

No matter how hard you try, there are some places your lawn just won't grow. But don't give up--try planting a ground cover instead. There are dozens of hardy varieties to choose from, including ones that do well in deep shade.

Easy to maintain and wonderfully attractive, ground covers are a gardener's delight. They hug and bind the soil--a real benefit to steep slopes--and, once established, practically take care of themselves. You can choose varieties to grow in conditions ranging from deep shade to bright sun, from poor, sandy soil to perfectly prepared garden fare.

Better still, they spread fast to fill in those trouble spots you've always worried about. Do a little research and select the cover that's right for the sun, soil, and climate in your region. Then visit your nearby garden center and purchase enough plants to get started. As soon as your ground cover is fairly well established, the only care it will need is occasional watering, weeding, mulching, and pruning. Ground covers are usually quite resistant to diseases and pests, so they're not major problems.

And here's a good idea: if you need a fast, reliable ground cover to hold the soil in an area where you eventually plan to sow grass seed, plant a temporary annual cover such as sweet alyssum, portulaca, verbenas, petunias, or California poppies. They'll transform the area from bare dirt to attractive, soil-binding cover in just a few weeks.

You'll love the effect low-growing ground covers have on your landscape. Try different shapes and textures as you plant garden-like beds of greenery. Few lawn-keeping ventures are more enjoyable than growing ground covers.