

Addendum: Additional Details and Answers to Chat Questions

Elaine Mills, presenter of “Native Ground Covers for Sun & Shade”

In response to a question about whether deer-resistant plants would also be **rabbit-resistant**:

- Unfortunately, no plants are truly “rabbit-proof,” and rabbits may browse on plants that deer don’t tend to eat. For example, Moss Phlox (*Phlox subulata*) is reportedly seldom damaged by deer, but rabbits may eat the foliage.
- Refer to the Tried and True plant fact sheets where we have provided some information on predation by rabbits.
- The blog post [“Virginia’s Rabbit-proof Native Plants”](#) on the Choose Native website has photos of plants that are less likely to be affected by rabbits. The organization also compiled a [checklist](#) based on consultation with Arlington Regional Master Naturalists and reference to resources prepared by Penn State Extension and Native Plants Wildlife Gardens.

For those interested in the **preparation of the pads (nopales) or fruits (tunas)** of Eastern Prickly Pear (*Opuntia humifusa*), refer to [information](#) provided by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Note that the glochids (minute bristle-like barbed hairs) on the pads can cause severe skin irritation upon contact.

Regarding a question about **tolerance to Black Walnut**:

- Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) and Butternut (*J. cinerea*), as well as hickory trees in the *Carya* genus, produce the chemical juglone to enhance their survival and reproduction by inhibiting the growth of nearby competing plants.
- Sensitive plants located beneath the canopy of these trees may be exposed to juglone through direct contact with the roots or accumulation of the toxin from leaves and the hulls of nuts. Symptoms of sensitivity include yellowing and wilting of leaves and will eventually result in death.
- See a [post by the Penn State Extension](#) for recommendations for planting around walnuts and a list of plants that are tolerant of juglone.
- See also information on the MGNV website for [Best Bets plants](#) recommended for use near Black Walnut trees.



Native Ground Covers for Sun & Shade

Gardeners either seem to love or greatly dislike the **wild violets** (*Viola* species) that volunteer in yards.

- Violets can be a useful ground cover that is beneficial for pollinators by providing nectar and for many fritillary species by serving as a host plant for their caterpillars.
- Removal by digging out individual plants is not a particular problem in garden areas without turfgrass.
- For those who are concerned about control of violets in lawns, refer to a [blog post by the Penn State Extension](#).

For those concerned about **control of [invasive Periwinkle](#)**:

- The best way to prevent the spread of this plant is to avoid using it as a garden plant.
- The most ecological control method is to manually remove the plants by digging them out by hand, being sure to remove all of the roots which are fairly shallow. Use of a tool like a [hori-hori](#) (a soil or weeding knife) is recommended for lifting the runners that set down roots in multiple places. This approach is certainly advisable if desirable plants are intermixed with the Periwinkle.
- Use of an herbicide should be a last resort.

Regarding a question about **distinguishing native Allegheny Spurge** (*Pachysandra procumbens*) from [invasive Japanese Pachysandra](#) (*Pachysandra terminalis*):

- Invasive Japanese Pachysandra spreads by rhizomes; its stems are stiff and upright; its leaves are dark green, stiff, and glossy; and its flowers rise above the upper leaves (hence the species name *terminalis*).
- In the native Allegheny Spurge, the leaf stems droop and extend along the ground (hence the species name *procumbens*.) The flowers, which appear in early spring, arise from ground level. The leaves are softer in appearance and have a marbled coloration with hints of purple and silvery white during the winter and early spring before turning a medium green.
- See a [photo comparison](#) of the two *Pachysandra* species at the Identify That Plant website.

Native Ground Covers for Sun & Shade

In response to a question about **shade-tolerant low ground covers that can take light foot traffic:**

- Two native sedges, Pennsylvania Sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*) and Appalachian Sedge (*Carex appalachica*) are sometimes described as tolerant of light foot traffic. I would personally recommend the use of steppingstones in order to pass through an area where any shade-loving native plants are used as ground covers. Some of the sun-loving native species are more tolerant of foot traffic.
- See Mt. Cuba's recent report on [Carex for the Mid-Atlantic Region](#) for information on which species they recommend as successful and mowable replacements for traditional turfgrass.

On the question of whether native plants can **choke out English Ivy** on a slope:

- It would be difficult to find a native plant that can compete with the ivy if it is left in place. Rather, it is advisable to remove the ivy and replant with a preferred plant.
- See the section on controlling invasives, beginning at 1:07:06 in my presentation on ["Invasive Plants and Native Alternatives,"](#) for general information on dealing with invasive ground covers and specific details on removing English Ivy.
- See a short video on ["Invasive Plant: English Ivy"](#) for a further discussion of the removal and replacement process with some suggestions for native alternatives.
- Golden Ragwort (*Packera aurea*) is the native ground cover strongly recommended by our local Audubon at Home ambassadors as a replacement for English Ivy because it spreads rapidly to fill in empty areas. Other possible alternatives are Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) and Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*).

In regard to **xeriscaping on a slope:**

- Moss Phlox (*Phlox subulata*) is a drought-tolerant plant that can survive in stony or sandy soil. It forms a solid mat when its prostrate stems branch and root at the nodes, making it an excellent choice for erosion control in dry conditions.
- Creeping Phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*) spreads by stolons (above-ground stems) to form large colonies as its name suggests, but it prefers rich, organic soil with consistent moisture, making it better suited as a ground cover in a woodland garden or naturalized area.
- Refer to page 71 (Solutions for Slopes) of the publication [Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping](#) for suggestions on additional plants that provide stabilization on dry, sunny slopes.

In response to a request for a dense ground cover recommendation for a **steep slope with dry soil under white pine**:

- Barren Strawberry (*Geum fragarioides*) creates a dense mat and is evergreen. [Minnesota Wildflowers](#) lists suitable habitat as “part shade, shade; moist to dry woods, pine forest.”
- Allegheny Spurge (*Pachysandra procumbens*), Wild Ginger (*Asarum canadense*), Meadow Anemone (*Anemone canadensis*), and Lady Fern (*Athyrium asplenoides*) are suggested by various websites as ground covers appropriate for use under pine trees.

Regarding **Lady Fern**:

- (Southern) Lady Fern (*Athyrium asplenoides*, formerly *A. filix-femina*) is common throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, except for northern Pennsylvania. It typically grows in wooded ravines, moist woods, and floodplains. It spreads by rhizomes, sometimes aggressively, and large colonies can provide cover for wildlife. It is a low-maintenance plant that deer rarely damage.

On the question of whether Partridge-berry is **safe for pets**:

- The fruit of Partridge-berry (*Mitchella repens*) is considered edible by humans, although it is described as sour or insipid. While the fruit is consumed by wild birds and other mammals, no specific studies have been done on whether they are safe for canine consumption. One concern is that the seeds could be a potential choking hazard.
- A helpful website that often provides information on toxicity of specific plants is the [North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox](#).

One participant asked for information on **controlling Pennsylvania Sedge or Appalachian Sedge**:

- Neither of these native sedges is considered to be a particularly aggressive plant.
- Pennsylvania Sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*) spreads by fairly shallow underground rhizomes, but it does so slowly and should present little competition to neighboring plants. The recent Mt. Cuba report on *Carex for the Mid-Atlantic Region* describes it as “an excellent garden companion for taller perennials where [it] can weave gently among their stems, helping to cover ground and suppress weeds.” If necessary, unwanted sections can simply be uprooted with a hand tool such as Hori Hori knife.

Native Ground Covers for Sun & Shade

- Appalachian Sedge (*Carex appalachica*) is a clumping sedge. As one of the less ornamental sedges, it is ideally used in larger swaths for edging or erosion control. It may spread a short distance by reseeding, but the unwanted young clumps should be easy to lift with a hand tool.