

Groundcover Comparison for Play Areas

Loose fill	Organic	Inorganic Loose Fill Materials
Material	Wood chips, shredded bark nuggets, engineered wood fiber	Sand, pea gravel, shredded/recycled rubber
Advantages	- Low initial cost - Ease of installation - Less abrasive than sand	- Ease of installation - Does not promote microbial growth - Does not decompose - Generally non-flammable
Issues to consider	- Materials decompose/compress over time & lose cushioning effect - Susceptible to microbial growth - Displaced by strong winds or playing action of children - Can be thrown by children - May be allergenic - Often spread outside the containment area - Frequent maintenance needed to ensure proper depth of materials	- May be displaced by playing children - Can be thrown by children - Spreads outside the containment area - Pea gravel can present a choking hazard for small children - May compact &/or lose cushioning ability when wet or frozen - Sand and dark colored rubber may get hot/cause burns in hot climates - Initial cost of shredded/recycled rubber can be high

Unitary materials (rubber mats/tiles or poured in place)

Advantages	- Does not displace or decompose - Does not promote microbial growth - Low maintenance
Issues to consider	- Initial cost is high - Manufacturer's directions must be followed closely, may require professional installation - Dark colors may get hot/cause burns in hot climates

Minimum Depth for Loose Fills

Type	Depth	Protects to fall height
Shredded/recycled rubber	6 inches	10 feet
Wood chips	9 inches	10 feet
Wood mulch	9 inches	7 feet
Pea gravel	9 inches	5 feet
Sand	9 inches	4 feet

Ground Cover Recommendations for Play Areas

Recommended

Sand
Shredded/recycled rubber
Engineered wood fiber, wood chips
Unitary materials

Cautionary

Pea Gravel

- Choking hazard for small children
- Avoid gravel with sharp edges

Not Recommended

Concrete/patio brick
Grass or sod

- Does not absorb shock

Bark mulch

- Microbial growth
- Decomposes readily

