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	• Low initial cost • Ease of installation • Less abrasive than sand	• Ease of installation • Does not promote microbial growth • Generally nonflammable (except rubber products)
Issues to consider	• 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	• 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
Shredded/ Recycled Rubber	• 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	• Falls rarely result in injury • Readily absorbs shock • 9 inches compressed material will protect from falls up to 10 feet

Not Recommended

Type of Groundcover	Concerns/Attributes
Concrete/ Patio Brick	• Falls from short distances can result in injury • Surface does not absorb shock
Grass (Sod)	• Falls from short distances can result in injury • Surface does not absorb shock
Bark Mulch	• Decomposes readily • High prevalence of microbial growth when wet

Cautionary Groundcover

Type of Groundcover	Attributes/Concerns
Sand	• Readily absorbs shocks in warm temperatures • Less to no shock absorption when cold/frozen • Can attract animals (e.g. ants, spiders) • Some animals may use as litter box • 9 inches compressed material will protect from falls up to 4 feet
Pea Gravel	• 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

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