

You can plant ground-covering perennials, shrubs, and vines in either spring or fall. Shallow-rooted kinds or those planted on windy, exposed slopes do better when planted in spring, particularly if your winters are harsh.

Deep-rooted plants, though, can handle fall planting easily. In fact, most ground covers can be set out anytime of the growing season, provided they're given adequate water and protection from wind until roots are established.

Prepare the soil-bed as you would for planting grass seed. Cultivate a good, balanced fertilizer into the soil for most ground covers. *Note:* for some plantings, fertilizer does more harm than good. Alpine ground covers grow naturally in poor soil and a rich diet doesn't suit them. To be safe, check planting instructions for your choice of ground covers before preparing the soil.

When planting, remember that small, single-stemmed root cuttings take longer to establish than those planted in larger bunches. Ground covers normally spread by underground stems or by trailing runners, so--depending on variety--they may be planted anywhere from six inches to five feet apart.

For example, pachysandra can be spaced as far as a foot apart at planting, but covers much faster when set six inches apart or so. Most ground covers that are more prostrate in habit (such as periwinkle or ivy) can be placed at one plant per square foot. Alpine or rock plants are spaced one foot apart.

Shrubs such as cotoneaster, junipers, and euonymus need at least three square feet of space per plant. Vines (except annuals) typically need even wider spacing, with trailing roots spread at least three to five feet apart.

If you plant on a hillside, be sure to make a small depression around each plant to hold water.