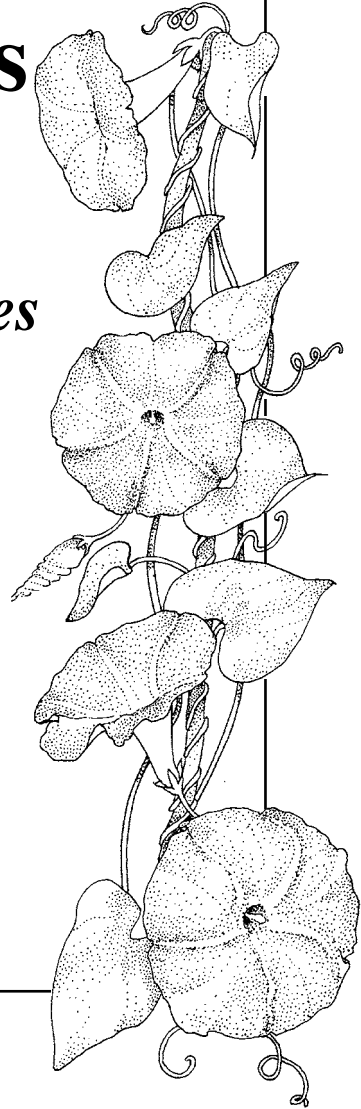
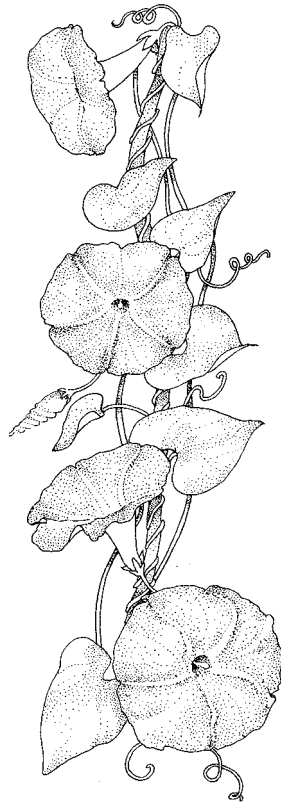


Ground Covers and Vines

*for
Louisiana
Landscapes*







Ground Covers and Vines

Ground covers and vines are important in Louisiana landscapes. This publication provides information on landscape uses, cultural practices and selection of ground covers and vines.

Landscape Uses

Ground covers are defined as living plants or non-living materials used to cover areas. In general, plant-related ground covers have a creeping or prostrate growth habit and grow no taller than 2 feet. A good ground cover should be evergreen and provide a permanent covering. Functions of a ground cover in the landscape would include:

- control traffic without affecting landscape views
- reduce lawn maintenance
- control erosion on a sloping area
- reduce weed problems
- provide a living “mulch”
- reduce glare and lower soil temperatures during extreme heat
- fill odd, irregularly shaped areas

To establish a certain instant quality to a landscape, consider ground covers. Effects that cannot be achieved with turfgrass or other plantings are possible with ground covers. Ground covers provide variation in plant height, texture and color. They also give definition to ground patterns and are often the most significant unifying element in the total landscape planting.

Vines offer an interesting variation in plant form. They are valuable in the landscape for their practical and aesthetic qualities. Vines are defined as woody or herbaceous plants that require support for proper growth and development. Vines can be annuals or perennials, evergreen or deciduous, flowering or non-flowering, or may fit other plant characteristics. The practical value of vines is in the shade and privacy they can provide. To be effective, vines need to be part of an overall landscape plan.

Selection

When selecting a ground cover, consider the intended use and the growing conditions. What type of planting is needed to satisfy the aesthetic purpose of the design? Match the ground cover to the planting site by examining such factors as

sun exposure, drainage patterns, soil type, hardiness and maintenance requirement desired. Some ground covers will require little or no care after planting, and others will need attention frequently. Few ground covers are maintenance free although it is the perception that maintenance is reduced when compared to turf areas.

It's important to select a ground cover that will cover the ground surface within a reasonable period. A planting should provide complete cover within one good growing season. If a longer period is required, this indicates an improper choice was made, the spacings between plants were too large at planting or disease, insect or other cultural practices (poor drainage, sun exposure) presented problems.

Since large numbers of small, individual plants are usually required, one problem limiting the use of ground covers in landscapes may be installation cost. A well-prepared planting bed is essential, but it can be costly and time-consuming. Weed control in a newly planted ground cover bed can likewise be difficult and labor intensive.

When selecting vines, review the needs of the area and select the plants best suited to that site. Vines are useful in a variety of areas. Some do quite well when planted on an arbor to provide shade over a patio. Training some vines to grow against a wall and to "frame" a doorway is another recommended use. Other uses of vines include relieving a monotonous view, training on a fence, forming a cascade of flowers on a steep bank, reducing erosion and replacing turfgrass areas in an attempt to reduce maintenance (similar to ground covers). In addition, vines offer these landscape benefits:

- provide diverse visual quality
- provide rich foliage texture and decorative growth habits
- many have fragrant and colorful blossoms

Vines are usually divided into three groups. Boston ivy and English ivy attach to a support structure by using root-like appendages along their stems. Clematis and grapes attach to a support structure using tendrils or leaf-like appendages that act as tendrils. Bittersweet and wisteria go up a support structure by climbing. An interesting note is that some of these climbing vines grow clockwise (example: bittersweet), while others grow counterclockwise (example: honeysuckle). Make sure any structure used for vines can withstand their vigorous growth.

Cultural Practices

Planting

Ground covers may be planted at anytime of the year provided they are container-grown plants. It's best to plant in the fall. The second best time to plant is late winter/early spring. This gives the ground cover a full growing season to properly establish. If you're planting in summer or fall, considerable supplemental irrigation may be needed. Vines should also be planted in the fall through spring. Avoid summer plantings. Container-grown plants are preferred when planting ground covers and vines. Be sure not to damage the root system.

Prepare the planting site for the ground covers or vines several weeks before obtaining the plants. Spade or work up the area to be planted to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. Organic matter can be added to a larger bed area. Incorporate this material (pine bark, compost, etc.) into the existing soil. If the soil being worked with is a clay soil, which most are in Louisiana, add sand in addition to the organic matter. Add lime and fertilize based on the results of a soil test. Most ground covers and vines do best in a pH range of 5.5-6.5, which is considered slightly acid.

Spacing between plants depends on the species selected. Small ground cover plants are usually spaced 6 to 8 inches apart. This includes plants growing in 3- to 4-inch containers. Wider spacings can be used for plants growing in quart, trade-gallon or full-gallon containers. If small shrubs are being used as ground covers (this includes junipers and azaleas), use a 3- to 4-foot spacing between plants. Randomly spacing ground cover plants results in heavily covered areas and lightly covered areas rather than a desirable uniform appearance. Planting closer than optimum results in extremely fast covering, but plants will probably become overgrown. The table indicates the amount of area that 100 plants will cover based on a given spacing. When spacing, measure plants from center to center.

| Planting Distance (inches) | Area Covered by 100 Plants (ft²) |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 4 | 11 |
| 6 | 25 |
| 8 | 44 |
| 10 | 70 |
| 12 | 100 |
| 15 | 156 |
| 18 | 225 |
| 24 | 400 |
| 36 | 900 |
| 48 | 1600 |

Vines are usually planted in individual planting holes instead of in masses like ground covers. At planting, prune off any damaged or dead shoots. If the plant is bare-root (more common for vines than other plants), spread the roots out in a natural position. The individual hole for ground covers and vines should be about one-third to one-half larger than the root ball of the plant to be placed in the hole.

After planting, mulch the individual plant or landscape bed area. Excellent mulches are pine straw, pine bark mulch, pine bark nuggets, cypress shaving and leaves. Thoroughly irrigate after planting. It's better to water thoroughly after planting than to provide frequent light sprinklings.

Fertilization

For proper establishment and rapid cover of an area, ground covers need regular fertilization for the first season after planting. If planted in fall through early spring, start a fertilization program in early spring. The fertilizer recommendation for proper establishment is to apply 1 to 2 lbs. of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. of landscape bed area in early spring and again in early summer. This is equivalent to 13-26 lbs. of 8-8-8 or 8-16 lbs. of 13-13-13 per 1000 sq. ft. After establishment and complete coverage, apply fertilizer annually at the rate of 1 lb. of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft.

Fertilize vines once a year after establishment. They typically don't need large amounts of fertilizer to perform optimally. The amount to apply will depend on the size and vigor of the plant, soil fertility and the amount of organic matter present. For small vines, fertilizer can be broadcast around the base of the plant. For larger vines, place fertilizer in holes around the base of the vine as is recommended in shade tree fertilization.

Pruning

Ground covers should be kept confined to the areas intended for their use by occasional pruning. The amount of pruning is species related. Some plants, such as Asian jasmine, grow vigorously and need to be maintained under a higher pruning regime than slower-growing species. The intended purpose is to establish clear, sharp contrasts between areas. Untrimmed and overgrown plants destroy the neat appearance of most developments and serve no useful purpose in the planting design. Selective pruning also may be required to remove weak, diseased or unsightly growth and to keep plants more vigorous.

Vines grown for ornamental purposes require little pruning except to keep them in the area where they are intended to grow. Prune flowering vines shortly after they have flowered. Avoid pruning in late summer and fall. To avoid cutting off live wood, prune cold-injured vines in the spring after growth starts. For tender vines that are killed to the ground in winter, severe pruning is done after the first killing frost.



Recommended Ground Covers

| Species | Mature Size (height & spread) | Flowering Characteristics | Landscape Value and Culture |
|---|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Ajuga (<i>Ajuga reptans</i>) | 3" x 6-12" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spring blooms • purple flowers • flower spikes 6" tall | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fertile, well-drained soil • filtered sunlight or shade • non-aggressive • best for small areas |
| Ardisia (<i>Ardisia japonica</i>) | 1' x 1' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blooms summer-fall • pinkish white flowers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excellent for Louisiana • partial to full shade • spreads by underground runners • slow establishment rate |
| Aspidistra (<i>Aspidistra elaitor</i>) | 2-3' height | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • purple flowers • flowers at ground level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excellent for heavy shade • low maintenance, pest free • clumpy growth habit; • very site adapted if full sun avoided |
| Dwarf Azalea (<i>Rhododendron spp.</i>) | 4' x 3' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • many colors available • spring flowering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • partial shade • dwarf shrub for ground cover • acid soil pH (5.0-5.5) • some pest problems |
| Cotoneaster (<i>Cotoneaster horizontalis</i>) | 3' x 4' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • white to pink flowers • blooms mid-to-late spring • no major landscape value | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoid in south Louisiana • needs sun and alkaline soils • irregular, sprawling growth • scarlet fruit in fall |
| Holly Leaf Fern (<i>Cyrtomium falcatum</i>) | 2-3' height | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no flowers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prefers shade to partial sun • amend soil with organic matter • dense, mounding clumps • excellent understory plant |
| Spreading Euonymus (<i>Euonymus fortunei</i>) | 4-6" x 5' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • green to white flowers • blooms on old plants • no major landscape value | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shrub-like ground cover • full sun to partial shade • orange-red fruit clusters • autumn foliage color |
| Dwarf Gardenia (<i>Gardenia jasminoides</i>) | 2' x 2' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • white flowers • highly fragrant • May/June | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dwarf shrub for ground cover • partial shade recommended • acid soil pH (5.0-5.5) • considerable pest problems |

Recommended Ground Covers

| Species | Mature Size (height & spread) | Flowering Characteristics | Landscape Value and Culture |
|--|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Algerian Ivy (<i>Hedera canariensis</i>) | 8-10" height | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no major significance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • well-drained soil in shade • limited cold hardiness • black fruit on old plants • adapted for vine use also |
| English Ivy (<i>Hedera helix</i>) | 6-12" height | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • flowering is insignificant, occurs only on mature plants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evergreen adapted to shade • climbs by aerial root |
| Hosta (<i>Hosta spp.</i>) | 12-18" height | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • white, blue, lilac flowers • flower stalks above foliage • summer & autumn | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cool, moist environment needed • semi-shade is best • poor performance in S. La. |
| Asian Jasmine (<i>Trachelospermum asiaticum</i>) | 12 - 18" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does not flower | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excellent ground cover • sun and shade • several dwarf cultivars available |
| Juniper (<i>Juniperus horizontalis</i>) | 2' x 4' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no major landscape value | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full sun on well-drained sites • short-lived in Deep South • many cultivars available • blue-green fruit on female plants |
| Liriope (<i>Liriope muscari</i>) | 1-2' height | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • violet, white or pink flowers • extend above foliage • summer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excellent ground cover • partial sun to shade • tolerates full sun • many cultivars now available |
| Mondo Grass (<i>Ophiopogon japonicus</i>) | 6-12" height | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small lilac flowers • concealed by foliage • no major landscape value | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • excellent ground cover • a border plant for Louisiana • partial sun to shade • also called monkey grass • confused with <i>Liriope</i> |
| Plumbago (<i>Plumbago auriculata</i>) | 3' x 5' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blue flowers • phlox-like flowers • spring-fall | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not cold hardy in north La. • needs sun for best flowering • flowers produced on current season's growth |



Recommended Vines

| Species | Mature Size (height) | Flowering Characteristics | Landscape Value and Culture |
|--|----------------------|---|--|
| Cross Vine (<i>Bignonia capreolata</i>) | 50' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • red flowers with red and yellow interiors • March to summer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • semi-evergreen woody vine • grows to top of large trees • fast growth • Tangerine Beauty is popular variety |
| Bouganvillea (<i>Bouganvillea spp.</i>) | 20' - 30' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bracts in shades of red, orange and pink • intensive colors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • needs full sun • not cold hardy (tropical) • stress to improve flowering |
| Trumpet Vine (<i>Campsis radicans</i>) | 20' - 30' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • orange-scarlet flowers • summer to autumn • no flowers in shade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sun or shade adaptable • attracts hummingbirds • requires support (heavy growth) |
| Clematis (<i>Clematis spp.</i>) | 10' - 20' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • star-shaped flowers • many colors available • spring, summer and autumn | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • give southern exposure • neutral to slightly alkaline soil • needs sun to flower well |
| Air Potato (<i>Dioscorea spp.</i>) | 10' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bear potatoes on stem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fast grower for trellises • store potatoes in winter and plant next spring • usually come back from root system |
| Hyacinth Bean (<i>Dolichos lablab</i>) | 15' - 30' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • purple and white flowers • spring through autumn | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pea family • annual fast grower • great for south Louisiana • full sun with good drainage |
| Climbing Fig (<i>Ficus pumila</i>) | 60' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no major landscape value | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clinging evergreen vine • excellent wall covering • may be damaged by cold in north Louisiana |
| Carolina Jasmine (<i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i>) | 20' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bright yellow flowers • heaviest flowering-early spring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • needs sun to flower well • fast growth • excellent vine for Louisiana • annual pruning necessary |

Recommended Vines

| Species | Mature Size (height) | Flowering Characteristics | Landscape Value and Culture |
|---|----------------------|--|--|
| Climbing Hydrangea (<i>Hydrangea petiolaris</i>) | 10' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • white flowers • early spring | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deciduous • slow to start climbing • great plant for attaching to walls |
| Morningglory (<i>Ipomeae spp.</i>) | 30' - 40' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funnel-shaped purple, blue, white flowers • open in morning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ornamental or weed? • fast growing annual • twining vine with coarse foliage • easy to grow |
| Trumpet Honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera sempervirens</i>) | 50' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scarlet-orange flowers with yellow centers • spring and summer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prefers slightly alkaline soil • attracts hummingbirds and butterflies • arbor, fence or trellis cover |
| Virginia Creeper (<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>) | 50' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no major landscape value | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • native, deciduous • reddish-yellow foliage in autumn • dark blue fruit (non-edible) |
| Maypop (<i>Passiflora incarnata</i>) | 15 - 20' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pink, lavender flowers • midsummer to autumn • open in day, close at night | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abundant in lower south • very site adapted • full sun for flowering |
| Passion Vine (<i>Passiflora coccinea</i>) | 15 - 20' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scarlet red flowers • very showy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less cold hardy than maypop • provide full sun • larger flowers than maypop |
| Mirliton (<i>Sechium edule</i>) | 10' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • male and female flowers on same plant • fruit in September | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vegetable pear • ornamental vegetable vine • adapted across Louisiana |
| Potato Vine (<i>Solanum jasminoides</i>) | 20' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blue white flower • summer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sun or partial shade • good for trellis or fence • evergreen |
| Brazilian Nightshade (<i>Solanum seaforthianum</i>) | 10' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lilac flowers star-shaped * summer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • does well in New Orleans • not cold hardy • clusters of pea-sized yellow berries |

Recommended Vines

| Species | Mature Size (height) | Flowering Characteristics | Landscape Value and Culture |
|--|----------------------|---|---|
| Skyflower (<i>Thunbergia grandiflora</i>) | 10' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • numerous blue flowers • bell-shaped • summer to autumn • white flower variety is available | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • perennial, usually treated as annual • rapid grower • grow on buildings, arbors |
| Confederate Jasmine (<i>Trachelospermum jasminoides</i>) | 20' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creamy-white flowers • star-shaped • late spring to summer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • full sun to partial shade • fragrant vine • trellis, arbor, fences • fast growth |
| Wisteria (<i>Wisteria spp.</i>) | 25 - 30' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blue violet and white flowers • spring to early summer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • woody vine • deciduous usually, but evergreen variety now available • vigorous, long-lived • full sun to partial shade |





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