

Groundcover Comparison and Recommendations

Comparison of loose-fill ground surfacing materials

	Organic Loose Material	Inorganic Loose Material
Material	Pine bark, shredded bark nuggets, wood chips, cocoa shell mulch	Sand, pea gravel, shredded/recycled rubber
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low initial cost • Ease of installation • Less abrasive than sand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of installation • Does not promote microbial growth • Generally nonflammable (except rubber products)
Issues to consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With time, these materials may decompose and lose their cushioning effect • Materials can be displaced by strong winds or the playing action of children thereby reducing cushioning effect • Susceptible to microbial growth when wet • Can get thrown around • Some children are allergic to bark dust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial cost varies (transport can be costly) • Sand and pea gravel may be displaced by the playing action of children thereby reducing the cushioning effect • Can be swallowed, blown or thrown – potentially leading to injury • Easily spreads outside the containment area • Rubber may have an unpleasant smell

Recommended Groundcover

Type of Groundcover	Attributes/Concerns
Sand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readily absorbs shocks • 9 inches compressed material – will protect from falls up to 4 feet
Shredded/ Recycled Rubber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readily absorbs shocks • Available in lighter colors to avoid excessive heating • 6 inches compressed material will protect from falls up to 10 feet
Engineered Wood Fiber/ Wood Chips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Falls rarely result in injury • Readily absorbs shock • 9 inches compressed material – will protect from falls up to 10 feet

Cautionary Groundcover

Type of Groundcover	Concerns/Attributes
Pea Gravel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered a choking hazard for infants and toddlers • Avoid gravel with sharp edges • 9 inches compressed material – will protect from falls up to 5 feet

Not Recommended

Type of Groundcover	Concerns/Attributes
Concrete/ Patio Brick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Falls from short distances can result in injury • Surface does not absorb shock
Grass (Sod)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Falls from short distances can result in injury • Surface does not absorb shock
Bark Mulch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decomposes readily • High prevalence of microbial growth when wet

This fact sheet can be downloaded and printed from: <http://www.marshfieldclinic.org/safeplay/keystocreate/>