

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 • 9 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/>