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in the garden *by Stephen and Kristin Pategas*

Heel! How To Control Spreading Plants

Plants that travel and cover the ground can create expanding privacy screens, or when low and full they can make good lawn grass substitutes. To be successful groundcovers, they need to grow vigorously and dense enough to fill in and deter weed seeds from germination. Since they are not predisposed to know boundaries, one challenge is to keep these plants in place when an adjacent edge, like a sidewalk, is not in place. Some plants grow in clumps and slowly expand in spread using underground rhizomes while others are more vine-like and creep along the ground.

The clumpers include African iris, lady palm, and the Bambusa species of bamboo. These will need edging of an appropriate depth. Custom-made galvanized steel edging can be ordered at various heights. Otherwise, trim away new growth that emerges at the outer edge of the clump or divide clumps using a sharp shovel or reciprocating saw.

The creepy ones travel either above and/or below ground. Vining stems may travel above the soil and roots or rhizomes may creep unseen below ground. Some plants will travel both ways. When

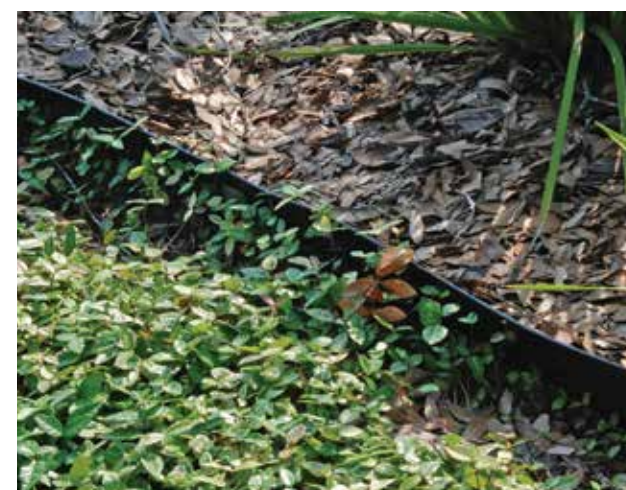
the runners are at or above the surface (Dwarf Asian jasmine) a shallow edging is useful to define the outer edge of the bed. This edging guides the runners upward and marks the trimming location. It provides maintenance personnel with a visual guide for where to trim and controls bed creep. Usually, if the plant travels with above-ground runners it can also climb, so keep runners away from vertical objects such as walls, shrubs or tree trunks.

When there is underground creep, determine the typical root or rhizome depth. For plants with shallow roots such as mondo grass or wire vine, we suggest a six-inch-high edging placed four inches into the ground. Mints are notorious underground

For the typical creeping groundcovers, the following rule of thumb will apply to most situations. Along edges not adjacent to hardscape or lawns install a six-inch-high edging. Place it three inches below ground to halt the underground creep and three inches above to provide a trimming boundary. If it spreads underground, place it four inches in the ground.

spreaders. Planting in containers (about 18 inches in height) either above or set into the ground is a good strategy. For shallower pots, set them on stepping stones and check the drain holes to make sure the roots haven't found an escape route. The native sunshine mimosa has aggressive rhizomes reaching at least two feet deep, so planting next to a barrier such as a wall, driveway, or swimming pool is a necessity. Running bamboos require concrete walls about three feet deep with a six inch lip above ground.

At purchase, know how the plant grows and have a control strategy in place before a maintenance challenge presents itself – control the spread.



Bottom far left, edging helps keep the groundcover beds tidy at Hortus Oasis. Center photo, recycled drain pipe contains mint. Photo top right, edging disappears from view as Dwarf Asian jasmine matures. Bottom right, Super Edging recently installed.