

# spring-blooming groundcovers

These versatile perennials serve plenty of practical purposes as they roll out their carpets of color in the garden.

WANT MORE PLANTS? TURN THE PAGE FOR PROPAGATION TIPS.

Even tiny flowers can make

a big impression when they appear in profusion, as they do with spring-blooming groundcovers. But the plants in this large category are also workhorses. Phlox, sweet woodruff, and bugleweed are some of the best known. "They're beautiful problem solvers," says Sandra Gerdes, BH&G® Test Garden manager. As with other groundcovers, they hold soil in place, crowd out weeds, and fill in bare spots. And when they bloom, butterflies and other pollinators take notice.

## PLANT PICKS

- 1 'Violet Pinwheels'** Phlox Bred for a more intense flower color.
- 2 'Beacon Silver'** Dead Nettle Foliage and flowers light up the shade.
- 3 'Shauna Ann'** Verbena Blooms from late spring through summer.
- 4 'Sugar and Spice'** Foamflower Lightly fragrant.
- 5 'North Hills'** Phlox Petite flowers rebloom in fall in many areas.
- 6 Bergenia Dragonfly 'Angel Kiss'** Flowers go from white to pink and are deer-resistant.

## groundcover

**411**  
What to know before you plant.



SUN TO SHADE



LIGHT TO MODERATE



WELL-DRAINED SOIL



3"-12" TALL



ZONES 3-9

## KIT IT OUT

A few well-placed hooks, bins, and trays can help with common garden clutter.

### PROBLEM

**Larger tools have no place to go.**

### SOLUTION

As with the trellis, adding hooks to the side of the bench increases its storage capabilities. A five-hook iron piece, *right*, stands up to the weather and is big enough for shovels and pruners. *Cast Iron 5-Hook Rack*, \$25; [containerstore.com](http://containerstore.com)

### PROBLEM

**Bulky bags of soil look unsightly in the yard.**

### SOLUTION

Keep soil out of sight but close at hand with a lidded bin, *opposite*, on the bottom shelf. *Galvanized Steel Locking Lid Storage Can (10 gal.)*, \$25; [homedepot.com](http://homedepot.com)

### PROBLEM

**The outdoor equivalent of a junk drawer is a jumble of seed packets, twine, and gloves.**

### SOLUTION

Lining the drawer with clear containers, *right*, defines sections



for smaller items, such as gloves, hand tools, and seed packets (choose a lidded one for the packets for extra protection from moisture).

### PROBLEM

**Soil collects in the potting bench crevices.**

### SOLUTION

A tray on the work surface, *below*, keeps loose soil contained as you pot plants and is easier to wipe or hose off than the entire bench. A copper one can handle water for extended periods. *Essex Plant Stand Trays*, \$70 for 3; [gardeners.com](http://gardeners.com)



**↑ all-star tools** BH&G® Test Garden manager Sandra Gerdes swears by these three tools: **1 FISKARS POWERGEAR SUPER PRUNER/LOPPER** "When branches are too thick for pruning shears but not big enough for a handsaw, reach for these." \$28; [fiskars.com](http://fiskars.com) **2 WILCOX 102S 12" DIGGING TROWEL** "Its long blade lets you dig deep, and the pointed tip breaks through hard soil." \$18; [wilcoxallpro.com](http://wilcoxallpro.com) **3 DRAMM ONE TOUCH REVOLUTION SPRAY GUN** "This nozzle is so easy to use; you just flip on or off with your thumb. It's metal so it won't crack if it's dropped." From \$14; [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) ■



■ **CONDITIONS**

Sunny spots suit most groundcovers, but they adapt well to shade, particularly dappled light.

■ **WHEN TO PLANT**

Spring and early summer are the ideal times to plant groundcovers. Their roots are shallow, so it's easy to make room for them. Firm the soil around them after planting and water once a week while they are becoming established. It's fine to start with small plants, as groundcovers grow quickly.

■ **WHERE TO PLANT**

Gerdes recommends planting under trees, at the edges of flowerbeds, and around the skirts of larger perennials. Spring-blooming groundcovers also work well with spring-flowering bulbs. Phlox looks spectacular planted at the top of a stone wall, where it can cascade gracefully.



**1** Groundcovers make natural additions to rock gardens. Basket-of-gold likes afternoon shade where summers are hot and can take full sun in cool climates. **2** The snow-white flowers of evergreen, drought-tolerant candytuft bloom for up to 10 weeks. **3** Bugleweed covers quickly with leaves that can be dark purple, golden, or variegated. **4** Creeping thyme spreads between stepping-stones and will bloom for several weeks.

Along a pathway or in a rock garden, creeping thyme "just needs a nook and a cranny with a little bit of soil, and it's as happy as can be," she says.

■ **MAINTENANCE**

Cut off the spent flower heads of bugleweed, bergenia, and foamflower. To keep candytuft and basket-of-gold full and bushy, cut them back by up to one-half after

blooms fade. Other groundcovers don't need to be trimmed. Fertilizing isn't necessary.

■ **PROPAGATION**

Divide plants in spring just after they bloom, moving

divisions to another spot. Phlox and dead nettle can also be propagated from stem cuttings. Root them directly in the garden or in small pots.

■ **SOURCES**

[bluestoneperennials.com](http://bluestoneperennials.com), [witsendgardens.com](http://witsendgardens.com) ■

➔ **STANDOUT SCENT** The leaves of 'Ingwersen's Variety' geranium are especially fragrant and turn bronze in fall. The plant thrives in shade or sun (with a little extra watering).

