

Asiatic Jasmine Makes a Good Groundcover But It Must Be Maintained



The author's Asiatic jasmine groundcover planting is maintained so that it looks almost like a lawn.

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Does anyone remember the three tropical storms Alberto, Beryl, and the infamous "unnamed storm" of 1994? These storms seemed to drop yards, not inches, of rain on Leon, Gadsden, and Wakulla counties, making rowboats the mode of transportation in many areas. Huge trees tipped over. Gravel driveways washed away, including ours.

Our newly built house sat on such a slope such that every storm managed to erode away more of the landscape, washing topsoil down into the wetlands. So we decided we had to plant a groundcover that would put a stop to the erosion. We did not want to plant a lawn grass. We didn't want to spend our time mowing at least once a week, spending \$2500+ on a mower, and spending our spare time in the blazing hot summer sun when there are lots more fun things to do. We prefer sipping a julep in a rocker on the porch under the paddle fan, watching something good on TV.

After some research, we settled on Asiatic jasmine as our groundcover. It is an excellent, tough, relatively disease-free groundcover. It takes its time to get established (about two years), but after that, you'll have a beautiful groundcover that is drought, insect and disease resistant. It will grow in sun or shade. It's not a bit fussy.

BUT, as Paul Harvey says, "Here's the rest of the story." Asiatic jasmine will need some maintenance to keep it under control. While not a strong vertical climber, Asiatic jasmine will still try to climb trees, so every once in a while I have to trim around them. Even more so, Asiatic jasmine spreads horizontally, vigorously spreading across walks and paths. So, about every two months I use my trusty weed whacker to trim along borders and keep the encroachment down. I also mow the planting with my mower blade set high, at about 5 ½ inches. The newly mown color of the groundcover is a darker green. As soon as the new growth comes in it will be a bright, lovely shade of almost neon green.

The University of Florida Mid-Florida Research & Education Center website, <http://mrec.ifas.ufl.edu/faculty/rcb/Jasmine/introduction.htm>, gives more details about maintaining Asiatic jasmine. They say that though Asiatic jasmine does not have to be mowed, it is highly recommended that it be mowed once a year (with the mower set 3-4 inches high) as new growth begins to occur in late winter. Mowing limits the height of the groundcover and promotes a more uniform appearance. It also allows more air movement within the groundcover canopy, reducing the risk of disease development during extended rainy periods. Asiatic jasmines are somewhat susceptible to *Rhizoctonia* fungus if the canopy is dense, shaded, and kept wet through extended rain periods or frequent supplemental irrigation. Mowing will destroy most of the green foliage, but it will quickly return in a couple of weeks as buds break dormancy and grow.

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Without maintenance, Asiatic jasmine can become a problem. UF-IFAS Leon County Extension Agent, David Marshall says there are two questions he hears most frequently about Asiatic jasmine. The first, "What's killing it?" has to do with the planting getting too thick and getting the fungus disease. The second question, "How do I kill it?" has to do with people letting the jasmine get out of control. Both problems can be solved by routine maintenance.

Most people mow their lawns about once a week from April until November; 20 to 30 times. I mow three times a year. They water; I don't. They fertilize; I don't. They spray insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides. I don't. As for erosion problems... what erosion problems???

To see Asiatic Jasmine in action, go north on Gadsden from Tennessee Street (in the left lane) and look at the far left corner of the first street you cross... Virginia. It's impressive.

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