

# Groundcovers and Vines in Landscaping

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Delphine Daugherty

Groundcovers such as ivy and Mondo grass are beautiful and practical additions to the home landscape, adding texture and soil stabilization.

One can only wonder how many thousands of liriopie plants there are in the Tallahassee/Big Bend area! One of the most popular ground covers, it adorns practically every yard. The prolific border plant grows from Virginia to Texas and parts of the Southwest. Ground covers are like an artist's last touch to a landscape. Or let's say, to "accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative", such as sprucing up a fence with a climbing vine or covering bare spots or eroded areas with a spreading ground cover.

Garden shops and nurseries usually stock a variety of ground covers. Here are some typical choices:

*Liriopi Liriopi mucari*: An attractive clumpy plant that does well in shade, making it a good choice for planting underneath large trees where grass won't grow. Also excellent for border purposes, and will tolerate partial sun and most growing conditions. In spring, it puts out purplish spikes of flowers that remind one of grape popsicles, later bearing small black berries in early fall. As the plants spread they can be propagated by dividing the clumps.

Mondo (or monkey grass) *Ophiopogon japonicas*: Similar to liriopie except plants are smaller with thinner leaves. Plants make a dense mat that can be mowed every third year or so in late fall to create a carpet-like look. It does not like sun, but is an excellent choice for underneath trees.

Asian jasmine *Trachelospermum asiaticum*: Will tolerate full sun or shade. Dark green leathery foliage has thin vining stems. This plant does not flower, but the leaves are very attractive and the plantings will eventually become dense and deep (up to 15 inches).

Confederate jasmine *Trachelospermum jasminoide:s* A very popular flowering vine that puts out highly fragrant white star-shaped flowers in the spring. The sweet aroma can permeate a neighborhood. It's wonderful for fences, trellises, or anyplace one might want a climbing vine. Sun or partial shade will suit this plant. Some help will be needed in encouraging the tendrils to follow a certain path. When starting a young plant, so that it is able to grow into an attractive mass, simply move tendrils into desired spots.

English ivy *Hedera helix*: This is a hearty vine that needs no help in climbing. If not

controlled,

it will spread everywhere, but is very good in controlling erosion and makes a nice cover for under-plantings such as bulbs. It is best not to allow English ivy to climb trees, as the trees can

be damaged if too much sun is blocked out. English ivy grows best in shade.

**Blue rug juniper *Juniperus horizontalis*: 'Wiltoni'** An attractive juniper shrub that grows no higher than six inches. Its spreading branches grow up to six feet, reaching out to form a thick mat. The foliage is a nice contrast to lawn grass. It needs full sun.

**Partridgeberry *Mitchella repens*:** This Florida native has succulent looking leaves only three fourths of an inch in diameter, with tiny trumpet-shaped white flowers in spring and red berries in winter. This is not a ground cover with volume or thick mat and is known to be difficult to establish. I mention it because the tiny plant is such an attractive addition to a deep shaded area, usually volunteering in acidic soil with undisturbed high organic matter (perhaps the wood nymphs and trolls plant them). So, if you have a woody situation and notice these plants, look at your yard as special for the nice addition.

There are many more ground covers to consider such as many ferns, periwinkle, coontie, lantana, dwarf yaupon, or daylilies, just to name a few. An excellent source of information is the book "Southern Plants for Landscape Design" by Neil Odenwald and James Turner. You may also use the University of Florida IFAS Extension web site at [edis.ifas.ufl.edu](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu) For more information about gardening in our area, visit the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

*Delphine Daugherty is a Master Gardener volunteer and a member of the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension Advisory Committee. [Back]*