

California **GARDENER**®

May/June 2008

3.95

Gaillardias
are in **Favor**

Cora, the New Periwinkle
Are Petunias Too Good?
Frankly Figtastic!



Elin Thyme



What to plant between the pavers



Creeping Thyme



Chamomile



Woolly Thyme

By Brenda Rees

Gardeners use groundcovers in small servings for many reasons — sure, they fancy up paver stones and footpaths, but little splashes of green are also perfect for folks who want to hide annoying cracks in walkways and walls. Who needs Spackle and cement when a little thyme, chamomile or baby tears will soften imperfections, making the area appear lush and well designed?

Before you make the trip to the nursery, however, you'll probably want to get rid of any weeds that cling around stepping-stones and bricks. Here is an effective method: Mix up a solution of oil and vinegar and sprinkle it on the weeds — you've seen a wilted salad before? Weeds wilt, too. Wait a day or two and then pour boiling hot water on the offenders. Now you can head out to the garden center.

Some of the most popular plants for small spaces are members of the thyme family. You can't go wrong with any of these condense, fragrant and able-to-take-a-walking-foot plants. They all love full sun.

Elfin thyme is low growing with compact leaves that mound. It's the smallest (1-2 inches) and slowest growing of all the thymes and has tiny, dark pink flowers. Mother of thyme or creeping thyme produces small, round aromatic

Continued next page...



Lemon Thyme



Pink Clover



Baby Tears

Continued from previous page

leaves. They typically grow 3-6 inches, but some gardeners report plants as tall as 10 inches. They will occasionally flower small white, pink or purplish blossoms.

Lemon thyme has tiny glossy green leaves with a delicious lemon smell and taste. Yes, you can cook with it! They have pale pink flowers and grow 4-12 inches. Wooly thyme is flat and mat-like with dense, small silvery leaves. It blooms well in Southern California and this is one of the few thyme varieties that can tolerate partial shade.

But perhaps your pathway leads to the swimming pool. Maybe you don't want groundcovers that have a perfumed scent or pollen-rich flowers. Those varieties may attract bees, which can be problematic for bare feet!

If you got a mild case of cnidophobia (fear of being stung) then you might like to try the classic steppingstone plant, Baby tears. It quickly and densely fills up empty spaces with its tiny, ball-like green leaves. Very compact and neat, they grow 1-4 inches high. It prefers shade but can tolerate some sun near our coastal regions of California.

Another popular groundcover is chamomile because of its light green, well-defined aromatic leaves. The 'Treneague' variety is non-flowering. These are fast growing and can reach up to 12 inches, becoming spidery. They enjoy full sun to partial shade. Keep in mind that these species are very prolific and you might frequently have to haul out your snippers to keep them off walkways.

Corsican mint is a very low (only ½ inch tall) mat that spreads through cracks nicely. Their tiny round bright green leaves offer a pleasant smell when lightly crushed underfoot.

For something showier, sweet alyssum is a branching trailing plant that features clusters of four-petaled flowers. Even though it's an annual, it's a heavy re-seeder. It does best in poor soil.

And speaking of soil, do make sure to prepare the soil to help your new plants take root. Fill the spaces where it's practical to do so, with high-quality mixed compost, as deeply as you can, about six inches deep being best.

Whatever your needs, attractive low growing plants add depth and texture to any garden, large or small. You'll be surprised that with such little effort – and plantings – your garden will look like you have been breaking your back for the last 20 years. That's fine. It'll be our little secret!

But perhaps your pathway leads to the swimming pool. Maybe you don't want groundcovers that have a perfumed scent or pollen-rich flowers. Those varieties may attract bees, which can be problematic for bare feet!



Alyssum