

SHORT, NATIVE, HERBACEOUS PLANTS FOR GROUND-COVER

The species below are suitable for planting as a ground-cover layer below taller plants that rise above them as the growing season progresses. Most bloom in spring providing nectar and pollen for insects as well as beauty for humans. Those that flower in the summer and fall are best placed on the margins of taller plantings so that their flowers can be appreciated.

Spring flowering

- Pennsylvania sedge, *Carex pensylvanica*. Needs shade and moisture
- Appalachian sedge, *C. appalachica*. Tolerates a drier, shady site
- Creeping phlox, *Phlox subulata*, Drought-tolerant and evergreen
- Wild ginger, *Asarum canadense*. Shade lover that spreads slowly
- Allegheny spurge, *Pachysandra procumbens*. Evergreen groundcover for shade
- Woodland phlox, *Phlox divaricata*. Long-flowering; part shade
- Woodland creeping phlox, *Phlox stolonifera*. Similar to above but with rounded leaves
- Dwarf iris, *Iris cristata*. Pretty when blooming in spring; dies back in summer
- Pasque flower, *Pulsatilla patens*. Spring flowering, drought-tolerant
- Spring-blooming anemone, *A. canadensis* & *A. quinquefolia*. Spreads by rhizomes
- Common wild violet, *Viola sororia* and others. Can be very weedy in lawns
- Striped violet, *Viola striata*. Long blooming white flowers for shade; spreading
- Golden ragwort, *Packera aurea*. Yellow flowers; spreads to form good carpet
- Lyre-leaf sage, *Salvia lyrata*. Purple leaves, flowers not showy, self-seeds
- Purple phacelia, *P. bipinnatifida*. Bi-annual, strong self-seeder, part shade
- Coral bells, *Heuchera* sp. Clumping; drought-tolerant, large variety of cultivars
- Eared coreopsis, *C. auriculata*. Some moisture, golden, long-lasting spring flowers
- Small's beardtongue, *Penstemon smallii*. Clumping, lavender & white flowers; floppy
- Prairie smoke, *Geum triflorum*. Late spring showy flowers, drought-tolerant
- Blue-eyed grass, *Sisyrinchium campestre*. Forb with grass-like leaves
- Showy primrose, *Oenothera speciosa*. Large, pale pink flowers; spreading
- Wild geranium, *Geranium maculatum*. Lavender-blue flowers; sun, part-shade
- Bradbury's bee balm, *Monarda bradburiana*. White flowering shorter bee balm

Summer flowering

- Missouri primrose, *Oenothera macrocarpa*. Large yellow flowers on sprawling stems
- Midwestern primrose, *Oenothera pilosella*. Yellow flowers, mat-forming leaf rosettes
- Wild petunia, *Ruellia humilis*. Blue flowers, drought tolerant, self-seeder, spreading
- Round seeded St. John's Wort, *Hypericum sphaerocarpum*, a low spreading semi shrub
- Spotted St. John's Wort, *Hypericum punctatum*, similar to above, but shorter
- Purple poppy mallow, *Callirhoe involucrata*. Wanders through bed on long vining stems
- Dittany, *Cunila origanoides*. Rocky ground, clumping, small purplish flowers

- Violet bush clover, *Lespedeza violacea*. Small flowers on delicate looking but tough plant

Fall flowering

- Prairie dropseed grass, *Sporobolus heterolepis*. Borders, sunny locations
- White wood aster, *Symphyotrichum divaricata*. Shady locations, drought tolerant

Non-native plants for ground covers:

- All creeping thymes, *Thymus*. They attract pollinators when in bloom
- European geranium, *Pelargonium*. Low-growing perennial
- Leadwort / plumbago, *Ceratostigma plumbaginoides*. Fall blue flowers, spreads by underground rhizomes, drought and shade tolerant
- Bishop's hat, *Epimedium*. Spring flowering, drought tolerant ground cover for shade

Updated 03-2025, Ann Witherington, M.S. Botany