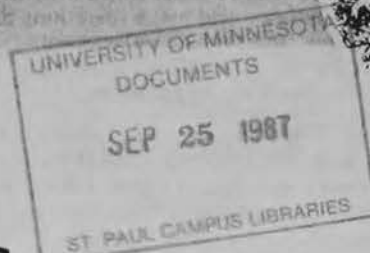


Arboretum Review



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LEON C. SNYDER

Evergreen and Woody Ground Covers

Ground covers that stay green all winter are preferred to those that lose their leaves or die to the ground each fall. Unfortunately, many of the better evergreen ground covers are not fully hardy under our climatic conditions. Their use is limited to special sites and soil conditions except for a very few hardy kinds. The following broad leaved evergreens have been grown successfully under the conditions described:

Arctostaphylos uva-ursi (Bearberry)—This native plant thrives on acid, sandy soils. It is a low, creeping plant with small, dark-green, leathery leaves. These leaves turn to a bronze color in the fall. The flowers are bell-shaped and white, tinged with pink. The small fruits are bright red and are effective from late summer until the plants are covered with snow. Plants must be propagated by rooting cuttings in a mixture of acid peat and sharp sand. Do not attempt to move plants from the wild. An excellent ground cover where conditions are favorable.

Asarum europaeum (European Wild Ginger)—This evergreen species and the west coast A. caudatum are worth trying. They like a moist, shaded site and a soil rich in organic matter. Plant where the plants will receive a good snowcover. In addition to evergreen foliage, this plant produces interesting reddish, bell-shaped flowers that are hidden by the leaves.

Euonymus fortunei (Wintercreeper)—This is a variable species with a number of cultivars ranging from low shrubs to creeping forms. 'Coloratus' has proved quite hardy when planted in partial shade where there is a dependable snow cover. The leaves turn purple in the fall. 'Gracilis' has white-margined leaves that brighten up a shady spot. 'Minimus' and 'Kewensis' have very small leaves and are effective where the area to be covered is small. 'Longwood' is a new cultivar from Longwood Gardens that we have just received. Plant in partial shade in an area that will receive a dependable snow cover.

Gaultheria procumbens (Wintergreen)—This plant is native in shaded areas on acid soils. Where such conditions exist the wintergreen makes an excellent ground cover. The white, bell-shaped flowers and the small, bright-red berries that are still red and edible in the spring are attractive features. The fruits and the young leaves have a wintergreen flavor.

Gaylussacia brachycera (Box-huckleberry)—This is another low-growing, acid-loving plant that makes a good ground cover where conditions are right.

Mahonia repens (Creeping Mahonia)—This low-growing Mahonia or Oregon grape is native in the Rocky Mountains and is found in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Strains differ in their hardiness and you may succeed or fail depending on the source of planting stock. Plant in partial shade where the plants will have dependable winter snowcover. Evergreen, holly-like leaves; yellow flowers; and black berries formed like clusters of grapes are identifying features.

Pachistima canbyi (Canby's Pachistima)—This dainty evergreen ground cover is slow-growing but in time will form a dense mat if plants are spaced a foot apart. It requires good light but does best where it has dependable snow cover. It has performed well in all parts of the state. The leaves are toothed and resemble small holly leaves.

Pachysandra terminalis (Japanese Spurge)—This is an excellent ground cover where conditions are right. It does best in partial shade and must be protected from the winter sun. Plant on the north side of the house or at the edge of the woods. It spreads by underground rhizomes and is easy to increase. Small white flowers followed by white berries add additional interest.



Pachysandra terminalis (Japanese Spurge)

Polystichum acrostichoides (Christmas Fern)—Because of the limited number of broadleaved, evergreen ground covers for this area this spreading evergreen fern is included. It makes an attractive ground cover in a wooded area.

Vaccinium vitis-idaea (Cowberry or Mountain Cranberry)—This low, mat-forming plant makes an excellent ground cover where conditions are favorable. Grows well in moist, acid soil. Its small, pink, bell-shaped flowers and dark red berries add interest.

Vinca minor (Periwinkle or Myrtle)—Conditions will determine success or failure with this plant. Partial shade and dependable snowcover are essential to success. The small, dark-green leaves and showy blue flowers make this one of the best of all ground covers where conditions are favorable.

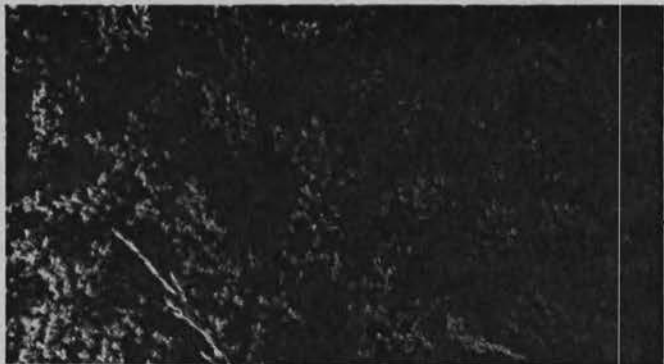
CONIFEROUS EVERGREENS

Most of our coniferous evergreens are too tall to be classed as ground covers. A few have a spreading habit and are excellent.

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Juniperus horizontalis (Creeping Juniper)—This creeping juniper extends across the North American continent in many diverse forms. A number of cultivars have been selected, and these should be planted rather than seedlings. We have a fine selection of these cultivars growing in the arboretum. Visit the arboretum or your favorite nursery and make selections that would look well in your yard. 'Bar Harbor,' 'Douglasii,' 'Wiltonii,' and several others look very promising. 'Plumosa,' commonly known as Andorra, turns a purplish green in the fall. We have had some injury on the cultivar following an open winter. All of the junipers prefer a sunny location.

Juniperus procumbens (Japanese Garden Juniper)—This species has done well for us in the arboretum but is inclined to open up in the center on old plants. Some winter burn can be expected in exposed sites. The dwarf form 'Nana' is excellent where a small plant is desired.



Juniperus procumbens (Japanese Garden Juniper)

Juniperus sabina (Savins Juniper)—This highly variable European species contains several low-growing, creeping forms that make excellent ground covers. 'Arcadia' and 'Skandia' are two of the best for our area. Planted on slopes in full sun, they are excellent for bank covers.

Taxus canadensis (Canadian Yew)—This is a native yew that prefers shade and does best where there is a good snow cover. This species is not readily available from commercial nurseries.

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Taxus cuspidata (Japanese Yew)—This is a variable species. The spreading forms make excellent ground covers when planted in partial shade. They must be protected from the winter sun.

DECIDUOUS SHRUBS

Mass plantings of certain deciduous shrubs can be used effectively as ground covers.

Comptonia peregrina (Sweet fern)—This low, spreading shrub with dark-green, fern-like leaves makes an excellent ground cover on acid, sandy soils. It is often planted on highway slopes to hold the soil from eroding. It spreads by underground rhizomes.

Forsythia 'Arnolds Dwarf'—The forsythias, in general, do not perform well here primarily because they fail to bloom. 'Arnolds Dwarf' does not flower but forms a low, dense shrub. Several, planted about 18 inches apart, will make an effective cover planting.

Myrica pensylvanica (Bayberry)—This shrub is closely related to the sweet fern. The leaves are dark green and leathery, persisting on the plant through the winter. The gray berries are produced along the stems and are used in making bayberry candles. This species grows well in this climate but the tips of the branches may die back in a severe winter.

Rhus spp. (Sumac)—All of the species of sumac can be planted for bank covers. Their suckering habit and their ability to grow on poor soils make them excellent ground covers for large areas. The smooth sumac (*R. glabra*) and the staghorn sumac (*R. typhina*) are the common species in this area. Cutleaf forms of both of these species are available and preferable for landscape uses. The fall colors in the sumacs are especially pleasing.

Spiraea japonica alpina (Dwarf Japanese Spirea)—This is one of the smallest of the spireas. Plants spaced a foot apart will soon fill in to make a dense carpet covered with small, pink flowers throughout the summer. This variety seldom grows over a foot tall.

Viburnum opulus 'Nanus' (Dwarf Highbush Cranberry)—This is a low, compact form of the highbush cranberry that makes an attractive ground cover when spaced about a foot apart and planted in a semi-shaded location.

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