



Department of Horticulture

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service • West Lafayette, IN

Landscape Plants for Sandy Soils

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This publication lists and briefly describes landscape plants that are suitable for the specific site conditions of sandy areas. These lists can serve as a guide, but are not intended to be exhaustive. Many other plants may grow well in sandy conditions besides the ones on the list.

Sandy soils, such as those found by the lakeshore, are highly porous and hold little moisture to sustain plants. To increase the moisture holding capacity of the soil, add topsoil and/or organic matter such as peat, leaf mold, or compost. The best way to ensure successful plantings on sandy soil is to choose plants which naturally grow in

such an area or those which will adapt to sandy conditions. The following plants are a few which grow well in sand.

Winter survival is fundamental to success of perennial landscape plants. Indiana is divided into hardiness zones by the United States Department of Agriculture. Southern Indiana, from the Ohio River to approximately Bedford or Seymour, is in zone 6. The rest of the state is in zone 5. Select only plants from this list with a hardiness zone number equal to or lower than the zone for the location they will be planted. For example, in Muncie (zone 5), select plants listed for zone 5, 4, 3, or lower.

Groundcovers and Vines for Sandy Soils

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Zone	Comments
Actinidia, Bower <i>Actinidia arguta</i>	30'	5	Rapidly growing, twining vine with deciduous foliage. Sun or partial shade.
Adam's - needle <i>Yucca smalliana</i> or <i>Y. filamentosa</i>	21/2'	5	Clump-formed evergreen. Sword-shaped leaves. White, pendulous flowers on 1- to 3-foot tall stalk in summer. Full sun.
Bearberry, Common <i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	less than 1"	2	Evergreen groundcover for acid soils. Bronze fall foliage and scarlet berries. Thrives in full sun.
Bittersweet, American <i>Celastrus scandens</i>	25'	4	Sun to partial shade. Twining vine. Yellow fall foliage with attractive orange berries on female plants (male plants required for pollination). (Invasive)
Grape <i>Vitis</i> spp.	8-10'	6	Many cultivars available. Edible fruits. Full sun. Fruit production will not be good on dry sites.

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Zone	Comments
Juniper, Creeping <i>Juniperus horizontalis</i>	1'	3	Many varieties available. Needled evergreen. Full sun.
Juniper, Japanese Garden var. <i>procumbens</i> <i>Juniperus chinensis</i>	2'	4	Dense, needled evergreen. Grows slowly. Full sun.
Rose, Memorial <i>Rosa wichuraiana</i>	hugs ground	6	Semi-evergreen foliage. Small, white flowers followed by red fruit. Stems root where they touch moist ground. Full sun.
Stonecrop, Gold Moss <i>Sedum acre</i>	5"	3	Succulent evergreen. Spreads by creeping and rooting along stems. Yellow flowers in spring. Full sun. Many other species of <i>Sedum</i> can be used in sandy soils.
Sumac, Fragrant <i>Rhus aromatica</i>	8'	3	Tall groundcover or shrub. Small, yellow flowers appear before leaves. Fruits turn red in summer. Scarlet fall foliage. Full sun.
Thyme, Common <i>Thymus vulgaris</i>	6"-15"	2	Evergreen with aromatic foliage and flowers. Full sun. Slightly moist soil required for growth.
Trumpet Vine <i>Campsis radicans</i>	30'	5	Clinging vine with orange flowers through summer. Full sun to partial shade.
Virginia Creeper <i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>	100'	4	Climbing vine. Brilliant red fall foliage. Small, blue fruits attractive to birds. Full sun to partial shade.
Wintercreeper <i>Euonymus fortunei</i>	20'	5-6	Semi-evergreen, clinging vine, or small-shrub. Attacked by scale and crown gall. Full sun or shade. Invasive in natural areas.

Shrubs for Sandy Soils

Barberry, Japanese <i>Berberis thunbergii</i>	5'	4	Many thorns. Sun or shade. Profuse, yellow flowers followed by red berries. Many cultivars available.
Bayberry <i>Myrica pensylvanica</i>	9'	5	Semi-evergreen. Gray berries are fragrant when crushed. Full sun.
Beach Plum <i>Prunus maritima</i>	10'	3	Dull purple fruits. Prefers slightly acid soil. Full sun or partial shade.
Blueberry, Highbush <i>Vaccinium corymbosum</i>	6-12'	4	Edible, blue fruits attract birds. Requires acid soil. Red fall color. Full sun or partial shade.
Bush Clover <i>Lespedeza thunbergii</i>	10'	5	Rosy-purple blooms in late summer. May be killed to the ground in winter.

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Zone	Comments
Butterfly Bush, Orange-eye <i>Buddleia davidii</i>	15'	5	Dies to the ground over winter. White, pink, red, or purple blooms in late summer. Full sun.
Chokeberry, Red <i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>	12'	6	White blooms followed by bright red berries in fall. Red fall color. Full sun or partial shade.
Cinquefoil, Shrubby (See <i>Potentilla</i>)			
Firethorn <i>Pyracantha coccinea</i>	6'	7	Semi-evergreen with bright orange berries. Susceptible to fireblight. Full sun or partial shade.
Juniper, Pfitzer <i>Juniperus chinensis</i> 'Pfitzerana'	6'	4	Needled evergreen. Requires large area for growth. Full sun.
Kerria, Japanese <i>Kerria japonica</i>	8'	5	Single, yellow flowers in spring. Green twigs through winter. Full sun or partial shade.
Mock Orange <i>Philadelphus coronarius</i>	10'	5	Single, fragrant flowers. Full sun or partial shade.
Potentilla (Shrubby Cinquefoil) <i>Potentilla fruticosa</i>	4'	2	White to yellow, single flowers through summer. Full sun.
Privet, Amur <i>Ligustrum amurense</i>	15'	4	Glossy, deciduous leaves. Full sun.
Quince, Flowering <i>Chaenomeles speciosa</i>	6'-10'	5	White, pink to dark red flowers in spring. Thorns present. Full sun.
Rose, Japanese <i>Rosa rugosa</i>	6'	2	White or red flowers followed by red fruits. Orange fall color. Full sun.
Scotch Broom <i>Cytisus scoparius</i>	10'	6	Slightly acid soil. Yellow flowers in spring. Stems green through winter. Full sun.
Spirea, Japanese <i>Spiraea japonica</i>	6'	6	Valuable for white to pink blooms. Full sun to partial shade.
Sumac, Smooth <i>Rhus glabra</i>	20'	3	Shrubs or small trees good for naturalizing in hot, sunny areas. Scarlet fall color; interesting fruits. Full sun.
Tamarisk <i>Tamarix parviflora</i>	9'	4	Small, pink flowers in spring. Soft, needle-like foliage. Partial shade.
Weigela <i>Weigela florida</i>	8-10'	5	Bright flowers in red, white, or pink. Susceptible to winter die-back. Sun or partial shade.

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Zone	Comments
Trees for Sandy Soils			
Cedar, Red <i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	75'	3	Needled evergreen. Full sun. Do not plant near Hawthorn, Crabapples, Apples, or Quince.
Crabapples, Flowering <i>Malus x atrosanguinea</i> , <i>M. floribunda</i> , <i>M. sargentii</i>	25' 25'	5	Full sun. <i>M. sargentii</i> is smallest Crabapple available. Attractive flowers, fruits, and red fall color. Choose disease-resistant cultivars.
Hawthorn, Washington <i>Crataegus phaenopyrum</i>	25'	5	Do not plant near Cedar trees. Full sun. Attractive flowers and fruit.
Japanese Pagoda Tree <i>Sophora japonica</i>	80'	5	Withstands city conditions. Lacks fall color. Attractive flowers in August.
London Plane <i>Platanus xacerifolia</i>	120'	5	Interesting exfoliating bark. Ball-like fruits. Susceptible to anthracnose. Sun.
Oak, Pin <i>Quercus palustris</i>	80'	5	Brilliant red autumn color. Drooping lower branches. Prefers slightly acid soil. Sun.
Oak, White <i>Quercus alba</i>	100'	4	Slow-growing. Purple-red autumn color. Sun.
Pine, Austrian <i>Pinus nigra</i>	100'	4	Grows well on alkaline soils. Good as specimen or mass planting. Sun. Susceptible to Diplodia Tip Blight.
Pine, Pitch <i>Pinus rigida</i>	60'	5	Scrubby tree good for poor soils. Sun. Susceptible to Diplodia Tip Blight.
Pine, Red <i>Pinus resinosa</i>	90'	3	Long needles, reddish trunk, and older branches. Sun.
Pine, Eastern White <i>Pinus strobus</i>	120'	3	One of the best pines for ornamental use. Sun or partial shade.
Poplar, White <i>Populus alba</i>	90'	4	Silver underside to leaves; interesting gray bark. Requires large area for growth. Sun.
Russian Olive <i>Elaeagnus angustifolia</i>	20'	3	Gray-green foliage and fragrant flowers. Very susceptible to canker. Sun. (Invasive, not recommended.)
Sour Gum <i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	100'	6	Good in wet areas. Excellent fall color.
Spruce, White <i>Picea glauca</i>	100'	3	Tolerates heat and drought well. Sun.

* Janie Nordstrom Griffiths assisted in the revision of this publication.

For more information on the subject discussed in this publication, consult your local office of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.