

# Groundcovers of every size for un-irrigated landscapes



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## Commonly-used groundcover species (not necessarily tolerant of drought!)

**Kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*).** 12”h x 3’w. Sun/part shade. ‘Massachusetts’ is commonly sold but needs irrigation in full sun. Selections from Oregon or California (in particular) are far more tolerant of drought.

**Oregon Grape (*Berberis aquifolium*).** ‘Compacta’ grows 3’h x 5’w and is a tall groundcover for use in partial (afternoon) shade. Probably best with some summer irrigation. Clusters of yellow flowers in early spring followed by blue fruit. Other cultivars include ‘Apollo’ and ‘Mission Canyon’. Much more potential out there!

**Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster* spp.).** Several well-known evergreen species including *C. congestus*, *C. dammeri*, *C. microphyllus* and hybrids like *C. x suecicus*, as well as a number of cultivars. Serviceable, low-growing groundcovers (for the most part) which are surprisingly tolerant of drought in certain situations, especially with afternoon shade.

**Carpet Broom (*Genista pilosa* and *G. lydia*).** Commonly used low-growing evergreen groundcovers. Native to dry regions of Europe or Asia and very drought-tolerant as well as nitrogen-fixing. Yellow flowers cover the plants in May.

**Point Reyes Creeper (*Ceanothus gloriosus*).** Low-growing but wide-spreading groundcover, 2’h x 4’w. Full sun. Exceptionally drought tolerant and nitrogen-fixing, so adapted to marginal, well-drained sites. Blue flowers in April.

**Creeping raspberry (*Rubus hayata-koidzumii*).** Commonly sold as *R. calycinoides*. Dense, low-growing, textural groundcover 12”h, which is adapted to sun or part shade. Small white flowers, sometimes followed by yellow fruit. Shows good drought tolerance, especially in afternoon shade, but best with some irrigation.

**Candytuft (*Iberis sempervirens*).** Evergreen mat 12”h x 2’w. Full sun. Native to southern Europe, so very tolerant of drought. White flowers cover the plant in April-May.

**Wild Thyme (*Thymus* spp. *Coccineus* group).** Complicated group with many species and cultivars, but generally a group of low-growing, often creeping subshrubs of European origin. Aromatic foliage and reddish flowers. Best in full sun, highly tolerant of drought.

**Strawberry (*Fragaria* sp.).** The most common groundcover species is *F. chiloensis*. Very low-growing evergreen groundcover (native to Oregon) which spreads by stolons, which root at tips. White flowers in May, sometimes followed by fruit. Can form dense canopy when conditions are favorable. Probably best with irrigation at least to establish. There are also pink-flowered forms which are of hybrid origin.

**St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum calycinum*).** Semi-evergreen groundcover to 1’h which spreads above and below ground. Large yellow flowers in June-July. Foliage discolors (to black) in winter, but remains. Can be sheared in spring. Probably fully drought-tolerant if some afternoon shade. Somewhat invasive in Washington and California (!).

**Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*).** Native throughout western Oregon on the coast and in forest understory. Dense shrub up to 4’h in moist coastal locations, lower and much less dense in drier locations. Useful in shade as a groundcover, but increasing sun exposure would require increasing irrigation.

**Japanese spurge (*Pachysandra terminalis*).** Dense, evergreen groundcover up to 8”h. Flowers are white. Best in shade with occasional summer water.

**Sweetbox (*Sarcococca* spp.).** Dense evergreen shrubs up to 5' tall, which feature very fragrant white flowers in January. For shady situations only, where they are completely tolerant of drought and are useful as tall groundcover.

**Periwinkle (*Vinca minor* or *V. major*).** Commonly used, diminutive groundcover to about 8"h. Several cultivars available. Drought tolerant if used in full shade, but not suited to full sun. Somewhat weedy in some locations.

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## Common PNW native groundcover species

**Kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*).** Dense, low growing textural groundcover. Widely used, but as noted above, commonly sold cultivars may not tolerate full sun and drought. West coast selections best for dry situations.

**Creeping Mahonia (*Berberis repens*).** Native to southern Oregon, the Cascades and NE Oregon. Low-growing, spreading evergreen shrub with yellow flowers. Very tolerant of drought, but typically fails to form a dense canopy.

**Cascade Oregon Grape (*Berberis nervosa*).** Common in shady woods from the Cascades into western Oregon. Up to 18"h typically and relatively dense. Useful in shady situations (not sun!) where it will tolerate considerable drought.

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## Groundcovers of every size for un-irrigated landscapes (listed more or less chronologically by time of year of bloom, earliest to latest)

**Sweetbox (*Sarcococca confusa* and *S. hookeriana*).** As noted above, commonly available tall, evergreen groundcover to 3'h, especially useful in dry shade. Not for sunny situations! Highly fragrant white flowers produced in January.

**Winter Heath (*Erica carnea* and *E. x darleyensis*).** Mounding spreading, very dense evergreen shrubs, up to 2' tall. Many cultivars available, varying in size and flower color. Winter blooming. Quite tolerant of full sun and drought.

**Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*).** Formerly *Rosmarinus officinalis*. Widely grown, aromatic, winter to spring blooming shrub. Many cultivars, may have an upright or a mounding or trailing habit. Cultivars with a trailing habit are dense, drought-tolerant groundcovers for sun, but vary in hardiness and can be damaged in very cold (<20°F) weather.

**Kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* 'Anchor Bay').** Selections of Kinnikinnick from the PNW will display good vigor and improved drought tolerance. Includes 'Green Supreme', 'Point Reyes', 'Radiant', 'San Bruno Mountain', etc.

**Glossy leaf manzanita: *Arctostaphylos nummularia* (select form).** Dense, spreading groundcover up to 18"h x 3'w. Glossy foliage is very distinctive. For full sun, completely drought tolerant. May suffer slight injury in coldest winters.

**Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos hookeri*).** Very vigorous, dense, mounding species, 4'h x 8'w. Full sun, completely drought tolerant. Several excellent cultivars available including 'Buena Vista' and 'Wayside'. White blooms in March.

**Mt. Vernon Laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus* 'Mount Vernon').** Very diminutive cultivar of the common cherry laurel. 'Mount Vernon' grows slowly to 2'h x 3'w. Full sun. Rarely flowers or sets seed so not weedy like the full-size species.

**Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster* spp.).** As noted above, Cotoneasters in general exhibit surprising drought tolerance, especially in well-prepare soil and with some afternoon shade. Widely available and many to choose from.

**Emerald Beauty Cotoneaster (*C. x suecicus* Emerald Beauty™).** New cultivar released from OSU Department of Horticulture breeding program. Dense, flat, spreading habit to 18"h x 2'w. Full sun. Fireblight resistant.

**White Rockrose (*Cistus x hybridus*)**. Widely utilized, tall, spreading shrub to 4'h x 6'w. Dense canopy of leaves and covered with pure white flowers in May-June. Full sun, completely tolerant of drought. As with all Rockroses, ensure good drainage and prune lightly, if at all, after bloom!

**Orchid Rockrose (*C. x purpureus*)**. Commonly grown, tall, spreading to 4'h x 6' wide. Very dense habit, produces pink flowers with purple blotch on each petal in May-June. Full sun, completely tolerant of drought. Prune lightly!

**Sunset Rockrose (*C. x pulverulentus* 'Sunset')**. Dense, compact habit to 18"h x 4'w. Produces magenta flowers *en masse* in May-June, then sporadically in summer. Full sun, completely tolerant of drought. Prune lightly if at all!

**Rockrose (*C. x obtusifolius*)**. Similar to *C. x hybridus*, but much more compact, to 3'h x 4'w. White flowers in May-June. Much more suitable for compact areas where it forms a mounding groundcover without needing to be pruned.

**Rockrose (*C. salviifolius*)**. This is a variable species which is often sold as a low, spreading plant, sometimes as 'Prostratus'. It will grow to about 2'h x 4'w and offer white flowers in May. Full sun.

**Rockrose (*C.* 'Snow Fire')**. Very vigorous rockrose useful as a tall groundcover especially for larger areas. Will grow 4'h x 6'w or wider. Full sun and very drought tolerant. White flowers with red blotches in May.

**Rockrose (*Halimium lasianthum* 'Sandling')**. Low, spreading shrub with textural silvery foliage, 2'h x 4' wide. Blotched yellow flowers *en masse* in May. As with other rockroses, full sun and good drainage required.

**Sunrose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) 'Cheviot', 'Belgravia Rose'**. *H. nummularium* is a variable species in both foliage and flower color, growing to about 18"h x 3'w. Dense, low growing small groundcover. Many cultivars available, the two listed are just two examples. May be short-lived.

**Sonoma sage (*Salvia sonomensis*)**. Very vigorous, low growing and spreading groundcover to 18"h x 6'w or more. Highly aromatic foliage, also spikes of blue flowers in May-June. Full sun; a bit tender so place in protected location.

**Spanish lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*)**. Dense, rounded shrub to 18"h x 2'w, useful when massed. Purple flowers in short spikes in May. Several cultivars available, differing in foliage and flower color. Full sun, good drainage.

**Point Reyes Ceanothus (*Ceanothus gloriosus*)**. Low-growing, wide spreading shrub with tough, textural foliage. 18"h x 5' wide, with blue flowers in April. Full sun, very drought tolerant and also a nitrogen-fixing shrub, good in poor soil.

**Mt. Vision Ceanothus (*Ceanothus gloriosus* var. *porrectus*)**. This variety is found in a few locations on the northern California coast. Forms a mounding, spreading shrub 4'h x 8'w. Blue flowers in May. Full sun, excellent drainage.

**Wild Lilac (*Ceanothus gloriosus* 'Anchor Bay')**. Very vigorous, mounding spreading groundcover to 3'h x 10'w. Blue flowers in May. Excellent groundcover for large areas in full sun. Like other Ceanothus is a nitrogen-fixing shrub.

**Navarro Ceanothus (*Ceanothus gloriosus* var. *exaltatus* 'Emily Brown')**. Possibly the most vigorous Ceanothus groundcover. 3'h x 12'w. Excellent groundcover for large areas in full sun. Nitrogen-fixing shrub, good in poor soil.

**Carpet broom (*Genista pilosa* and *G. lydia*)**. Two species of dwarf groundcovers, growing up to 18"h x 2'w. Yellow flowers over a short period in May. Full sun. Both are nitrogen-fixing so good in poor soil.

**Jerusalem Sage (*Phlomis fruticosa*)**. The most commonly-grown species and a variable shrub. Can grow up to 2'h x 8'w, but compact cultivars exist. Grey-green leaves form a dense mat, with yellow flowers in spikes in June. Full sun. Prune off flower spikes in winter (and other pruning tasks) to avoid irritating hairs which detach in dry weather.

**Jerusalem Sage (*Phlomis 'Le Sud'*)**. Uncommon cultivar with blue green foliage and yellow flowers in June. Forms a rounded shrub 3'h x 5'w. Full sun. Leaves are covered by minute hairs, so prune off flower spikes in wet weather or in winter to avoid these, which can be irritating.

**Jerusalem Sage (*P. purpurea*)**. Fairly common species which forms a shrub 3'h x 4'w. Offers greyish foliage as well as purple flowers in whorls on spikes above foliage in June. Full sun, as with other *Phlomis*, prune in winter to avoid irritating leaf hairs. *P. italica* also has purple flowers.

**Common Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)**. Rounded shrub to 1'h x 2'w. Evergreen foliage is highly aromatic. Purple flowers in May. Many different species and cultivars of Thyme make good, small-scale, often diminutive, groundcovers.

**Hairy canary clover (*Dorycnium hirsutum*)**. Dwarf shrub to 1'h x 2'w. Silvery foliage and white flowers. Individual plants are short-lived but seedling plants pop up as replacements in planted area.

**Hybrid Lavender (*Lavandula x intermedia*)**. Well-known rounded aromatic shrubs 2'h x 2'w. Many cultivars available, with flowers produced in spikes above foliage that may be blue, white or pink. Canopy tends to open up with time.

**Star Jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*)**. An evergreen vine that can form an effective groundcover, particularly useful in shade, where it is very drought-tolerant and produces highly fragrant white flowers in July.

**Common Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)**. Aromatic, woody shrub forming a dense, spreading canopy 2'h x 3'w. Several cultivars available, which produce bluish flowers in July. Besides landscape use, foliage is used as an herb. May be short-lived.

**Mountain Sage (*Salvia microphylla*)**. Aromatic shrub which has an upright-spreading habit. A number of cultivars are available, flower color is usually pinkish or red. Flowers over a long period. Useful for massing. A bit tender to cold so best in a protected spot.

**Lavender Cotton (*Santolina chamaecyparissus*)**. Aromatic, highly textural shrub growing 2'h x 4' with time. Yellow button-like flowers in clusters in July. Useful for massing, although forms a variable canopy which is not pretty to look at in winter! Prune in late winter to tidy up the canopy. The most commonly encountered *Santolina*.

**Lavender Cotton (*S. benthaminiana*)**. Aromatic, highly textural shrub growing 2'h x 4' with time. White button-like flowers in clusters in July. Useful for massing, forms a better canopy than *S. chamaecyparissus*. Not common in the trade.

**Minorcan Lavender Cotton (*S. magonica*)**. Aromatic shrub growing into a perfect 2'h x 2' mound. Yellow button-like flowers borne just above the canopy in July. Full sun. Has proven more tender than other *Santolina*. Not common in the trade, nor is the somewhat similar *S. insulare*, which also forms a tidy, spreading mound.

**Shrubby hare's ear (*Bupleurum fruticosum*)**. Unusual evergreen shrub in the carrot family. Forms a rounded blue-green canopy 4'h x 6'w. Very unusual yellow flowers in flat clusters in August. Tolerates afternoon shade.

**Coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis*)**. Native to the OR coast, south into California. Forms a large rounded shrub, but dwarf cultivars are available of CA and OR origins which form spreading mats of foliage. Dioecious (female and male flowers on different plants). Produces scented flowers in September. 'Pistol Pancake' is an Oregon-sourced form.

**California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*)**. Deciduous, dwarf, suckering shrub growing 1'h or more (depending on cultivar). Spreads quickly to form a mat of twiggy stems, often with silvery leaves in summer-fall. From August to October produces tubular red, white or pink flowers, depending on cultivar, of which there are many.