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# Xeriscaping—Groundcovers

## ALTERNATIVE TO A TRADITIONAL BLUEGRASS LAWN



Homeowners often surround their houses with carpets of bluegrass. Bluegrass is not only beautiful it is unsurpassed for handling foot traffic of children and pets. However, in Colorado's high, dry climate, bluegrass requires at least 24 inches of water in addition to the 13 inches of rain Colorado usually receives during the growing season! In areas that will receive less traffic, consider

some groundcover alternatives that will be attractive and hardy and use less water than bluegrass.

### STEPS TO ESTABLISHING AND CARING FOR GROUND COVERS

#### STEP 1 — PREPARE THE SOIL

Proper soil preparation is essential for establishing groundcovers. Till 3 to 5 cubic yards of organic material such as aged manure or compost into every 1000 square feet to be planted. This will increase the water retention capabilities of the soil and will provide additional nutrients for plants. Then, rake level and firm the surface of the soil.

#### STEP 2 — PLANT

Groundcovers will establish more quickly if the soil is slightly moist when planted. Plant the individual

groundcover plants (from 2 inch pots) 12 inches apart; or if faster cover is desired, plant 8 inches apart. One flat of groundcovers in 2 inch pots covers approximately 40 to 50 square feet .

#### STEP 3 — MULCH

Mulch groundcovers with one inch of fine pea gravel (often sold as 3/8 minus pea gravel). A fine organic mulch can also be used, but small-leaved, low-growing plants such as creeping veronica and creeping thyme will spread more quickly in gravel mulch.

#### STEP 4 — MAINTAIN

After planting, check the plants frequently for wilt, and water as needed. The groundcovers listed on the back thrive on dry conditions after establishment, which usually takes about 6 weeks. Plants are established when they no longer pop out of the ground by gently tugging their leaves. Keep the area well weeded during the establishment period. After the groundcover plants knit together, they will effectively choke out most weeds.

(Occasional weeding will still be necessary.) Water regularly during warm weather after establishment. Usually, once every 7 to 10 days is sufficient, but this may vary depending on soil and weather conditions. Remember to water at least once a month during the winter, especially if there has been little precipitation.



## CHOOSING GROUND COVER PLANTS

Many water-conscious homeowners who do not need bluegrass are using low-growing, xeric groundcovers as an alternative to bluegrass lawns. Although these groundcovers do not tolerate foot traffic as well as bluegrass, many will recover satisfactorily from light foot traffic. In areas receiving heavy foot traffic, steppingstones placed through the groundcovers provide an attractive solution.

Choose groundcovers that will thrive in the conditions of the site where they will be growing. Consider exposure (sun and shade), plant height/width as well as color, bloom period, and general appearance. Also consider planting individual types in groups of threes, fives and sevens to create sweeps of color, which is visually more pleasing than randomly planting one here and there. Finally, consider using taller, less foot-traffic tolerant groundcover along the edges of patios and paths.

## SHORT (UNDER 3 INCHES) GROUNDCOVERS FOR LIGHT FOOT TRAFFIC AREAS

GROUND COVER	COMMENTS
<b>Pussytoes</b> <i>Antennaria dioica</i>	Adapts to sun or shade but needs more water in sun. Mat of silvery green leaves under 1/2 inch high. Flowers in early spring. Slightly taller, fuzzy flowers look like cat's paw.
<b>Lemon Thyme</b> <i>Thymus 'Doone Valley'</i>	Needs Sun. Beautiful variegated foliage about 2 inches high. Lemon scent when stepped on. Pink flowers in summer.
<b>Miniature Thyme</b> <i>Thymus minus</i>	One inch high sun lover. Very tiny leaves pour themselves between and over rocks.
<b>Pink Chintz Thyme</b> <i>Thymus praecox 'Pink Chintz'</i>	Another sun loving low-grower with pink flowers in late spring. Leaves dark green.
<b>Red Flowered Thyme</b> <i>Thymus praecox coccineus</i>	Low growing sun lover with red flowers in mid-summer. Taller than most thyme, 3".
<b>Soft Landing Thyme</b> <i>Thymus 'Soft Landing'</i>	Very fast-growing. cascading gray-green thyme that flowers heavily in late spring. If trimmed after the first bloom, a second bloom may occur in late summer. Very hardy in full sun, which may be a good characteristic for tough sites. May be as tough as wooly thyme. Twiggy appearance in winter.
<b>White Moss Thyme</b> <i>Thymus 'White Moss'</i>	Bright green foliage with white flowers in early summer.
<b>Wooly Thyme</b> <i>Thymus pseudolanuginosus</i>	The toughest thyme of them all. Less than one inch high, and exceedingly drought tolerant. Adapts to sun or part sun. Fuzzy gray-green leaves turn purple in winter. Lavender flowers are infrequent.
<b>New Century Veronica</b> <i>Veronica 'New Century'</i>	Two inches high, mounding hybrid of Wooly and Turkish Veronica. Profuse blue flowers in early spring on dark, evergreen foliage.
<b>Turkish Veronica</b> <i>Veronica liwanensis</i>	Grows in sun or part shade. Less than two inches high. Small, shiny dark green leaves completely covered with tiny blue flowers. Very early and long blooming.
<b>Wooly Veronica</b> <i>Veronica pectinata</i>	Gray-green foliage on two inch high plant with light blue flowers in spring followed by repeat (although much sparser) bloom in summer.

## TALLER (OVER 3 INCHES) XERIC GROUNDCOVERS THAT WILL NOT TOLERATE FOOT TRAFFIC

<b>Bugle Weed</b> <i>Ajuga reptans</i>	<b>Ground Cover Sedums</b> <i>Sedum kamchaticum</i> and <i>S. spurium</i>	<b>Purple Ice Plant</b> <i>Delosperma cooperi</i>
<b>Creeping Baby's Breath</b> <i>Gypsophila repens</i>	<b>Hardy Yellow Ice Plant</b> <i>Delosperma nubigenum</i>	<b>Snow in Summer</b> <i>Cerastium tomentosum</i>
<b>Creeping Phlox</b> <i>Phlox subulata</i>	<b>Lamb's Ear</b> <i>Stachys lanata</i>	<b>Snow on the Mountain</b> <i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>
<b>Dalmatian Bellflower</b> <i>Campanula portenschlagiana</i>	<b>Partridge Feather</b> <i>Tanacetum densum</i>	<b>Soapwort</b> <i>Saponaria ocymoides</i>
<b>Dead Nettle</b> <i>Lamium maculatum</i>	<b>Periwinkle</b> <i>Vinca minor</i>	<b>Sweet Woodruff</b> <i>Galium odoratum</i>
	<b>Pine Leaf Penstemon</b> <i>Penstemon pinifolius</i>	<b>Wild Fuschia</b> <i>Zauschneria garrettii</i>
		<b>Winecups</b> <i>Callirhoe involucrata</i>

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