Aureola'	10"	20"					▲			
<i>Juncus tenuis</i>	8"	10"					▲			✓
<i>Leymus arenarius</i> 'Blue Dune'	18"	30"					▲			
<i>Muhlenbergia reverchonii</i>	24"	36"					●			✓
<i>Nassella tenuissima</i>	15"	24"					●			✓
<i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i> 'Burgundy Bunny' ^{PP21917}	12"	20"								
<i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i> 'Hameln'	15"	24"					●			
<i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i> 'Little Bunny'	10"	15"					●			
<i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i> Lumen Gold ^{(^{'JS Jommenik'}) PP27435}	15"	24"								
<i>Pennisetum alopecuroides</i> 'Piglet' ^{PP19074}	12"	20"					●			
<i>Rhynchospora colorata</i>	12"	24"					▲			✓
<i>Sesleria autumnalis</i>	15"	24"								
<i>Sesleria</i> 'Greenlee Hybrid'	12"	18"								
<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	12"	30"					●			✓
<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i> 'Tara'	12"	24"								✓

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