

## Plants Underfoot: Selected Plants That Can Withstand Walking

*Ajuga reptans* is also known as **bugleweed** or **carpetweed**. It is a member of the Mint family (Lamiaceae). It is a small- to medium-sized, herbaceous semi-evergreen groundcover that rises to 2" to 4" above the ground, but reaches 10" tall when in flower in mid-spring. It forms a prostrate mat growth habit. The foliage is evergreen to semi-evergreen with light green, dark green, bronzed, purple or variegated leaves. The fall color is unchanged. The flowers are blue, purple, pink or white depending upon the cultivar. They are small flowers on dense upright stems and bloom in May and June.

It prefers moist, well-drained soils of average fertility in partial shade to full shade, with regular watering during the hot and dry periods of summer; however, it is adaptable to more harsh conditions, including poor soils and heat. Can be used for bedding, planters, edging, or entranceway groundcover for shady conditions. It is Native to Europe. Zones 4 to 8. Cultivars: '**Bronze Beauty**' - bright green-bronze foliage turns glossy deep purple in Autumn and Winter; '**Burgundy Glow**' (also known as '**Burgundy Lace**') - pink, white, and green variegated foliage, which will develop sports with time and revert back to a form identical to '**Bronze Beauty**', '**Catlin's Giant**' - foliage almost twice as big as normal, becoming more popular for its medium-bold texture; '**Metallica Crispa**' (also known as 'Cristata') - bronzed foliage is small and crinkled, resembling miniature dark spinach, but is not as vigorous as other cultivars such as, **Jungle Beauty**.

**Lady's Mantle** (*Alchemilla mollis*) Lady's mantle produces a profuse froth of chartreuse blooms in May and June. The basal leaves are 2 to 4 inches wide and reach 8 to 10 inches in height and the flower can reach up to 18 inches. The flowers can be picked for fresh or dried arrangements and have also been used to make a natural yellow dye. Plant in the front of the border in sun to partial shade. It is easily propagated by seed or division.

*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* or **bearberry** is a dense, low evergreen groundcover. It is slow growing and forms mounds less than one foot tall which can spread considerably, taking root as they travel. Reaches a height of 6 to 12 inches tall and 15 inches wide. The foliage is ½" to 1 ¼ inch leaves are shiny and dark green, turning a bronze or reddish color in the fall and winter. The pretty waxy-looking white to pink flowers, are small, urn shaped and closely crowded - 3 to 15 flowers in a cluster. They bloom in April and May but are not particularly showy. The bright, red berries develop in late summer and persist, about the size of a small currant. Older bark may exfoliate, loose bark is silvery and paper.

It can be difficult to transplant and establish. Prefers a well-drained, sandy soil, acidic soils may be best; full sun to very light shade, do not fertilize, does not need pruning. It is salt tolerant, so good seaside groundcover. It is effective plant along a rock wall where it can cascade over the edge, useful on sandy slopes and banks. It is native to the northern regions of Europe, Asia and North America. Found as far south as northern California and Virginia. It thrives on rocky and sandy outcrops and slopes in sandy or rocky soil. Zone 3. Cultivars/Varieties '**Massachusetts**' - A disease resistant selection with smaller leaves than the species. Tends to flower and fruit well. Raised on the west coast of U.S. from Massachusetts seed. Very common in the trade. '**Point Reyes**' - Features good, deep-green foliage color and leaves closely-spaced on the stems. Supposedly more heat and drought tolerant than other forms. '**Vancouver Jade**' - A University of British Columbia Botanical Garden introduction. Has larger, glossier leaves than typical. Foliage develops a nice wine color in the fall. A more vigorous grower than most *A. uva-ursi*.

**Chamomile** (*Chamaemelum nobile*) The soothing properties of chamomile tea were known long before it was prescribed for Peter Rabbit. The herb grew wild around the Mediterranean and was used in medicines and cosmetics by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Chamomile is a perennial that grows to about a foot with ferny, apple-green foliage. Plants are durable, and come back after being trampled, making this an ideal herb for planting in cracks between stones. The active ingredients are concentrated in the yellow-centered, daisy-like flowers, which smell like apples. They seed readily and are easy to harvest and dry. Chamomile prefers good light soils and a sunny location. The delicately-cut foliage of Roman Chamomile makes a fragrant ground cover. To encourage plants to make runners, keep the flower heads clipped. Chamomile is propagated by seed or root division in the spring. Seed must be exposed to light in order to germinate so press the minute seeds firmly into well-drained soil and scatter very fine sand on top of the seed.

***Chrysogonum virginianum***, is also known as “**green and gold**,” “**goldenstar**” or “**golden knee**”. The genus name is derived from the Greek “chrys” meaning gold and “gon” meaning offspring, as in flowers. This native groundcover is grown for both its foliage and its flowers. It is a bright blooming semi-evergreen herbaceous perennial that forms a foliage mat 3-4 inches tall, but with flowering stems can bring the total plant height to 8-12 inches. The star-shaped golden flowers originate from stems in the leaf axils and bloom well above the foliage. Each flower has five, rounded, slightly-notched, yellow petals and a center tuft of yellow disk flowers with contrasting brown stamens. The flowers appear abundantly in the spring and fall, but tend to die down in the heat of summer. The ovate, toothed, bright green leaves are 1 to 3" long with sparse hair.

This easy to grow ground cover can be used for the front of the border, underplanting or between stone paths and will tolerate limited foot traffic. It prefers partial to dappled shade or full sun and a range of soils, so long as they are well drained. It prefers moist organic soils but will tolerate dryer conditions if protected from the sun. Family Asteraceae. It is native to rich woodlands from New York to Louisiana and Florida. Hardy in Zones 5 to 9.

**Sweet Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*)** is a one foot hardy perennial. Given ample moisture and partial shade, sweet woodruff may be used as a ground cover. Plants may be increased by root division in fall or spring. A mulch will greatly benefit the herb. Sweet woodruff is native in Europe, Asia and North Africa. Propagation is usually by root division in spring. It is often grown as an ornamental ground cover and border subject. Flavor Rhine wine with it to make may wine. Known to the Germans as “Waldmeister” master of the woods” Dried, it has the scent of a new-mown hay and was used as a strewing herb. Flowers and leaves make a delicious tea. Used in spring to flavor Rhine wine known as “Maibowle.

***Herniaria glabra***, is also known as **Rupturewort** or **Green Carpet**. It is a lovely bright green creeping ground cover that spreads effortlessly in all directions filling up to two feet per plant. It is a fairly flat plant of about two inches with attractive tiny soft foliage that creates a dense evergreen carpet and turns a bronzy red in winter. The tiny green- white flowers have no petals and are mostly inconspicuous. Since they are so small they do not attract bees and other pollinators and require no clean up, making this plant ideal for high traffic areas. *Herniaria* is known to be nearly indestructible and is an excellent choice as a lawn substitute, in heavy foot traffic areas or between stepping stones. Prefers full sun to partial shade. Its long tap root makes it very drought tolerant, although you should water in extreme periods of drought. It does not like winter wet. The growth rate is fairly slow. Caryophyllaceae (Pink) Family. Native to Europe. Hardy in Zones 5 or 6 to 7

***Juniperus horizontalis* or creeping juniper** is an evergreen ground cover with soft, fine-textured spreading branches and short twigs that stand upright to form a mat about 1 foot high. A single plant can cover an area of 6-10 feet. In colder weather creeping juniper changes to an overall purplish color. There are approximately 60 cultivars. The most popular is ‘**Wiltonii**’ or **Blue Rug**. It stays 6 inches tall and has glaucous powdery blue foliage that is bright steel-blue in summer, becoming mauve in winter. ‘Bar Harbor’ is also steel blue in summer and plum color in winter. It is more tolerant of salt spray.

***Juniperus horizontalis*** occurs naturally in open, dry sandy and rock habitats in North America from Newfoundland to Alaska and south to Wyoming, Nebraska, northern Illinois and New York. It is a common shrub in the Adirondacks, growing between the rocks. Creeping juniper will grow in slightly alkaline soils. Best in full sun, but tolerates partial shade. Established plants are highly drought tolerant. USDA Zones 3-10.

***Mazus reptans*** is a low-growing, mat-forming herbaceous perennial ground cover with rosettes of lance-shaped toothed leaves. It typically grows only to 2" tall and spreads to 6-12 inches. It blooms in late spring to early summer with tiny purplish blue, tubular, two lipped flowers with yellow and white markings. It features, bright green leaves that form a dense, attractive carpet of foliage which remains green throughout the growing season and well into the fall. The foliage is evergreen in warm climates. It spreads by creeping stems which root at the nodes as they go. Excellent ground cover for small locations, such as between stepping stones or in rock gardens. It prefers full sun and moist rich soils, but can be grown in well-drained soil in partial shade. Prefers moist rich soils. *Mazus* tolerates foot traffic and infrequent mowing and fills in quickly without being aggressive. Hardy in Zones 3 to 9. Family Phytaceae. Native to the Himalayas.

***Phlox stolonifera*** is also known as **Creeping phlox**. It is a dense, vigorous, mat-forming ground cover, with flowers on short flower stems from 3 to 12 inches tall. The flowers can be pale lavender-blue, rose-pink, medium violet, or white, with unnotched petals and a yellow center and bloom in early spring to summer. They give off a honeysuckle-like fragrance. This flower is pollinated by butterflies

It grows best in light to partial shade and in moist, loose soil of average fertility. Tolerates full sun if the soil stays moist. Prefers a slightly acidic soil (pH 5.5 to 7) It spreads by horizontal above-ground plantlet-bearing leafy stems. It is native to the rich, damp woods of the Appalachian Mountains and the Piedmont. It is found throughout the United States and in Southern parts of Canada, but is most prevalent in the Eastern United States. Family: Polemoniaceae. Many cultivars of *Phlox stolonifera* are available. **'Bruce's White'** has bears pure white flowers with yellow centers.

***Potentilla tridentata*** or ***Sibbaldiopsis tridentata*** (**three-toothed cinquefoil** or **shrubby five fingers**) is a compact perennial ground cover for dry, soil with loose clusters of dainty ½" white flowers in late spring and early summer. The glossy evergreen leaves have two notches in the tips that form three rounded teeth. They turn wine red in the autumn. The flowers provide nectar for butterflies, bees and other insects. Great for edging borders and looks especially good creeping out of rocky crevices. 6-8 inches tall and spreads 12-15 inches. Prefers acid soil. Hardy in Zones 2 through 7, and can withstand drought and temperatures as low as -40 degrees F. Native to sandy or rocky shores and mountain tops from Greenland and the Northwest territories south to Iowa and Connecticut and into the Appalachians. Endangered in Connecticut. Rose family.

***Sagina subulata***, or scotch moss or **Corsican pearlwort**, is a low, mat-forming perennial that spreads rapidly to form a tight moss-like ground cover in moist shade, growing one inch tall. The soft, cushiony lush green matt of is covered with 100's of tiny translucent white flowers in late spring. It prefers light to moderate shade in moist soil and benefits from watering during prolonged dry spells. Dislikes both drought and soggy wet soils. Can melt out in the heat and humidity. Full sun or partial shade and normal sandy or clay soil conditions. Excellent for small scale plantings between pavers and walkway cracks. Perfect for edging pathways or plantings in between stepping stones or as a lawn substitute where it can take foot traffic. Hardy in Zone 5. It is cold hardy and deer resistant. *Sagina subulata* 'Aurea' has a yellow tint to the foliage.

**Lamb's Ear (*Stachys byzantina*)** is a common garden perennial. It is a hardy perennial to one foot tall. The leaves form a basal rosette. They are long stemmed and linear heavily covered with white lamb's hairs that give the plant a beautiful silvery appearance. The flowers are purple spikes. Lamb's ear is very hardy, grows easily under all conditions and spreads readily. It is easy to propagate by digging up rooted stems. Plant in sunny moist, well-drained soil, Propagate by division of established plants in spring or fall. The leaves of lamb's ear are so soft and furry that they are irresistible to children. These leaves are used in wreaths and dried crafts. Fresh leaves are used medicinally similar to a band aid to protect wounds and draw out infection. A native of the Caucasus, The whole plants were collected for flavorful teas, said to have the good qualities of China teas plus virtues of its own. Betony was once thought to sanctify those who carried it.

***Thymus serpyllum*, creeping thyme** or **Mother of Thyme** is one of the best low growing ground covers. It is easy to grow and can survive with little or no care. It can even be walked upon. It makes an ideal ground cover between stepping stones, next to walkways or cascading over rocks. It grows two to four inches high and can spread up to two or more feet wide. The leaves are very small and dense and cover the low growing plant. Foliage color varies in shades from light to dark green and wooly thyme has attractive grayish foliage. Flower color ranges in shades of lavender, red, rose or white in late spring and early summer. These plants grow in full sun to partial shade and even full shade, although they will not flower as well. Prepare the soil about 10 inches deep, mixing organic matter to soil at a ratio of 1 to 1. Can also walk on Lemon thyme:

***Thymus citridorus***; Wooly thyme: ***Thymus pseudolanuginosus***; Elfin Thyme: ***Thymus serpyllum* 'Elfin'**; Red mother of thyme: ***Thymus serpyllum* 'Coccineau'**

**Thyme** (*Thymus vulgaris*) a hardy perennial that will grow 8-12 inches tall. Thyme (pronounced time) is readily propagated by spring sown seed. Sow the small seeds very shallowly either directly in the garden or inside. Thyme can't stand a heavy soil so plant in light, well-drained soil, with full sun. Divisions of mature plants can quickly double your thyme planting. Once thyme blossoms open they will be covered with hungry bees, so harvest just as the buds appear. Several cuttings may be taken during the summer. Thyme may be sheared to form a small border shrub that is evergreen. To prevent its becoming woody, keep clipped and divide old plants every three to four years. A mulch will help see thyme through the coldest winter. Native to the Mediterranean region, where it is found on southern shores and northern hills and in the Himalayas. It was brought to England by the Romans.

**Veronica prostrata**, also called **prostrate speedwell** or **harebell**, is a low-growing, mat forming herbaceous perennial ground cover which typically grows 6-8 inches tall and spreads indefinitely by sterile, prostrate stems. The short, dense racemes of tiny, pale-to-deep blue flowers (1/3" across) appear in the upper leaf axils of upright flowering stems in late spring to early summer. Sparse, intermittent rebloom may occur in summer and fall. Linear to ovate, entire to toothed, medium green leaves (to 1.5" long). It is a low-maintenance ground cover for rock gardens or borders and can tolerate some foot traffic. It is easily grown in average, medium, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. Avoid wet, poorly drained soils. Plants may be sheared after flowering to revitalize and to encourage new foliage growth. Family Plantaginaceae. Zones 4 to 8. Native to Europe. Cultivars: '**Nestor**' 3" dense mat forming ground cover with light blue flowers; '**Buttercup**' is a golden-leaved speedwell with dense racemes of lavender-blue flowers; '**Trehane**' dense racemes of tiny, deep blue flowers; '**Aztec Gold**' sun-proof, brilliant gold leaves with sky-blue flowers

**Vinca minor**, also known as **periwinkle** or **creeping myrtle**. This short, evergreen perennial ground cover that will reach six inches in height and trails to a length of three feet, rooting along the stems. The leaves are a lustrous dark green with a subtle white mid-vein. They appear opposite on the stems and clustered at the terminals. Some cultivars have creamy-white, silvery-white, gold or yellow variegation of the foliage. Blue-purple is the predominant color of the flowers, but cultivars exist that are white or reddish-lavender. The flowers are solitary and composed of five fused pinwheel-like petals and a short tubular throat, blooming in late March and April and sporadically throughout the growing season. The fruits are tiny, brown and inconspicuous. Best in rich, evenly moist, well-drained soils in partial shade, but is adaptable to soils of average fertility, soils of various pH, and occasional drought, once established. Will tolerate full sun with enough soil moisture. Dogbane Family (Apocynaceae). Native to parts of central and southern Europe and was first introduced in the 1700s. Cultivars: '**Alba**' is a white flowering form; '**Atropurpurea**' has reddish-lavender to red-violet flowers; '**Bowles**' has larger foliage that tends to mound instead of creep or trail, and flowers that are slightly larger and more dense with an intense blue or purple color; '**Ralph Shugert**' has leaf margins that are sharply defined by a creamy-white variegation with blue-purple blossoms.

**Viola labradorica** or **Labrador violet** is a very low growing perennial. It has attractive, purple-tinged, heart-shaped foliage (to 1 inch across) and lavender-blue flowers which appear atop leafy stems in late spring and sparkle against the dark leaves. The species has varying colored foliage, often darker at the base and in cooler climates. Six inches tall and 6-8 inches across. This low maintenance plant is easily grown in average, medium, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. Prefers average to moist soil. Best used in the shady, naturalized or woodland garden as a ground cover mass. Or use between stepping stones, in rock gardens or let it naturalize. Spreads, sometimes aggressively, by creeping rhizomes stems and by self-seeding. Deadhead to prolong blooming season and promote a new flush of growth. Native to moist woods and open sites in Greenland, Labrador and Ontario south to Maine. Zones 3 to 8

**Waldstenia ternata**, also known as **barren strawberry** is a hardy and easy to grow semi-evergreen ground cover that reaches 6 to 8" in height with strawberry-like growth spreading to 12-18 inches. The yellow buttercup type flowers appear in late May or June. Tolerates some foot traffic and is terrific on a bank. Once establishes, rhizomes may be divided in early spring. Plant in partial to full shade in well drained soil. It adapts to most soil types and tolerates drought quite well. The "Barren Strawberry" gets its common name from its Strawberry like growth habit. Native to Europe and Japan. Zones 3 to 8.