

Tough Covers

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Certain herbaceous perennials make good groundcovers in less-than-ideal conditions. A five-year joint study by Cornell University in New York and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center tested several dozen perennials on roadsides, slopes and other stressful sites.

Most successful at preventing weed growth because they rapidly formed dense canopies that excluded light were *Phlox subulata* 'Emerald Blue', *Alchemilla mollis* 'Thriller', *Nepeta x faassenii* 'Walker's Low', *Stachys byzantina* and *Heuchera* 'Chocolate Veil'. Prostrate growers such as *Veronica repens*, *Trifolium pratense* and *Gysophila* needed more weeding, especially in their first year, while moderate initial weeding was required by *Thymus serpyllum*, *Dianthus*, *Solidago sphacelata*, *Sedum acre* 'Gold Moss' and *Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-Low'.

The creeping phlox, creeping thyme, sedum, ornamental goldenrod, and lamb's ears proved to be the most drought tolerant. Ornamental goldenrod (*Solidago sphacelata*) was also extremely tolerant of salt. The goldenrod and also the 'Walker's Low' catmint were found to release very potent weed-suppressing allelochemicals. Catmint, lady's mantle and creeping phlox were unharmed by deer.

In Ohio tests where plant heights were limited to 4", the most promising were creeping mazus (*M. reptans*), blue star (*Laurentia fluviatilis*), *Potentilla neumanniana* 'Nana', *Aster ericoides* 'Schneegitter', and *Persicaria affinis*.