

Suburban Gardener

Attractive Ground Cover Adds Beauty To Landscape

By BETTY FRANKEL
Special Writer

Ground cover plants are becoming increasingly popular with gardeners because they cut down on maintenance work while adding beauty and elegance to the landscaping. There are many plants which have a naturally low, spreading habit of growth.

Some of these are too weedy, coarse or rampant to be considered good ground covers. Others, especially those with attractive evergreen foliage and a spreading but tidy form of growth, are choice plants for ground covers.

In addition to bringing charm and beauty to the landscape, ground covers also protect the soil against erosion, conserve moisture in the soil, keep the soil cool during hot periods, and prevent weeds from growing.

There are several hundred plants that have been tested at the Arnold Arboretum in Massachusetts and are recommended as use as ground covers.

Some grow best in sun, while others prefer shade. Some need moisture while others require dry soil. Some tolerate being walked on occasionally.

As with all plantings, if the plant's requirements and the characteristics of the growing place match, the plant will thrive and look attractive with a minimum of effort on the part of the gardener.

ONE OF THE best ground covers for growing in the shade is Japanese pachysandra (pachysandra terminalis). It forms broad mats of bright evergreen foliage six to eight inches high and is excellent to use as an edging along a walk or drive.

It is popular as a ground cover under shrubs, especially beneath plantings of rhododendrons or other evergreens, and is reputed to be the only ground cover that grows well under pine trees.

When starting a planting of pachysandra, set the plants four to six inches apart so that a thick bed will be formed quickly.

Galax is less well known than pachysandra but is another excellent ground cover that spreads quickly to grow well. It has glossy heart-shaped leaves that remain green all year.

Other good ground covers for shady areas include sweet woodruff (Asperula odorata), hosta, and lily-of-the-valley. These are green only during the warm months, however.

The best ground covers for growing in sun include dwarf spreading junipers and various conifers. The latter do not hold leaves during the winter, but have attractive red berries. Dwarf forsythia also makes a suitable ground cover for a sunny situation.

The dwarf polycnemum is sometimes used as a sun-loving ground cover. It has small green leaves that turn a bright red before they are shed in Fall. An added bonus are sprays of rose-red flowers in late summer.

It is an aggressive vine and is suitable for growing in large areas and on banks where other ground covers will not grow. It is not suitable for small areas.

THERE ARE NUMEROUS ground cover plants that grow well in either sun or shade. Myrtle or periwinkle (Vinca minor) is undoubtedly one of the most popular of all ground covers. It has small evergreen glossy leaves and a trailing habit.

It forms a thick carpet under trees and shrubs and is suitable for use on banks and in planter boxes. Often it is interplanted with spring bulbs. Set the plants four to six inches apart.

English ivy (Hedera helix) and Ballic ivy (Hedera helix battica) are also choice evergreen ground covers that grow in either sun or shade. They tend to climb up trees and walls as well as to grow flat on the ground. This climbing habit can be an advantage or a disadvantage depending on

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Start Indoors

Coleus Carpet Of Color

Exotic carpeting for any sunny or partly shaded area in the garden can be provided by the bright foliage plant, coleus.

It has flowers, too. They are slender spikes of lavender, but are only a minor reason for growing the plant.

Leaves may be of a single, solid color, mottled with several colors or have two or three distinct color zones. Shades of red, copper, pink, yellow and green are typical coleus colors that given an Oriental rug effect.

BECAUSE coleus is a long-season plant, for northern gardens it is best to start seeds in advance indoors or in a cold frame. The seeds are so fine that they are just pressed with the palm of the hand onto whatever medium is used for the seed bed.

If you prefer to sow seeds directly in the garden, wait until the end of May or early June, when danger of frost is past.

Whether they are sown indoors or out, the seeds sprout in from eight to 12 days when the temperature is 75 to 80 degrees. Seedlings should be transplanted to set three inches apart. Ultimately, in the garden, space plants 15 inches apart.

LEAF COLOR will be brightest if coleus plants are grown in full sun. They require plenty of water. In shade, less water is needed, but color will be poor. Semi-shade is ideal.

A rich, humusy soil is a must.

A popular strain of coleus is Rainbow. Seed firms offer their own selections of this strain and seeds of separate varieties also are available.

There are strains with fringed leaves, with small leaves

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