



Groundcover Plants for Southern Nevada: Viable Alternatives to Turfgrass

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Introduction

Lawns have been an integral part of the landscape of the United States, but turfgrasses are not native to this country, and their maintenance can be both costly and laborious. A recent piece of legislation in Nevada aims to reduce water use by eliminating nonfunctional turfgrass in commercial areas. However, desert residents should not eschew groundcover plants altogether, since turfgrasses are not the only option for decorative and sturdy groundcover. Extension in Clark County offers guidance to Nevada residents about alternatives to turfgrass. Groundcover plants are essential for keeping southern Nevada cool, as they hold in moisture and carbon, and prevent erosion, while pavement and plastic turf absorb heat.

Contrary to popular belief, there are many desert-adapted groundcover options available to desert residents. The purpose of this publication is to recommend plants that have positive results for Master Gardeners and local horticulturists. Gardeners who want more information are encouraged to contact their local Extension.

Alternatives to Walk On

One of the unique traits of turfgrasses is their durability, as they have been bred to withstand intense foot traffic by humans and other animals. Groundcover alternatives to turfgrass that can withstand light traffic include dwarf yarrow (*Achillea millefolium* 'Rosea') and silver carpet (*Dymondia margaretae*). Dwarf yarrow 'Rosea' has pinkish-red flowers and can be mowed to look similar to a lawn.



Silver carpet



Dwarf yarrow

Decorative Alternatives

Changing from turfgrass to alternative groundcovers need not result in a less beautiful garden. A spectacular groundcover, red mother-of-thyme (*Thymus serpyllum* 'Coccineum'), has deep green, glossy leaves and blooms with showy red flowers. It is fragrant and bee-friendly, so it may not be well-suited for areas where pets or children will play. Red mother-of-thyme should be planted 6-12 inches apart in fall or spring. Creeping wire vine/New Zealand wire vine (*Muehlenbeckia axillaris*) is another attractive alternative with dark, glossy leaves closely spaced. It is best for rock gardens and small areas. 'Lake King' eremophila (*Eremophila subteretifolia*) is a prostrate shrub with narrow, dark leaves and orange-yellow flowers. It requires little watering and can also be used to trail over walls. An *Evolvulus* hybrid known as "Blue my Mind" and dwarf morning glory is another showy groundcover plant. With blue flowers and silvery leaves, this plant stands out in desert-adapted landscapes. Both of these plants require supplemental watering but tolerate high heat and full sun.



Red mother-of-thyme



Creeping wire vine



'Lake king' eremophila



Dwarf morning glory

Highly Drought Tolerant Alternatives

If a gardener wants a groundcover that is particularly low-maintenance, Angelina stonecrop (*Sedum rupestre* 'Angelina') forms a low-growing mat. Its star-shaped, yellow flowers bloom from June to August. This plant tolerates full sun to light shade. Additionally, Master Gardener testimonials attest to the hardiness of red ice plant (*Malephora crocea*), an evergreen succulent with blueish-green leaves. Its red-orange flowers are small, abundant and showy. This plant blooms from spring to late summer.



Red ice plant



Angelina stonecrop

Other Alternatives

- Lantana (*Lantana camara*)
- Roman chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*)
- Germander (*Teurcium majoricum*)
- Trailing indigo bush (*Dalea greggii*)
- Pineleaf penstemon (*Penstemon pinifolius*)

- Blackfoot daisy (*Melampodium leucanthum*)
- Damianita (*Chrysactinia mexicana*)
- Southwestern mock vervain (*Glandularia gooddingii*)
- Angelita daisy (*Tetrandeum acaulis*)
- Germander sage (*Salvia chamaedryoides*)
- Many species of *Verbena*
- Miniature mat daisy (*Belium minutum*)

Further information

For more guidance and information, gardeners are encouraged to contact the Master Gardener help line at 702-257-5555 or visit the Extension office in Clark County to ask questions in person.

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