

# The Augusta Chronicle

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## COLUMNS

# Campbell Vaughn: Lilyturf can be a hearty, low-maintenance addition to your lawns

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I like tough plants and so do a lot of folks who are into low-maintenance landscapes.

When it comes to groundcovers, I tend to avoid using them because they are usually more trouble to keep clean than just simply adding mulch or pine straw. Things like acorns, cherry laurel seedlings, Bermuda grass and nutsedge tend to invade these planted areas and result in maintenance nightmares.

There are a couple of groundcovers that I don't mind in certain circumstances and one of my favorites is lirioppe.

Lirioppe, sometimes called lilyturf, is among our best evergreen ground covers. It multiplies rapidly and requires very little care. Once established, it is almost impossible to kill.

The two major species of lirioppe in our area are big blue lilyturf (*Lirioppe muscari*) and creeping lilyturf (*Lirioppe spicata*). They are only slightly different in appearance.

*Lirioppe muscari* grows in a clumping form and will spread to about 12 to 18 inches wide. The leaf blades tend to be a little wider. With a narrower leaf, *Lirioppe spicata* spreads rapidly by underground stems (rhizomes) and will cover a wide area. This type of lirioppe doesn't work well for an edging but is excellent for groundcover.

Lilyturf forms a dense evergreen groundcover with a thick bladed grass-like appearance. In my mature yard, the lirioppe has crept out into my St. Augustine grass and I just mow it with the rest of my grass. It has done a great job of filling in areas that aren't as full due to the dense shade from massive pines and a large ash tree. It isn't perfect sod, but I think it looks pretty good.

While standard varieties have a deep dark green leaf, liriopae does have a variegated variety that can add nice color to the landscape. It blooms in mid-summer with lavender, purple, pink or white flower spikes. Although the flowers are individually small, they are very showy with multiple blooms per plant. Flowering is heavier with more sun. Following blooms, clusters of bluish black berries adorn the plant into fall.

**Campbell Vaughn:** 2024 was a crazy year for weather in Augusta, and it might not let up

Liriopae is remarkably tough, handling deep shade or full sun, sand or clay. I personally think it stays a deeper green if not in all-day sun but still doesn't mind the direct light. Liriopae can also endure heat, drought and salt spray, but will not make it in saturated areas for long.

When planting, the spacing should be about 12 inches apart. As the liriopae matures it can be dug and separated into as many little plants as you would ever need; or your neighbor would ever need; or the Southeast would ever need.

This is the time of year to prune liriopae. Although the plant is an evergreen, the leaf blades can begin to look a little ratty. If you only have a little bit of lilyturf, give them a haircut with a pair of utility shears/scissors. If you have a lot of it, fire the lawn mower up, raise the blade to about 3-4 inches and clobber it.

Remember when I told you liriopae was almost impossible to kill? The weather this weekend might be comparable to Antarctica. You probably don't want to get out and prune your evergreen groundcover until it gets warmer. When you do get around to it, try and get it cut back before it puts up new growth around the middle of February. It does make a difference on next year's overall appearance.