



The Bottom Line on Ground Covers

Ground covers are low-growing perennials that have many uses. Ajuga and vinca add color and life to shady areas...pachysandra will quickly form a ring of greenery around trees... crown vetch helps to control erosion...and many ground covers are used simply to add texture to the landscape. Installing ground cover takes a bit of planning, but once established, most varieties are low maintenance.

What You'll Need.

- Shovel
- Rake
- Trowel
- Hose & sprinkler
- Ground cover plants
- [TROY-BILT® tiller](#)
- Mulch



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Select the right ground cover.

It's important, of course, to select the right type of plant for your needs. Here is a short list of possibilities for several planting situations. Your local garden center or county extension office can give you more complete information about suitable plants for your region.

Shady Areas

Ajuga
English Ivy
Euonymus
Lily-of-the-Valley
Pachysandra
Sweet Woodruff
Vinca

Full Sun

Blue Fescue
Creeping Juniper
Lavender
Mint
Moss Verbena
Sage
Sedum
Speedwell

Erosion Control

Crown Vetch
Ivies - various
Liriope
Mondo Grass
Vinca

Drought Tolerant

Ice Plant
Sedum
Moss Verbena



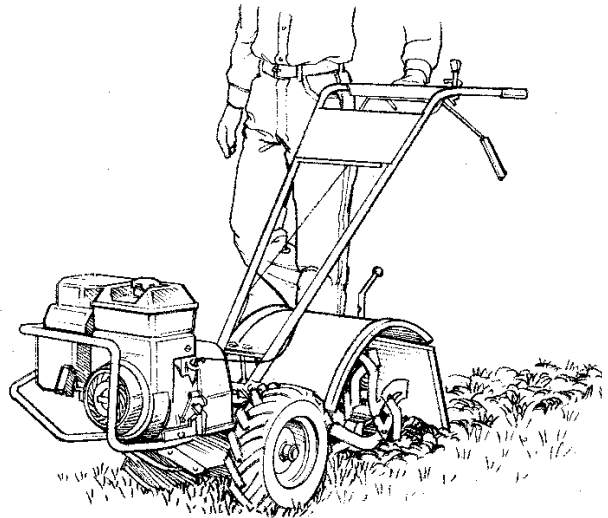
Prepare the soil.

The key to healthy ground cover is soil preparation. Most of these plants spread by offshoots or runners, and they will fill in more quickly if the soil is well-aerated, well-drained and amended with organic matter.

This is simple to do if you use your [TROY-BILT® tiller](#). You don't even have to remove the sod in a new garden location. Just start with your tiller set at the shallowest depth, and go over the ground several times, tilling under the grass and roots. Continue to till, lowering the tiller until you are tilling at full depth. Till thoroughly. Rake out rocks and other debris.

If possible, let the ground stand for several days so that the grass residue starts to decompose. Then add organic matter such as peat moss, shredded leaves or garden compost a few inches deep. Till the organic matter into the soil with your tiller at full depth. Go over the ground several times until you have created a planting bed full of loose, crumbly soil.

Rake to make the surface of the bed even. If you are able to let the soil sit for a day, water the bed to help settle the soil and to make sure the soil is moist but not muddy when you plant.



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STEP 3 Make a plan.

You will be planting with the mature plant size in mind. Check the directions on the plant tags from your nursery, but in general plants will be spaced 8–18 inches apart in every direction. The proper spacing may seem very open, but remember that most ground covers are fairly (or very!) aggressive, and they will fill in nicely after a year or two.

Plan a grid so that plants will be placed in a staggered pattern at the proper distance from one another. Mark the bed with small stakes or sticks.

Use the following table to estimate how many plants you will need to cover your planting area.

SPACING	48 plants	64 plants	100 plants
8 inches	18 sq. feet	24 sq. feet	38 sq. feet
12 inches	41 sq. feet	55 sq. feet	86 sq. feet
18 inches	92 sq. feet	123 sq. feet	192 sq. feet

STEP 4 Get digging.

Dig your planting holes with a trowel. The holes should be about 1 1/2 times larger than the root balls of the plants. If you are planting on a steep slope where erosion is a threat, make a small “terrace” for each plant, with a low spot behind the hole to catch water.



STEP 5 Water before you plant.

Before you even remove the plants from their flats or containers, lightly water them in place. This moistens the roots and helps the plants come out of the containers more easily. Then add some water to each empty hole to moisten the soil.

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STEP 6 Put them in their place.

Gently ease each plant out of its container—avoid pulling on leaves and stems. Gently loosen and spread out the roots with your fingers. Cut through the roots of potbound plants with a trowel. This will encourage root growth out and away from the main plant.

Set each plant in a hole with the leafy crown at or just above the soil level. Carefully fill in the planting holes, and firm the soil lightly around the roots. Leave a slight depression in the soil around each plant to help hold water.

STEP 7 Water them in.

Water well with a sprinkler to settle the soil. Add additional soil after watering if necessary to keep the soil surface at about the level of the plant crown.

STEP 8 Add mulch.

Until your ground cover begins to fill in, you will probably want to use mulch to cover the bare soil between plants. Mulch also helps to reduce weeds, conserve moisture and keep the roots of your new plants insulated. Organic mulch such as aged wood chips, leaf mold or compost has the added benefit of providing nutrients to your young plants.

Mulch to a depth of 2 to 3 inches. Keep the mulch a few inches away from the crown of each plant.

STEP 9 Early maintenance.

Water your ground cover regularly until the plants are well established. Weed around plants when necessary. Apply a general fertilizer in late summer of the first year. By year two, you won't have to worry about anything but occasional weeding and possibly trimming your healthy new landscape addition!

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