

Ground Covers

Grass is high maintenance compared to some other landscape alternatives. Grass will provide its greatest benefits where it can be used for its best functions, such as the high traffic and recreational areas of your yard. Other areas can be maintained in greenery by substituting turf for a wide variety of low growing ground covers. Some ground covers may be drought tolerant and stay green all through the seasons, tolerate some foot traffic, as well as stay attractive. Switching to ground covers as an alternative to turf will cut down on mowing, fertilizing, watering, pesticides, and erosion. Ground covers are also a great idea for those areas where grass is more difficult to grow such as in dry shade. Here are a few suggestions to get you started.

Ajuga (*Ajuga reptans*) – grows rapidly, tolerates clay, prefers sandy to light drained soil, is suited to shady areas.

Cinquefoils (*Potentilla* spp.) – short, runner spreader, tolerates a dry sunny area.

White Dutch Clover (*Trifolium repens* L.) – tolerates foot traffic, sun or shade, drought tolerant, can be mixed in with lawn.

Cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster* spp.) – deciduous to semi evergreen shrub, small glossy leaves, pink-white flowers, red berries, ideal for slopes, full sun to partial shade.

Dwarf Junipers (*Juniperus* spp.) – low-maintenance, evergreen, require well-drained rich soil, excellent for hot, sunny, dry places.

Japanese Spurge (*Pachysandra*) – excellent ground cover for deep shade.

Moss Pink (*Phlox subulata*) – good spreader, dense creeping carpet, plant in sunny or partial shade areas, tolerates a range of soil types.

Sedums (*Sedums* spp.) – drought tolerant, do well in thin poor soil, tolerate sun and a part shade.

Sensitive Fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*) – tolerates wet, shady conditions.

Snow- in-Summer (*Cerastium tomentosum*) – grey foliage with little white flowers, excellent choice for a small-scale ground cover, an edging along paths, or between stepping stones.

Thyme (*Thymus* spp.) –full sun, well drained soil, many species to choose from that create mounds, foliage scented, some species can withstand moderate foot traffic.

Wild strawberry (*Fragaria chiloensis*) – native species, sunny slopes, low and dense ground cover, white flowers in spring, will grow in acidic, poor soil.

Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*) – native species, slow spreader, good for shady slopes, large heart shaped leaves.

If you hire a landscape company to maintain your property, ask what alternatives to turf they offer. When going to your local nursery inquire about ground covers suitable of your specific location.

Consider Clover

Spread Clover Seed on your yard this summer. Enjoy a low or no maintenance, chemical-free lawn where kids and pets can safely “play and roll in the clover!” Express yourself on your own turf. Say “Yes!” to your front yard and help restore the Earth.

How Clover Renews the Earth

White Dutch Clover is recommended for lawns from B.C. to the Maritimes because it is:

- very hardy: tolerates foot traffic, children’s play and Canadian winters;
- adaptable: thrives in sun or shade and self- spreads by creeping stems and self-seeding to fill in bare gaps;
- Competitive with weeds, including dandelions, and is pest resistant. Therefore no toxic pesticides are needed;
- Low-growing: mowing is optional. Less power mowing saves energy and reduces greenhouse gases which cause global warming. Occasional mowing will, however, improve density and encourage it to grow at a shorter height;
- Drought tolerant: needs little or no watering. However, watering helps to get clover established;
- a “living mulch”: holds moisture in soil and discourages weeds in gardens;
- A soil de-compactor: fibrous roots loosen up the earth.

“White Dutch Clover is an excellent choice for use in lawns across Canada. Clover tends to stay green throughout drought and insect attacks which would damage grass.” — *Ed Lawrence, CBC Radio “Ontario Today” Gardening Expert and Chief of Greenhouse and Grounds Services, National Capital Commission.*

How to Roll Over to Clover

White Dutch Clover can be integrated with your existing grass to fill in bare spots or to start a new clover lawn. One pound of seed costs roughly \$6 and covers 1000 square feet of bare ground. If soil tends to be at all acidic, a light dusting of dolomitic lime before seeding is strongly recommended. Spread seed by hand or with a seeder. Because the seed tends to be very small, it is a good idea to mix with compost or soil for an even distribution while seeding. If nature does not do it for you, make sure to water your newly seeded lawn. If allowed to grow up and bloom, clover reseeds itself, year after year.

Conventional Lawn Costs:

Did you know that maintaining a conventional chemically dependent lawn on a 100 feet by 50 feet lot takes \$400, 33 hours (the equivalent of four 8-hour Saturdays), 14,000 litres of water, 70 lb. of chemical fertilizers, 46 lb. of chemical pesticides and 13 litres of gasoline per year? Also, a typical gas-powered mower emits as much air pollution annually as a car driven half way across Canada. These figures are based on information from “Definitely in my Backyard”: Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca>

Adapted from Consider Clover fact sheet <http://www.web.net/~jubilee>

Call the **Yard Improvement Helpline** at **905-540-8787 ext. 18** for tips on natural lawn and garden care.
Visit www.naturallyhamilton.ca for links to the Ministry of the Environment’s Cosmetic Pesticide Ban.