



◀ Ground cover solves landscaping trouble spots and minimizes garden maintenance.
▼ Iceplant and Sedum are examples of easy-to-grow plants that can cover your barren, weedy trouble spots with wondrous waves of flowers. ARA



Ground cover: The cure for ugly bare spots and landscaping challenges

ARA—Nearly every lawn or garden has one—a bare, ugly spot where nothing seems to grow well. Maybe the spot gets too much sun, or too much shade. Perhaps the soil is too sandy, rocky, or full of clay for most plants to survive in it. Maybe it's on a hill or slope where exposure to wind and water runoff make it uninhabitable for average plant life.

Whichever of these challenges is the source of your problem spot, chances are the cure is pretty universal: cover it up—quickly, inexpensively and permanently with flowering or lush, green ground cover.

Hardy, easy to grow, and aesthetically appealing ground cover fills

vacant spaces, solves landscaping trouble spots and minimizes garden maintenance. Ground cover can transform a dull, sparse space into a rich tapestry of textures, shapes, and continual colour. These plants can spruce up challenging spots under trees, accent transitional areas along paths and foundations, and intensify interest in open spaces. Plus, they deliver a stunning seasonal show of flowers and colours.

Ground cover is a cost-effective, fast way to deal with difficult trouble spots. It performs the job of mulch at a fraction of the cost, blocking weed growth, insulating soil, protecting more fragile plants, and adding vi-

sual appeal. Some ground covers even bolster nutrients for companion plants with more demanding nutritional needs.

Spring is the best time to plant ground covers, giving roots a chance to become established before conditions turn harsh. But before you decide on which varieties of these landscaping miracle-makers you'll plant, here are some ground cover guidelines:

Don't just plant the first ground cover that catches your eye. First, take stock of your problem area so you can select a ground cover that is appropriate for the spot. Some ground covers need sun, while oth-

ers thrive only in shade. Some prefer dry locations. Others require moist soil.

Assess the soil at the site. Is it sandy and dry? A lovely loam? Or wet, soggy clay? There's a ground cover for every soil condition, but you'll also need to test the acidity level of the soil. You may need to amend your soil to raise or lower its pH content, or add organic matter to modify its texture.

Hardy as they are, ground covers still require proper fertilizing, watering and weed control to maintain their attractiveness—just like any other plant. Newly planted areas will need special attention until they're well established.

Seed is the least expensive way to start ground cover. And planting ground cover seeds is some of the easiest sowing you'll ever do in your yard or garden. Ground cover seeds are typically much smaller and lighter than other plant seeds; often you'll get as many as 175,000 seeds in just 1 ounce. One way to make sowing even easier is to use a pre-mix of seeds and lime, like those offered by Outsidepride.com. The mix comes in a shaker bottle and

you simply sprinkle the seeds on the planting site. The lime in the mix improves the pH of acidic soils, adds valuable micronutrients and helps break down organic matter. The lime is also white, so it's easy to tell where you've spread the seed.

You can find a ground cover for virtually every soil situation—and to suit every landscaping preference. Outsidepride.com offers more than 50 different types of ground cover seed, from the luminous lavender and red of Magic Carpet creeping thyme and the baby blue of Forget-Me-Not to the gorgeous greens of Irish Moss and Kenilworth Ivy.

Best-sellers like creeping thyme offer homeowners a vibrant, versatile way to solve problems and accent their landscaping. Creeping thyme is a favourite for its tolerance of dry soil, low maintenance needs and ability to self-seed season after season.

To get ground covers started off on the right foot, plant them in spring so they have a chance to root well. Before long, your barren, weedy trouble spots will be gone, covered by wondrous waves of flowers and foliage.



These beautiful Easter eggs are coloured with dyes made from beets, onions, and blueberries. ROSALIND CREASY

Colour Easter eggs with natural dyes

From Mother Earth News

If you want to dye eggs using natural colours, all you need are three necessary ingredients: fresh red beets, yellow onionskins, and frozen blueberries. That's all you need to produce the primary colours: red, yellow, and blue. By combining the resulting dyes in varying amounts, you can create any colour of the rainbow. Here's how to do it.

DYEING AND DECORATING TIPS

Follow the recipes below to make the dyes, using individual stainless steel, glass, or enamel saucepans for each colour. Combine the ingredients and boil each colour mixture separately for 15 minutes before dyeing eggs. The vinegar acts as a fixative. Without it, the dyes won't stick to the eggs.

- Before dyeing, hard boil white eggs and let them cool.
- For uniform colour, strain each dye mixture through cheesecloth or a fine strainer.
- For a mottled, tie-dyed, or spotty effect, leave all the ingredients in the pans.
- Use crayons to make designs—circles, geometrics, your name—on the egg. The crayoned part will not take up any dye. White crayons work especially well.
- The longer the eggs remain in the dye, the deeper the colour.
- For special effects, dip half the egg in one colour, the other half in another.

RECIPES FOR NATURAL DYES

- RED**
- 500 ml (2 cups) beets, grated
 - 15 ml (1 tbsp) white vinegar
 - 500 ml (2 cups) water
 - Substitute: strong Red Zinger tea or chopped fresh or frozen cranberries

- YELLOW TO GOLD**
- 3 large handfuls of yellow or brown onionskins
 - 15 ml (1 tbsp) white vinegar
 - 750 ml (3 cups) water
 - Substitute: strong chamomile tea or 25 to 40 ml (2 to 3 tbsp) ground turmeric

- BLUE**
- 500 g (1 lb) frozen blueberries, crushed
 - 15 ml (1 tbsp) white vinegar
 - 500 ml (2 cups) water
 - Substitute: red cabbage leaves, coarsely chopped, for a lavender colour

OTHER COLOURS
Mix combinations of the primary dyes (in separate cups) to make secondary colours: red and yellow for orange, yellow and blue for green, and blue and red for violet. The proportion of one colour to the other determines the shade.

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Beautiful and creative Tuscan bedroom ideas

By ALYSSA DAVIS

Decorating the bedroom with an overall Tuscan look is a great way to add relaxing charm. Tuscan styling can be used to create a very natural and simple feel in the bedroom, allowing you to create an intimate retreat that is as beautiful as it is functional.

Use these Tuscan bedroom ideas to transform your bedroom into a natural country get-away.

USING NATURAL MATERIALS

Natural materials are the perfect choice when decorating the Tuscan bedroom. Hardwood floors or rustic tile will add a warm look to the room. Adding wooden beams to the ceiling is also a great way to add traditional Tuscan styling to the room. However, avoid the use of crown molding, since this will detract from the room's rustic charm. Wooden shutters are also a great way to add a Tuscan look to the room.

Stick with natural fabrics such as cotton bedding curtains, preferably in white or a light colour. Dark wood furniture pieces are also a good choice to accentuate the overall look of the room. Throw rugs made from natural fibres can be used to add softness and warmth to the floor.

CHOOSING A COLOUR SCHEME

Beautiful shades of gold and orange often work best for the Tuscan-styled bedroom. Using the same colour for the ceiling can create a warm look that will add to the overall style. Or, choose cream or a lighter shade of the wall colour to give the room a more spacious look and feel. White and cream are also great wall colour choices, both of which work especially well in smaller bedrooms.

GREAT FURNITURE CHOICES FOR THE TUSCAN BEDROOM

Dark wood furniture pieces accentuated with black wrought iron are a great way of adding an authentic touch to the Tuscan bedroom. Choose furniture that has a substantial look and feel, such as a large armoire or highboy dresser. A wrought iron headboard for the bed can add a nice touch. Or, choose a bed that includes a dark wood headboard and footboard.

Accentuate the look of the furniture by adding wrought iron accessories, such as a wall rack or hooks. A seating bench or blanket chest at the foot of the bed can also add a functional and visually appealing touch.

DECORATING THE TUSCAN BEDROOM

A beautiful textured Matelasse bedspread, created from white or light-coloured cotton jacquard, can make the bed into a true Tuscan focal point. Pile a stack of gold or orange pillows against the headboard of the bed to create an inviting and visually appealing look.

A decorative piece of wrought iron wall art or a pair of wrought iron candle sconces can add rustic style to the walls. A botanical print or a framed family photo can also add a nice touch. Overall, you'll want to keep artwork to a minimum within the room.

Functional and simply styled lighting usually works best, such as an iron base lamp with a simple cream-coloured shade. Wood and wrought iron accessories also work well. Add a couple of beautiful live plants as a final decorating touch.

Alyssa Davis of Metal-Wall-Art.com specializes in creating stylish interiors with outdoor metal wall art and dragonfly wall art. Permission to reprint article given by Creativehomemaking.com.



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