



## Groundcovers: No Bunnies Business

*(Author's Note: This is the twenty-first in a series of articles by members of the City of Sanibel Vegetation Committee dealing with vegetative matters of concern to island residents. Members of the Vegetation Committee are Sanibel residents appointed by City Council for one-year terms. To be considered for appointment, contact the City Manager's Office at (239) 472-3700.)*

The use of native groundcovers versus turf grass makes so much sense! Native groundcovers require no watering once established, no fertilizing, no weeding (they suppress weeds), no mowing (although many may be cut), and they hold soil in place. Furthermore, they are generally not bunny food! There is a bumper population of rabbits on Sanibel this year in case you have not seen them. Small mammal population boom/bust cycles are a common phenomenon. When resources (i.e. food, shelter) are plentiful rabbit populations can significantly increase. Subsequent to the rabbit population increase predator populations will also increase since the rabbits provide them an abundant food source. Eventually, the rabbit population growth is usually curtailed by predators preying on the rabbits.

You may have noticed that these rabbits have a voracious appetite and are eating everything they can reach including turf grass. Not to worry though! There are native groundcovers that are less appetizing, and can be substituted for plants that are being grazed by rabbits. This article discusses some of the available native groundcovers suitable for Sanibel yards.



### **Dune Sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*)**

Habitat Type: Beach/Dune  
Light Requirement: Full sun  
Height: 12"-24"  
Salt Tolerance: High  
Water Requirement: Dry  
Bloom: Yellow  
Other: Self-sowing



### **Gopher Apple (*Geobalanus oblongifolius*)**

Habitat Type: Upland  
Light Requirement: Full sun  
Height: 12"-24"  
Salt Tolerance: Low  
Water Requirement: Dry  
Bloom: White to pale yellow  
Other: Woody, evergreen



**Mimosa**  
**(*Mimosa strigillosa*)**

Habitat Type: Upland  
Light Requirement: Full sun  
Height: 4"-9"  
Salt Tolerance: Moderate  
Water Requirement: Dry  
Bloom: Pink  
Other: Sprawling growth



**Blanket Flower**  
**(*Gaillardia pulchella*)**

Habitat Type: Beach/Dune  
Light Requirement: Full sun  
Height: 12"-24"  
Salt Tolerance: High  
Water Requirement: Dry  
Bloom: Red/yellow  
Other: Self Sowing



**Beach Verbena**  
**(*Glandularia maritima*)**

Habitat Type: Beach/Upland  
Light Requirement: Full sun  
Height: 6"-8"  
Salt Tolerance: Moderate  
Water Requirement: Dry  
Bloom: Lavender  
Other: State-Endangered



**Golden Creeper**  
**(*Ernodea littoralis*)**

Habitat Type: Upland  
Light Requirement: Full sun  
Height: 24"-36"  
Salt Tolerance: Low  
Water Requirement: Dry/Moist  
Bloom: White  
Other: Sprawling growth



**Blue Porterweed**  
**(*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*)**

Habitat Type: Upland  
Light Requirement: Sun/Shade  
Height: 12"-24"  
Salt Tolerance: Low  
Water Requirement: Dry/Moist  
Bloom: Blue-violet  
Other: Beware of non-native!

There are plenty of others to choose from: matchweed (*Phyla nodiflora*), spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohiensis*), coontie (*Zamia pumila*), and blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium angustifolium*), just to mention a few. Many of these groundcovers attract butterflies and some produce food for other wildlife. They also cool the air surrounding the plants as water evaporates from the leaves. Turf grass is still an option where there is a lot of foot traffic, but groundcovers and mulch paths are aesthetically pleasing and in need of less maintenance (i.e. irrigation and fertilizer) once established.

If you're unsure of what to plant, it's always best to consult your local native nursery to determine which native groundcovers are suitable for your yard. You can also visit the Florida Association of Native Nurseries' website to view more information on native plants: <https://www.afnn.org/> .

Where can I learn more about native plants on Sanibel? The Vegetation Committee hosts free plant walks from November to April at City Hall to view and discuss the use of native plants. Everyone and their questions are welcome! Go native with the right help!

To view pictures of the Invasive Exotic Plants "Worst of the Worst" or the City's "The Alien Invasion" brochure, visit the City's website at: <http://www.mysanibel.com/Departments/Natural-Resources/Vegetation-Information/Exotic-Vegetation/Other-Invasive-Exotic-Vegetation> or contact the City's Natural Resources Department at 472-3700.

To read other Vegetation Committee articles in this series please visit the City of Sanibel's Natural Resources Department website: <http://www.mysanibel.com/Departments/Natural-Resources>