

Ground Covers for Pinellas County

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Ground covers are naturally low-growing plants that can be a few inches to 3 feet tall and used to cover bare ground. Select them according to the amount of light they will receive, the moisture level of the soil, and if salt-tolerance is needed. Also, consider the desired outcome (groundcover, wildflower garden, border, mass planting or specimen). New plantings will take time to become established and fill in the area (usually 1 to 3 years).

Before planting make sure the area is weed-free. Consider using a non-selective systemic herbicide such as glyphosate for this purpose. Another option for a sunny spot is to solarize the soil. Remove all the weeds, water the soil, place CLEAR UV stabilized 3-6 mil plastic over the cleared soil, and bury the edges to prevent airflow. This must be done during the hot, sunny, summer (at least 6 weeks) to build up enough heat to kill the weed seeds and disease organisms. Leave the plastic in place until ready to plant.

For a wildflower meadow: Sow seeds mid-October through December for zone 9b, and November through January for zone 10A. Distribute seeds evenly by filling a large bucket about halfway with sand or vermiculite and slightly moisten, add 1/2 of the seeds and mix well. Start at one end of the garden and spread the mixture evenly over the site from east to west. Repeat procedure except start at other end of the garden and go north to south. If erosion is a concern, add a thin layer of weed-free straw. Make sure there is good soil to seed contact. Water seeds gently after planting to help settle them in the soil. Under normal conditions, native plants do not require fertilizer; in fact, fertilizer tends to promote weeds and water pollution.

For groundcovers: Place plants paying attention to spacing. Once you have the proper layout, dig the holes and install the plants (keep the root ball slightly above ground level). Mulch the area in-between the plants (not over the root ball). Apply a preemergent herbicide over the mulch to keep weed seeds from germinating. Make sure the preemergent is safe for your particular plant by reading the label and applying according the label directions (federal law). Smaller, younger plants will establish more quickly and are cheaper to buy. Water the plants initially until they are established. Small plants may only need to be watered a couple of times to get them established. Keep up with mulching, preemergent applications, and weeding until the area is covered. Correctly chosen plants should not need any further care once established, other than occasional weeding.

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Name	Light	Moisture range	Salt Tolerance	Native habitats	Uses	Height x Width	Notes
Blanket flower <i>Gaillardia pulchella</i>	FS	1 Dry to very dry	High	Dry sites, often near the coast.	Cultivated flower beds, roadside wildflower plantings, wildflower garden.	H= .75 to 1.5 feet x .5 to 2 feet wide	Annual. Showy flowers good as cut flowers. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Attracts many pollinators including honey and native bees, butterflies and wasps. Birds that eat the seeds include chickadees, titmice, and warblers.
Seacoast sumpweed <i>Iva imbricata</i>	FS	1 Dry to very dry	High	Coastal dunes.	Groundcover in coastal sandy areas. Useful for dune stabilization.	H=2 to 3 feet x 4 to 10 feet	Shrub. Long-lived perennial. Evergreen.
Beach morning glory <i>Ipomoea imperati</i>	FS	1 Dry to very dry	High	Beach dunes.	Groundcover in open, dry, sandy sites.	H= .5 feet x 30 feet	Vine. Long-lived perennial. Showy white flowers. Good for pollinators.
West-coast dune flower <i>Helianthus debilis</i>	FS	1 Dry to very dry	M	Beach dune. Disturbed areas near coast (ruderal).	Wildflower garden, groundcover.	H= .5 to 1 foot	Annual. Showy yellow flowers.
Orange milkweed <i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	FS	1 Dry to very dry	None	Sandhill, clayhill, scrub, ruderal.	Wildflower garden, meadow.	H=1 to 2 feet	Flower. Short-lived perennial. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Known for butterflies, bees, other insects. Larval host to the monarch , queen and soldier butterflies.
Florida greeneyes <i>Berlandiera subacaulis</i>	FS	1 Dry to very dry	None	Sandhill, dry flatwoods, upland mixed forests, ruderal.	Small specimen.	H=1 to 2 feet	Flower. Short-lived perennial. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Attracts many different kinds of pollinators - bees, wasp, and butterflies.
Forked blue-curls <i>Trichostema dichotomum</i>	FS	1 Dry to very dry	None	Scrub, xeric hammock, overgrown sandhill, flatwoods.	Wildflower garden.	H= 2 to 3 feet x 1 to 2 feet	Annual. Showy, blue, fragrant flowers. Attracts various pollinators and hummingbirds.

Blue sage <i>Salvia azurea</i>	FS	1 Dry to very dry	None	Flatwoods, sandhills, pine-oak-hickory woods, secondary woods. Zone 9B.	Wildflower garden, suitable for naturalizing. Blooms July-October.	Height: 3-5 ft Width: 2-4 ft	Flower. Short-lived perennial. Valuable nectar source for native bees and other pollinators.
Sandhill milkweed, <i>Asclepias humistrata</i>	FS	1 Dry to very dry	None	Sandhill, clayhill, scrub.	Small specimen plant. Difficult to transplant. Best grown from seed.	Height: 1-3 ft Width: 1 ft	Showy white, pink, purple flowers, showy purple, green fruits, interesting foliage. Winter dormant. Toxic. Larval host to the Monarch butterfly, Queen butterfly and others. Attracts many pollinators, especially native bees. Interesting pink veined foliage, showy flowers. Often lies on its side with the flowers held somewhat above the rest of the plant.
Blue porterweed <i>Stachytarpheta jamaicensis</i>	FS, PS	1 Dry to very dry	M	Coastal strand, open areas in dry mesic hardwood forests, sometimes nestled under trees along sandy roadsides.	Groundcover or in a meadow.	H= .5 to 1 foot x 3 to 4 feet	Flower. Short-lived perennial (5 years). <u>Winter dormant</u> . Showy blue/purple flowers. Host plant for the tropical buckeye. Attracts pollinators.
Roseling, Spiderwort <i>Callisia spp.</i>	FS, PS	1 Dry to very dry	None	Dry sites.	Small specimen flower or, en-masse, as a limited area groundcover.	Height: 0.5 to 1 ft. Width:	Flower. Winter dormant. Showy pink, purple flowers. Flowers are produced in the morning and close by early afternoon. Propagation: Division of clumps. Seed.
Quailberry, Christmasberry <i>Crossopetalum ilicifolium</i>	FS, PS	1 Dry to very dry	None	Pine rockland, rockland hammock, sinkhole. Sinkhole edges. Zone 10A.	Small shrub. Can be planted as a groundcover in beds or masses with other low-growing plants. Makes a good plant for use in a rock (limerock) garden. Calcareous soils.	Height: 1-2 (3) ft Width: 1-3 ft	Shrub. Evergreen. Showy white flowers, showy red fruits, interesting foliage. Fruits attract birds.

Gopher apple <i>Licania michauxii</i>	FS, PS	1 Dry to very dry	None	Scrub, scrubby flatwoods, sandhill, dry secondary woods.	Groundcover in dry, sunny settings.	Height: 0.5 to 1 ft	Deciduous. Showy white flowers. Fruits are eaten by small mammals and gopher tortoises. Fruit edible.
Coastal searocket <i>Cakile lanceolata</i>	FS	2 Dry	High	Coastal dunes.	Searocket is best used to hold loose sand in place such as the beach dune system.	Height: 2 feet Width: 2 feet	Evergreen. White flower. Fruit yellow. Attracts butterflies and bees
Sand Squares <i>Paronychia rugelii</i>	FS, PS	2 Dry	M	Woodlands, flat pinewoods, sandhill, scrub, disturbed areas in the coastal plain.	Groundcover.	H=8 to 12 inches x 8 to 12 inches	Annual. <u>Winter dormant</u> . White flowers and interesting foliage.
Twinflower <i>Dyschoriste oblongifolia</i>	FS, PS	2 Dry	None	Sandhill, flatwoods, upland mixed forest.	Groundcover. While tolerant of dry soils, extended extremely dry periods will cause its demise.	H= .5 to 1 foot	Flower. Short-lived perennial. Showy lavender flowers. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Attracts many pollinators, especially bees. Larval host plant for common buckeye.
Beach creeper, golden creeper <i>Ernodea littoralis</i>	FS, PS	3 Very slightly moist to very dry	M	Dunes, coastal areas with rocky soils (sunny, open areas).	Low specimen plant, mass plantings. Can be used as a low hedge, even sheared. Useful for beach dune stabilization.	H=2 to 3 feet x 2 to 4 feet	Shrub. Long-lived perennial. Evergreen. Showy flowers and fruits. Provides food for birds and other wildlife.
Scarlet sage, tropical sage, blood sage <i>Salvia coccinea</i>	FS, PS	4 Slightly moist to very dry	M	Disturbed sites, calcareous bluffs, shell mounds.	Wildflower gardens and meadows.	H= 2 to 6 feet x .5 to 2 feet	Annual. Showy flowers. Attracts numerous pollinators - butterflies, hummingbirds, nut-hatches, warblers, and bumblebees. Readily self-seeds and can be fairly aggressive.

Seaside goldenrod <i>Solidago sempervirens</i>	FS, PS	5 Slightly moist to dry	M	Coastal upland forest. Coastal marshes, estuarine and bay shores.	Wildflower garden.	H= 2.5 to 3.5 feet x 1.5 to 2.5 feet	Flower. Short-lived perennial. Showy yellow flowers. Attracts many pollinators. Is not an allergen.
Starry rosinweed <i>Silphium asteriscus</i>	FS, PS	5 Slightly moist to dry	None	Moist roadsides, flatwoods, sandhill, scrub.	Wildflower garden. Plant in late winter, early spring.	H=2 to 5 feet x 1 to 2 feet	Flower. Short-lived perennial. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Yellow flowers. Rosinweed has many pollinators including bees, and butterflies
Muhly grass, hairgrass <i>Muhlenbergia capillaris</i>	FS, PS	6 Moist to very dry	M	Flatwoods, marshes, scrub.	Hedge, specimen plant, mass planting.	H= 2 to 3 feet x 1 to 3.5 feet	Grass. Long-lived perennial. Showy purple flowers. Forms a canopy that small animals can use for shelter and refuge. Small birds eat the seeds.
Yellow Jessamine <i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i>	FS, PS	6 Moist to very dry	None	Mesic to xeric hardwood forests and upland mixed forests, secondary woods, bluffs, floodplains, flatwoods, ruderal.	Train on a fence or arbor, allow to climb trees. Can be used as a groundcover but does not bloom well with that use.	Height: 25 feet	Vine. Evergreen. Birds attracted to the fruits include warblers, grosbeaks, cardinals, mockinbirds, titmice, chickadees, and thrashers. Hummingbirds are among the pollinators. Toxic if eaten.
Coontie, arrowroot <i>Zamia integrifolia</i>	FS, PS, SH	6 Moist to very dry	High	Upland hardwood forests, high pine, coastal hammocks, shell middens.	Specimen plant or mass planting in border.	H= 2 to 3 feet x 3 to 5 feet	Shrub. Long-lived perennial. Evergreen. Larval host for atala butterfly and the echo moth.
Leavenworth's Tickseed <i>Coreopsis leavenworthii</i>	FS	7 Moist to dry	None	Moist to wet flatwoods, marl prairies, sandhill, scrub, and disturbed areas.	Cultivated flower beds, wildflower gardens, meadows, and butterfly gardens.	H=1.5 to 3 feet x .5 to 1.5 feet	Annual. Showy yellow flowers. Attract many butterflies, and is a source of nectar and pollen for honeybees, native bees, and wasps.
Eastern gamagrass, Fakahatchee grass <i>Tripsacum dactyloides</i>	FS, PS	7 Moist to dry	High	Wet bogs, roadsides, ditches, wet hammocks, river banks, low thickets, pine woods, open swamps, open	Hedge, individual large grass clump, background screen for a flower garden.	H= 4 to 6 feet x 2 to 4 feet	Grass. Long-lived perennial. Showy flowers. Larval host for Three-spotted, Clouded and Byssus Skipper. Provides excellent cover for small mammals, birds, and reptiles. Deer eat the hard, yellow, corn-like seed produced by this grass.

				habitats, flatwoods, sandhill, scrub.			
Mangrove spiderlily <i>Hymenocallis latifolia</i>	FS, PS	7 Moist to dry	High	Shell mound, maritime hammock, coastal strand, beach dune, mangrove swamp (edges), estuarine (brackish) swamp.	Borders and wildflower beds.	H= 2 to 3 feet	Flower. Long-lived perennial. Showy white flowers.
Lyre-leaved sage <i>Salvia lyrata</i>	FS, PS	7 Moist to dry	None	Disturbed sites. Roadsides, dry-mesic to mesic areas.	Wildflower garden. Roadside plantings. Can be mixed in with grasses or other low groundcovers. If kept mowed, it will reward you in the spring by creating a sea of blue.	H= 1 - 1.5 ft	Flower. Short-lived perennial. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Showy blue/lavender flowers, interesting foliage. Attracts many pollinators including hummingbirds, butterflies and bees.
Sunshine mimosa, powderpuff <i>Mimosa strigillosa</i>	FS, PS	7 Moist to dry	None	Open, disturbed areas. Typically fairly moist but tolerates dry soils after establishment.	Groundcover, can be mowed. Not good for heavy traffic. Tends not to have good cover during late fall through winter.	H= 6 inches x spreading	Flower. Long-lived perennial. Pink flowers. Pollinated by bees. Larval host of little sulfur butterfly. Sparse in winter.
Carolina wild petunia <i>Ruellia caroliniensis</i>	FS, PS, SH	7 Moist to dry	M	Dry mesic hammocks, flatwoods, sandhill, disturbed areas.	Groundcover.	H= 1 to 2.5 feet x .75 to 2 feet	Flower. Short-lived perennial. Showy purple/lavender flowers. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Host plant for the Common Buckeye, and White Peacock butterflies. Also attracts many other pollinators.

Marsh pennywort <i>Hydrocotyle umbellata</i>	PS	7 Moist to dry	None	Cutthroat seep, wet prairie, dome swamp.	Groundcover in moist areas. Can be mowed.	H=3 to 5 inches x spreading	Flower. Short-lived perennial. Interesting foliage, white flowers. Evergreen.
Bristle basketgrass <i>Oplismenus hirtellus</i>	PS, SH	7 Moist to dry	None	Moist sites. Shade. Moist hammocks.	Groundcover.	H= .3 feet	Grass. Long-lived. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Not visible during winter-spring, so its use is somewhat restricted to areas where this is not an issue.
Partridge berry <i>Mitchella repens</i>	SH	7 Moist to dry	None	Hammocks, upland hardwood forests, upland mixed forest, seep slopes, second bottom and levees in floodplains.	Typically grown as a curiosity. This is a very small plant that acts as a groundcover with the caveat that the plants are very small. Keep it in a natural forested setting or establish in such an area.	Height: 1 inch	Evergreen. Evergreen. Showy white flowers, showy red fruits, interesting foliage. Birds consume the berries.
Elliott's lovegrass <i>Eragrostis elliottii</i>	FS	8 Moist to slightly dry	High	Flatwoods, sandhill, wet prairie, cutthroat seeps, dry hammocks, disturbed sites.	Wildflower garden and mass plantings	H= 1 to 3 feet x 1 to 2 feet	Grass. Short-lived perennial. Small birds and other wildlife consume the seed. Larval host for zabulon skipper
Sand cordgrass <i>Spartina bakeri</i>	FS	8 Moist to slightly dry	High	Wet prairie, edges of marshes, but mostly inland--rarely coastal.	Large clump-forming grass with uses as tall groundcover, specimen plant, or border plant. Nice along edges of ponds and water features.	H= 3 to 4 (6) feet x 3 to 4 feet	Grass. Long-lived perennial.

Spiked blazing star <i>Liatris spicata</i>	FS	8 Moist to slightly dry	None	Mesic to wet flatwoods, seep slopes, bogs, savannas, ditches, cutthroat seeps, bogs, boggy swamps.	Wildflower garden.	H= 2 to 7 feet x less than 1 foot wide	Flower. Short-lived perennial. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Showy lavender flowers. Attracts butterflies and bees. Sometimes the flower stalks are too tall and heavy to stand. Can be cut back mid-summer to reduce height or staked.
Frogfruit, turkey tangle fogfruit <i>Phyla nodiflora</i>	FS, PS	8 Moist to slightly dry	High	Dry-moist-wet sites. Disturbed wet prairies, ruderal areas.	Low growing groundcover can be used as a turf substitute in low traffic areas.	H= 6 inches x spreading	Flower. Short-lived perennial. Showy small white/purple flowers. Evergreen. Larval host for Phaon Crescent, White Peacock and Common Buckeye. Good nectar source for hairstreaks.
Whorled milkweed <i>Asclepias verticillata</i>	FS, PS	8 Moist to slightly dry	None	Flatwoods.	Wildflower garden. This is a small but pretty little plant. Grow it in a moist wildflower garden.	Height: 1-3 ft Width: to 1 ft	Flower. Annual. Showy small white flowers. Larval host for the monarch butterfly. Attracts various pollinators. It may be necessary to re-seed to keep this in the garden. Seed is not generally commercially available.
Rainlily, atamasco lily, zephyr lily <i>Zephyranthes atamasca</i>	FS, PS, SH	8 Moist to slightly dry	None	River floodplains. Low roadsides. Low pastures. Usually seen in late winter/spring after rains. Can show up at other times with the right pattern of dry/rain.	Small wildflower. Plant in low border or intermixed with a groundcover.	H= 1 foot x 1 foot	Flower. Long-lived perennial. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Showy white flowers. Typically seen in spring or after rain. Grows in small tufts. Attracts pollinators.
Wild Boston Fern <i>Nephrolepis exaltata</i>	PS, SH	8 Moist to slightly dry	None	Wet-dry sites. Swamps, hammocks, yards.	Groundcover especially in shady moist areas. Spreads by rhizomes	Height = 2 feet	Fern. Long-lived perennial. Evergreen. NOTE: Do not use <i>Nephrolepis cordifolia</i> - it is a category I invasive plant with tubers.
Maryland goldenaster <i>Chrysopsis mariana</i>	FS, PS	9 Moist	None	Wet to moist soils.	Moist wildflower garden.	Height: 1-2 ft Width: 1 ft	Flower. Winter dormant. Long-lived perennial. Yellow showy flowers. Attracts pollinators. Birds and other small wildlife consume fruit.

Florida peperomia <i>Peperomia obtusifolia</i>	SH	9 Moist	None	Rockland hammocks, hydric hammocks, strand swamps.	Groundcover.	H= 6 to 9 inches x clumping	Long-lived perennial. Evergreen. Endangered.
Sea purslane <i>Sesuvium portulacastrum</i>	FS	10 Slightly wet to slightly dry	High	Coastal forests, coastal dunes.	Use as a groundcover in moist coastal settings.	H= 4 to 6 inches x wide spreading	Flower. Long-lived perennial. Evergreen. Showy pink/lavender flowers and interesting foliage. An important sand stabilizer in the pioneer zone of beach dunes and can tolerate occasional flooding by sea water.
Deer tongue <i>Carphephorus paniculatus</i>	FS	11 Wet Moist to dry	None	Hydric to mesic pine flatwoods, cutthroat seeps, bogs.	Wildflower garden.	Height: 3 feet	Flower. Winter dormant. Short-lived perennial. Pink flowers. Attracts butterflies.
Simpson's lily <i>Zephyranthes simpsonii</i>	FS, PS	11 Wet to slightly dry	None	Dome swamp, wet flatwoods, wet prairie. In ditches, wet pastures, roadsides. Often in burned areas.	Small wildflower, or plant with other low groundcovers.	H= 1 foot x .5 foot	Flower. Short-lived perennial. Showy white flowers. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Threatened - state. Attracts pollinators.
Cinnamon fern <i>Osmunda cinnamomea</i>	PS, SH	11 Wet to slightly dry	None	Seepage edges of swamps and in the upper reaches of baygalls (bay swamps).	Specimen in moist areas. Large size and grace are its principal appeal.	H= 3 feet x 3 feet	Fern. Long-lived perennial. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Showy fruits, interesting foliage.
Water hyssop <i>Bacopa monnieri</i>	FS, PS	12 Wet to moist	M	Lake edges, stream floodplains, marshes, swamps.	Low ground-hugging ground cover in restoration areas, in ditches, and on wetland edges.	H= 6 inches x spreading extensive mats	Flower. Long-lived perennial. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Showy white/pink flowers. Larval host plant for white peacock butterflies.

Aquatic milkweed, swamp milkweed <i>Asclepias perennis</i>	PS, SH	12 Wet to moist	None	Marshes, swamps.	Small specimen plant in wet areas.	H= 1 to 3 feet x 1 foot	Flower. Short lived perennial. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Showy white flowers. Larval host to the monarch, queen and soldier butterfly. Attracts various pollinators including butterflies and bees. Toxic.
Golden Canna <i>Canna Flaccida</i>	FS, PS	13 Wet	None	Swamps, pond and lake margins, ditches, savannas, hydric pine flatwoods.	Stands of flowers.	H=3 to 6 feet x 4 feet wide	Flower. Long-lived perennial. <u>Winter dormant</u> . Provides a great deal of protection to fish, amphibians, insects, and other aquatic life. The foliage allows the larvae of dragonflies to have a safe place to climb from ponds and metamorphose into adults. The foliage is host to the larvae of the Brazilian skipper butterfly (<i>Calpodethes ethlius</i>). Nectar plant.
Swamp milkweed <i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	FS, PS	13 Wet	None	Open seepage areas, marshes.	Plant in wet areas where it can be grown in large clumps. Grows naturally in floodplains.	Height: 2 to 3.5 ft Width: 1.5 to 2 ft	Flower. Showy pink flowers. Winter dormant. Larval host to the monarch butterfly, queen butterfly and soldier butterfly.