



Groundcovers Make Landscape Less Thirsty

If your lawn looks lean and your landscape limp during hot, dry weather and you view your sprinkler as a life support system, it's time to reassess your landscape.

University of Georgia horticulturists say with careful planning and plant selection, you can develop a quality landscape that requires little to no water beyond what Mother Nature provides.

Drought-tolerant ground cover is a great alternative for areas that require routine watering. Many are economical, easy to establish and provide years of low-maintenance beauty.

For hot, dry, sunny sites, consider one of the horizontal or creeping junipers. Junipers are tough once established and can survive long periods of limited rainfall.

Other great choices for dry, sunny sites include yarrow, hardy ice plant, wintercreeper euonymus, Carolina jessamine, day lily, liriope, mondo grass, sedum, trumpet creeper, creeping raspberry, Virginia creeper and Asiatic jasmine.

For shady, dry sites, consider English ivy, periwinkle, Japanese pachysandra or creeping lily turf.

When planting ground cover under trees, UGA experts say try not to disturb the tree roots any more than necessary. If grass is growing under the tree, spray it with Roundup. Wait a few hours for it to dry on the foliage, then dig planting holes carefully through the turf. The holes should be just large enough to put the plant in place. Now add mulch.

Proper spacing is important when planting ground covers so the plants don't overgrow their neighbors and become a maintenance problem. Space most ground covers about 18 inches to 2 feet apart in most landscape situations. Many of the creeping junipers will spread 6 feet in all directions. Plant them no closer than 2 feet apart.

An economical way to establish ground covers is to buy small plants grown in cell-packs or 2-inch pots. Some ground-cover suppliers will also ship some types of ground covers bare-root for next-day planting. Check with your local nursery about the availability of liner plants.

Although ground covers help reduce water use in the long run, they will need to be watered regularly, just like other plants, during establishment.

About six weeks after planting, give a tug on a few of the plants to see if they feel well rooted. If so, begin to gradually wean them off water and let Mother Nature take over irrigation duty.

Source:

Gary Wade

University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Cooperative Extension