

Liriope spicata - Creeping Lilyturf (*Liliaceae*)

Liriope spicata is a perennial, mat-forming groundcover that is best used in shady areas, erosion-prone sites, or areas with thin soils. Creeping Lilyturf has sparse inflorescences in mid-summer nestled within the evergreen, turf-like foliage.

FEATURES

Form

- medium-sized, herbaceous evergreen perennial groundcover (sometimes considered as a miniature evergreen ornamental grass-like plant)
- maturing at 1' tall and slowly but progressively spreading at its perimeter via underground rhizomes arching mat growth habit, forming a very dense turf-like groundcover
- slow growth rate of spread at its perimeter



Culture

- partial sun to full shade
- performs best in moist, fertile soils in partial shade, but will tolerate very dry, poor, and thin soils in sunny or shady sites
- propagated primarily by division of the many adjoining crown segments
- Lily Family, with virtually no disease or pest problems
- moderate availability in containers or flats
- mow the old semi-evergreen foliage to the ground in late winter or very early spring to allow vigorous new growth to emerge unimpeded from the crowns

Foliage

- linear dark evergreen "blades" of foliage (whose ends will eventually bleach-out or "burn" during the coldest portions of most winters)
- leaves are 0.25" wide x 1-1.5' long, but due to their arching habit are about 1' high in summer, and become increasingly prostrate with repeated snow loads during winter
- foliage resembles very vigorous turfgrass, hence the common name

Flowers

- white, violet, or lavender inflorescences, on 10" stalks during July and Aug., sparsely borne and often unnoticed within the attractive dark-green foliage, and not ornamentally significant

Fruits

- sparsely borne black round fruits mature in Sept.-Oct. and persist throughout the winter, being held on upright stalks, yet inconspicuous amongst the dense dark green foliage

USAGE

Function

- dense evergreen groundcover for either shady sites or erosion control sites, usually found as either a solid mass planting or as an edger
- special usages for Creeping Lilyturf include its placement around the bases of mature trees (in spite of surface roots and thin soil near the trunk), in a backyard woodland (as an evergreen edger to define a walking path, including winter under conditions of light snowfall), and in a small neglected foundation area (where it will choke out weeds and tolerate dry soil)

Texture

- fine texture
- thick density

Assets

- fine-textured evergreen foliage that resembles turfgrass
- fallen leaves can be easily raked free from its linear foliage in autumn, unlike most groundcovers where leaf litter becomes entangled
- readily transitions from partial sun to full shade within the same planted area, with little change in color, vigor, density, height, and overall appearance tolerant of dry soils, thin soils, and compacted clay soils
- good for erosion control on embankments, although establishment is initially slow

Liabilities

- slowly invasive peripheral rhizomes
- slow growth rate and establishment
- flowering is subtle and very poor as compared to *Liriope muscari*

Habitat

- Zones 4 to 10
- Native to China and Japan

SELECTIONS

Alternates

- evergreen to semi-evergreen groundcovers (*Euonymus fortunei* var. *coloratus*, *Hedera helix*, *Pachysandra* species, *Vinca minor*, etc.)
- groundcovers that flower in mid- to late summer (*Liriope muscari*)
- short ornamental grasses (or grass-like plants), especially those that tolerate some degree of shade (*Acorus gramineus* 'Argenteostriatus' ('Variegatus'), *Carex* species, *Glyceria maxima* 'Variegata', *Luzula* species, etc.)

Variants

- the species form of *Liriope spicata* is the only choice available
- the much more common species:
 - Liriope muscari* - Blue Lilyturf, a slightly less cold hardy form having a clump growth habit with wider and much more showy foliage, has several cultivars noted for leaf variegation and/or prominent flowering

