

Native Groundcovers

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Groundcovers are generally thought of as ground-hugging plants that seldom venture vertically. I think if you expand on this common knowledge definition of vegetative groundcovers, you will succeed in attracting the attention of more than just a few robins.

Instead of planting non-native ground covers such as vinca or pachysandra, try a native sedum (*Sedum ternatum*) in your shady garden bed. This one-foot tall plant is an amazing creeper with almost succulent foliage, much like that of a miniature jade house plant. Blooming during May and June, the striking white, star-shaped inflorescences attract a variety of insects, which, in turn, bring wrens, sparrows and flycatchers to your garden beds.

In the sunny garden, I love mass plantings of prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) or little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*). Prairie dropseed, when spaced 18" to two feet apart, form brilliant green mounds of fine-textured foliage, which look great as a monoculture or combined with native prairie wildflowers such as butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) or blazingstars (*Liatris* spp.).

I can't say enough good things about little blue. If you have a well drained and sunny location, this plant will exceed your expectations as both a native ornamental grass and functional groundcover. With roots exceeding four feet below the soil surface, this plant provides incredible soil-holding power and beautiful fall colors of russet and amber. If your native grass ground-cover planting is large enough, you may find vesper or savanna sparrows nesting in the thatch formed at the base of these clump-forming species.