

Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Ideas: Top 5 Drought-Resistant Ground Covers

Florida-Friendly Landscaping

So what exactly is Florida-Friendly Landscaping? It is an integrated approach to landscaping developed by the University of Florida that allows homeowners to design, install, and maintain attractive and environmentally friendly landscapes.

The 9 principles of Florida-friendly landscaping are:

- Choosing the right plant for the right place
- Fertilizing appropriately
- Attracting wildlife
- Recycling yard waste
- Protecting the waterfront
- Watering efficiently
- Using mulch in plant beds
- Managing yard pests responsibly
- Reducing storm water runoff

Ground Covers

Now that you understand the concept behind Florida-friendly landscaping, let's define a ground cover. Any plant that grows low to the ground and can be used to fill in areas where turf grass will not grow or is not wanted is considered a ground cover. Ideally, most ground covers should be evergreen and provide a permanent covering.

Oftentimes, we struggle with plants that are not in the right place. Replacing problem plants with appropriate ground covers in areas such as hot, dry strips next to sidewalks or driveways is a perfect solution. Ground covers are sometimes used as a natural barrier to prevent foot traffic or reduce soil erosion on sloped areas. Many ground covers will also do well in deep shade, as opposed to even the most shade-tolerant turf grass. The following are some particularly tough, colorful, and drought-resistant ground covers for Central Florida landscapes.

Florida-Friendly Ground Covers

<p>Beach sunflower (<i>Helianthus debilis</i>)</p> <p>Optimal Light: Sun Mature Height: 1ft-2ft Light Range: Full/Part Sun Mature Spread: 3ft-5ft Soil Moisture: Well-drained Soil Texture: Any Salt Tolerance: High Florida Native: Yes Florida Region: N,C,S Hardiness Zone: 8b-11 Color: Year-round</p>		<p>The Beach Sunflower is a native spreading perennial that has attractive, small sunflower-like blooms year round. It spreads to form a dense ground cover in hot sunny locations, even without irrigation. It is very attractive to butterflies and often reseeds. Plant in any sunny spot with well drained soil and watch the flowers turn their faces to follow the sun from sunrise to sunset. Plant two feet apart and apply mulch to keep the weeds down and hold moisture in the sandy soils.</p>
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Lantana (*Lantana spp.*)

Optimal Light: Sun
Mature Height: 2ft-3ft
Light Range: Full/Part Sun
Mature Spread: 2ft-3ft
Soil Moisture: Well-drained
Soil Texture: Any
Salt Tolerance: High
Florida Native: No
Florida Region: N,C,S
Drought Tolerance: High
Hardiness Zone: 8-11
Color: Year-round



Lantana is one of the most popular flowering perennials in Florida. Once established, this spreading ground cover blooms continuously and requires little care. Butterflies frequent these nectar rich flowers which come in a variety of colors. Well-drained soils are required. Lantanas are salt tolerant and usually re-grow after a frost. *Lantana camara*, a non-native variety, is considered invasive in Central and South Florida. Use with caution in North Florida.

Mimosa (*Mimosa strigillosa*)

Optimal Light: Sun
Mature Height: 2in-3in
Light Range: Full Sun – Part Shade
Mature Spread: 15ft-20ft
Soil Moisture: Well-drained
Soil Texture: Any
Salt Tolerance: Low
Florida Native: No
Florida Region: N,C,S
Hardiness Zone: 8-11
Color: Year-round



Also known as powderpuff, this native ground cover has purple, brush-like flowers. Stems often root along their length and can penetrate deep into soil, one of the likely reasons that this plant is drought resistant. Mimosa can spread quickly – as few as four or five pots planted in a landscape can cover 200-300 ft² in less than a full growing season. Its rapid spread, dense, mat-like habit, and deep root system also make it a good species for erosion control.

Perennial Peanut (*Arachis glabrata*)

Optimal Light: Sun
Mature Height: ½ ft
Light Range: Full/Part Sun
Mature Spread: 3ft-5ft
Soil Moisture: Well-drained
Soil Texture: Any
Salt Tolerance: High
Florida Native: No
Florida Region: N,C,S
Hardiness Zone: 9-11



Perennial peanut is a great ground cover due to its high resistance to drought, nematodes, and pathogens and its minimal fertilizer needs. It requires no fertilization or pest control, can be walked on, and has edible, peanut flavored flowers. Flowers bloom from April through September. Top growth dies back after a frost, but the plant will come back as long as the rhizomes don't freeze. Maintain at 1.5" tall by mowing every 2-4 weeks. Mowing stimulates flowering.

Dwarf Asiatic Jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum 'Minima'*)

Optimal Light: Part Sun
Mature Height: 2ft
Light Range: Full Sun – Shade
Mature Spread: 3ft-4ft
Soil Moisture: Well-drained - Medium
Soil Texture: Any
Salt Tolerance: Med
Florida Native: No
Florida Region: N,C,S
Hardiness Zone: 8-11
Color: Year-round



This vine's slender stems form dense tangled mats when grown as ground cover. It prefers rich, well-drained soil but will succeed in most soils except those that are soggy. It is slow-growing the first 2-3 years. It has good salt tolerance and can be grown near the beach. Jasmine tolerates deep shade, but prefers moderately shady situations in hot summer climates. A weed whacker can be used to maintain a neat shape and appearance.