

Green Mulch - Looking at Four Common Native Plants

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At the Pollinator Garden at Fighting Creek Park in Powhatan, we have been experimenting with low-growing, spreading native plants as ground covers (green mulch or living mulch). We started with Wild Strawberries, Yarrow, Pussytoes, and Common Violets. Here's what we have learned:

Wild Strawberries took off like wildfire. We started with three plants. By the second year, they were halfway through the plot, and by the third year, they had reached the other side. They are great ground cover! The little plants sprout on stolon, root, and leave plenty of room in between for all your favorite perennials to flourish.

Yarrow and Pussytoes both spread much more slowly and form denser mats. They will grow around other perennials, but do not leave as much room for the others as your Wild Strawberries do.

The Common Violets were not as happy in their first year as they were in full afternoon sun. Once they were moved to the other side, they began to thrive. Our plot is flat, but if you have a slight slope and some erosion, Common Violets can be very helpful. Besides their substantive roots, they have small rhizomes that make the surface bumpy, slowing water movement.

And the best part of our experiment with ground covers is that, with their roots doing the job, we no longer must add mulch to this garden every year. We just let all the native plants do the job.



Pussytoes form a dense, weed-smothering ground cover. Photo by Betsy Washington

For more information:

Choose Native Plants for Life - <https://choosenatives.org/articles/plant-native-ground-covers-make-america-green/>

Living Mulch (Part One) – an Ecological Alternative to Wood Mulch - <https://edgeofthewoodsnursery.com/living-mulch-part-one-an-ecological-alternative-to-wood-mulch>

Living Mulch (Part Two) – Species Suggestions - <https://edgeofthewoodsnursery.com/living-mulch-part-two-species-suggestions>