

Ground Covers for New Mexico

Adapted by Rick Daniell, Bernalillo County Extension Horticulture Agent from
Ground Covers for Albuquerque by Ruth Bronson, Albuquerque Area Extension
Master Gardener and NMSU Circular 444–Ground Covers for New Mexico



The most common ground cover in the average landscape is grass. There are, however, occasions and locations where some other plant would be more desirable. Ground cover plants can contribute color, texture or form to an overall garden design. Usually, they are wide-spreading and low-growing, ranging in height from a few inches to 2 feet or more. They often are perennial, although annuals that reseed themselves also may be used. Once established, they can be maintained with minimum care. When chosen carefully and used skillfully, ground cover plants contribute greatly to the beauty of any landscape.

Ground cover plants:

- provide color in shady areas where grass and other plants may be difficult to establish or maintain;
- prevent soil erosion on slopes, steep banks, and other areas where it is impractical to establish and maintain grasses;
- edge walkways to regulate and help direct foot traffic in gardens and yards;
- provide a foreground planting to enhance a border's beauty.

When choosing a ground cover, select one that can grow well on the site. Some species thrive only in shade, some need partial shade or require a northern exposure, and others thrive best in locations exposed to full sun. Still other species grow equally well in either sun or shade.

Ground cover plants usually are considered low-maintenance. However very few plants remain at the height and spread for which they were chosen without appropriate pruning, shaping, trimming or other care. With this care, they will provide the desired effects for a long time.

Soil Preparation and Plant Care

Before you plant any ground cover, eliminate all perennial weeds and grasses. Bermudagrass, bind-weed, and nut sedge are especially troublesome and difficult to eradicate. All three are perennial and set seed and self-propagate from tiny pieces of root left in the soil when cultivating. It is important to eliminate them, as much as possible, before planting any ground cover. It often is necessary to use a herbicide to destroy all these weeds prior to planting in order to help promote a clean, weed-free site. After the weeds have been eliminated, prepare the soil for the plantings according to the needs of the species selected.

Plant Selection Table

Table 1 is provided to help you decide which ground cover best suits your needs. The plants are listed in alphabetical order, according to their botanical names. Perennial ground cover plants and spreading annuals are included. Many of the plants listed may be invasive if planted in small areas. Many can be combined with other plantings, such as bulbs, to achieve a desired look. After selecting plants from the table that best fit your needs, it is a good idea to research your selections further to make sure that they will work for you.

Plants that require large amounts of water and those that need acid soil to thrive have not been included. If you have abundant water or naturally acidic soil, you should consult other references for additional plant suggestions.

Table 1. Ground Covers for New Mexico.

Botanical Name	Common Name	Height	Spacing	Sun/Shade
<i>Achillea tomentosa</i>	Wooly Yarrow	6 - 12"	6 - 12"	Sun
<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>	Bishops-Weed	12 - 14"	creeping	Shade
<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	Bugleweed	2 - 4"	6 - 12"	Sun/Psun
<i>Arabis</i> spp.	Rockcress	6 - 10"		Sun
<i>A. caucasica</i>	Wall Rockcress	10"	creeping	Sun
<i>Arenaria verna</i> v. <i>caespitosa</i>	Irish Moss, Sandwort	3 - 4"	6"	Sun/Shade
<i>Armeria maritima</i>	Thrift	2 - 10"	6 - 12"	Sun
<i>Artemesia schmidtiana</i>	Silvermound	3 - 6"	12 - 24"	Sun
<i>Aubrieta</i>	Aubrieta	2 - 6"	6"	Sun/Psun
<i>Aurinia saxatilis</i> (<i>Alyssum saxatile</i>)	Basket of Gold Alyssum	6"	10 - 12"	Sun/Psun
<i>Baccharis pilularis</i> *Southern NM Only	Dwarf Coyote Bush	18 - 20"	4' - 6'	Sun
<i>Begonia</i> , tender perennial	Bedding Begonia	6 - 10"	6"	Shade
<i>Berberis thunbergii</i> 'Crimson Pygmy'	Japanese Barberry	18"	1 - 2'	Sun/Psun
Various Species of Cacti	Various	10"		Sun
<i>Campanula carpatica</i>	Carpathian Harebell	8 - 10"	creeping	Psun
<i>C. elatines gargantica</i>	Dalmatian Bellflower	3 - 6"	6 - 12"	Sun/Psun
<i>C. Posharskyana</i>	Siberian Bellflower	12"	creeping	Shade
<i>Catharanthus roseus</i> (<i>Vinca rosea</i>)	Madagascar Periwinkle	6 - 24"	6 - 24"	Psun
<i>Cerastium tomentosum</i>	Snow-In-Summer	6"	12 - 18"	Sun/Psun
<i>Ceratostigma plumbaginoides</i>	Blue Leadwort, Dearf Plumbago	6 - 12"	12 - 24"	Sun/Psun
<i>Chamaemelum nobile</i> (<i>Anthemis nobilis</i>)	Chamomile	3 - 10"	4 - 12"	Sun/Psun
<i>Chrysanthemum</i>	Mums	6 - 36"	varies	Sun
<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	Lily-Of-The-Valley	6 - 8"	6 - 12"	Psun
<i>Coronilla varia</i>	Crown Vetch	1' - 2'	creeping	Sun/Psun
<i>Cotoneaster apiculatus</i>	Cranberry Cotoneaster	1 - 2'	2' - 6'	Sun
<i>C. congestus</i>	Pyrenees Cotoneaster	2' - 3'	2' - 6'	Sun/Psun
<i>C. dammeri</i>	Bearberry Cotoneaster	6 - 12"	2' - 6'	Sun
<i>C. horizontalis</i>	Rock Cotoneaster	3"	2' - 6'	Sun/Psun
<i>Delosperma cooperi</i>	Pink Ice Plant	3 - 6"	2'	Sun
<i>D. nubigenum</i>	Yellow Ice Plant	3 - 6"	2'	Sun
<i>Dianthus deltoides</i>	Maiden Pinks	6"	10 - 12"	Sun/Psun
<i>D. plumarius</i>	Grass Pinks, Cottage Pink	6"	10 - 12"	Sun/Psun
<i>Dichondra micrantha</i> *	Dichondra	2 - 6"	seed	Shade
<i>Epimedium grandiflorum</i>	Bishops Hat	9"	1'	Psun
<i>Eschscholzia</i> sp.	California Poppy	8" - 12"	self seed	Sun
<i>Euonymus fortunei</i> 'radicans'	Winter Creeper	1' - 2'	1' +	Sun/Psun
<i>Euphorbia myrsinites</i> , E sp.	Spurge	12"	1' +	Sun
<i>Festuca ovina glauca</i>	Blue Fescue	4 - 10"	6 - 12"	Sun
<i>Fragaria</i> sp.	Wild Strawberry	6 - 12"	12 - 18"	Shade
<i>Galium odoratum</i>	Sweet Woodruff	6 - 12"	1'	Shade
<i>Gazania hybrida</i>	Gazania	6 - 12"	6 - 12"	Sun
<i>Hedera helix</i> , many varieties	English Ivy	4 - 12"	18"	Shade
<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>	Sun Rose	8" - 12"	2' - 3'	Sun
<i>Hemerocallis</i> sp.	Daylilies	1' - 3'	6 - 12" +	Sun/Psun
<i>Heuchera</i>	Coral Bells	6 - 24"	1'	Sun
<i>Hosta fortunei</i>	Plantain Lily	6 - 3"	12 - 18"	Sun/Shade
<i>Hypericum calycinum</i>	Creeping St. Johnswort	12 - 15"	creeping	All
<i>Iberis sempervirens</i>	Evergreen Candytuft	6 - 12"	9 - 12"	Sun
<i>Juniperus chinensis</i> 'Seaspray'	Seaspray Juniper	12"	3' - 6'	Sun/Psun
<i>J. horizontalis</i> 'Blue Chip'	Blue Chip	12"	3' - 6'	Sun/Psun
<i>J. horizontalis</i> 'Wiltonii'	Blue Rug Juniper	4"	3' - 6'	Sun/Psun
<i>J. sabina</i> 'Broadmoor'	Broadmoor Juniper	14"	3' - 6'	Sun/Psun
<i>J. sabina</i> 'Buffalo'	Buffalo Juniper	8" - 12"	3' - 6'	Sun/Psun
<i>Lamium maculatum</i> 'Beacon Hill'	Dead Nettle	6 - 8"	8 - 12"	Shade

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Botanical Name	Common Name	Height	Spacing	Sun/Shade
<i>Lavendula angustifolia</i> 'Hidcote'	Lavender	12"	1' - 2'	Sun
<i>Liriope muscari</i>	Blue Lilyturf	12"	4 - 6"	
<i>L. spicata</i>	Creeping Lilyturf	9"	4 - 6"	
<i>Lobularia maritima</i>	Sweet Alyssum	2 - 6"	6-12"	Sun/Psun
<i>Lonicera japonica</i> 'Halliana', 'Purpurea'	Halls Honeysuckle, Purple-Leafed	18 - 24"	3' +	
<i>Lysimachia nummularia</i>	Moneywort, Creeping Jenny	1"	12 - 18"	Shade
<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i> 'compacta'	Dwarf Oregon Grape	1' - 3'	creeping	Psun/Shade
<i>M. repens</i>	Creeping Mahonia	1' - 3'	creeping	Sun/Psun
<i>Mentha requienii</i>	Creeping Mint	1 - 3"	6"	Sun/Psun
<i>Muscari armeniacum</i>	Grape Hyacinth	4 - 8"	4 - 8"	Sun
<i>Myrrhis odorata</i>	Sweet Cicely, Anise	6" - 3'	1'	Shade
<i>Nandina domestica</i> 'Harbour Dwarf'	Heavenly Bamboo	18" - 3'	1' - 4'	All
<i>N. d.</i> 'Nana compacta'	Dwarf Heavenly Bamboo	12"	1' - 4'	All
<i>Nepeta faassenii</i>	Catmint	1' - 2'	12 - 18"	Sun
<i>Ophiopogon japonicus</i>	Mondo Grass	12"	6 - 8"	Sun/Psun
<i>Pachysandra terminalis</i>	Japanese Spurge	6 - 10"	6 - 12"	Shade
<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	Virginia Creeper	10 - 12"	creeping	All
<i>Paxistima canbyi</i>	Mountain Lover	9" - 12"		Psun
<i>Phlox subulata</i>	Moss Phlox, Creeping Phlox	4 - 6"	12"	Sun
<i>Phyla nodiflora</i> *	Creeping Lippa	2 - 6"	seed in	Shade
<i>Potentilla tabernaemontanii</i>	Spring Cinquefoil	3 - 6"	12"	Sun
<i>Rosa wichuraina</i>	Memorial Rose	3 - 12"	3' - 6'	Sun/Psun
<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i> 'Prostratus'	Dwarf Rosemary	2'	2'	Sun
<i>Sagina subulata</i>	Pearlwort, Scotch Moss	2 - 4"	6 - 10"	Sun/Psun
<i>Santolina chamaecyparissus</i>	Lavender Cotton	18 - 24"	3'	Sun
<i>Saponaria ocymoides</i>	Soapwort	1"	24"	Sun
<i>Sedum</i> sp.	Stoncrop, Dragonsblood	2 - 12"	8 - 12"	Sun
<i>Sempervivum tectorum</i>	Hen and Chicks	2 - 4"	6 - 12"	Sun/Psun
<i>Stachys byzantina</i>	Lamb's Ears	18"	12 - 18"	Sun/Psun

*Southern New Mexico only.

Key:

Sun: Does best in a sunny location.

Psun: Does best in filtered sunlight (part sun and part shade).

Shade: Does best in a shady location.

All: Plant will do fine in either sunny or shady location.

