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

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