

Lawn ALTERNATIVES

Lawns offer excellent traffic tolerance and a pleasing uniform appearance; however, they have very specific nutrient, water, sunlight, and pH needs that may be challenging to meet. Lawn alternatives include resilient plants that provide a dense, compact cover in areas where grass may struggle. In many cases, alternatives can also offer additional benefits such as fall color, fragrance, and wildlife support.

Shade

	Nimblewill, <i>Muhlenbergia schreberi</i>	N	<8	L	Mowable, warm season grass, yellows in winter, spreads well	■ ■ ■
	Bristleleaf Sedge, <i>Carex eburnea</i>	N	<8	M	Semi-evergreen, delicate and grass-like	■ ■
	Poverty Oat Grass, <i>Danthonia spicata</i>	N	<7	L	Attractive, curling grass, grows in poor, dry conditions, mowable	■ ■
	Creeping Sedge, <i>Carex laxiculmis</i>	N	<7	M	Semi-evergreen, spreading, large leaves	■ ■
	Oak Sedge, <i>Carex pensylvanica</i>	N	<7	M	Evergreen, one of the easiest sedges to find	■ ■
	Sweet Woodruff, <i>Galium odoratum</i>		<6	H	Evergreen, Fragrant, white flowers, can be mown	■ ■
	Moss, various spp.	N	<7	M	Acidic, moist conditions, often growing as groundcover already, Common Haircap, Pincushion two common spp.	■ ■
	Pussytoes, <i>Plantain-leaf, Antennaria plantaginifolia</i>	N	<6	P L	Tolerates poor soil, slow spreader, white blooms	■ ■
	Common Blue Violet, <i>Viola sororia</i>	N	any	P M	Deciduous, purple flowers spring	■ ■
	American Wintergreen, <i>Gaultheria procumbens</i>	N	<6	L	Evergreen, Fragrant when crushed, fall color	■

Water Needs:

L=low

M=medium

H=high

Foot Traffic:

■ =infrequent

■ ■ =occasional

■ ■ ■ =moderate

N

=VA Native

>6

=pH Range

P

=supports pollinators

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Extension Master Gardeners

Photos in order of appearance: VCE-PW, Dan McNeal, Sandy Wolkenber, mjpapay, VCE-PW, abogomazova, Harriet Carter, VCE-PW, Harriet Carter, David McCorquodale

LawnALTERNATIVES

References

Flora of Virginia

North Carolina Extension Gardener
Plant Toolbox (ncsu.edu)
Lawn Alternatives (maryland.gov)

Groundcovers Plant NOVA Natives
Virginia Native Plant Society- Plants
for Southeast Virginia

Sun



Carpet Daisy, *Calyptocarpus vialis*

any

P

M

Attracts sulfur and skipper butterflies, can mow



White Clover, *Trifolium repens*

any

P

H

Host plant, cover crop; fixes nitrogen, erosion control, spreads



Lyreleaf Sage, *Salvia lyrata*

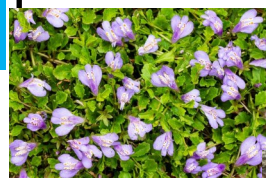
N

<8

P

M

Drought-tolerant, attracts hummingbirds & butterflies

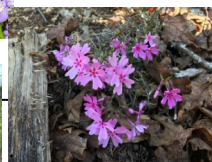


Mazus, *Mazus miquelii*

6-8

H

Grows well in wet sites; can be mowed



Pineland Phlox, *Phlox nivalis*

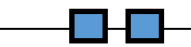
N

<8

P

M

Likes sloped banks; drought-tolerant, pollinator friendly



Purple Lovegrass, *Eragrostis spectabilis*

N

<7.5

M

Warm season grass, can be mowed a few times per year



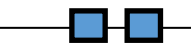
Common Wood Sedge, *Carex blanda*

N

>5.5

H

Evergreen, aggressive in bare soil, attracts birds



Stonecrop, *Sedum ternatum*

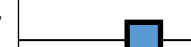
N

>6

P

L

Attracts butterflies, songbirds, pollinators, tolerates rocky and poor soils.



Viola, *Viola bicolor*

N

P

<6

M

Attracts butterflies, bees, wildlife.



Wild Geranium, *Geranium maculatum*

N

P

<8

M

Attracts songbirds, fibrous roots + shallow taproot, good for massing beneath taller shrubs and trees



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Photos in order of appearance: Annika Lindqvist, Harriet Carter (3 photos), Sean Bloom, VCE-PW, Harriet Carter, VCE-PW, Harriet Carter