

MADE FOR THE SHADE

The shade garden has a reputation for being difficult and having limited plant choices, but that's a myth we need to put an end to. In fact, as we'll show here, it's one of the more versatile types of gardens you can work with. The possibilities are endless, and it can be one of the most enjoyable places in a landscape on a hot sultry day in summer.

A subtle color palette in a shade garden offers a sophisticated look that can be both intimate and relaxing. While bright sun often washes out the color in full-sun locations, the combination of deep-green foliage and low light in a shade garden tends to intensify colors.

Taking to the shadows has maintenance advantages as well. You'll likely have fewer insects threatening your plants. Weeds tend to grow more slowly in the shade. And cooler soil means you probably won't have to water as often as you would with a full-sun garden.

Define it

"Shade" is perhaps one of the most ambiguous terms in gardening, so before we even begin to talk plants, it's important to determine what kind of shade you have or what kind of shade you want to create.

Chances are you may need to go home and spend a few days observing the sun and shade patterns in your garden. Watch not only for how many hours of sun a spot gets but when that sun occurs. For instance, three hours of morning sun may not bother a shade-loving plant too much. But three hours of hot afternoon sun might just fry it. Also, pay attention to what provides the shade. A tree that's bare of leaves in the winter won't provide shade in the spring (but that might be a perfect spot for spring-blooming bulbs that need sun) and may only give filtered or "dappled" shade during the summer. A solid wall or a dense canopy of trees may provide full shade. Keep in mind that the angle of the sun will change throughout the year; you'll see your longest shadows during the winter solstice.



Partial shade is generally defined as having less than five hours of direct sun, while full shade is usually assumed to have no direct sun or up to two hours of sun. When you're looking for plants and shrubs to fit into your shade garden, you'll notice that many plants straddle two categories; they may be sun/partial shade or partial shade/full shade. If your plants start to grow taller than they're supposed to or appear extra leggy, they probably need more light.

Create it

Another great perk of shade gardening is that you have the ability to tinker with light levels by pruning, planting, painting or building structures. You can turn a full shade location into partial shade by trimming the branches of trees. Painting a fence or building with a light color can also increase light levels by reflecting more light. If you want to create more shade, you also have lots of options: trellises, pergolas, arbors, overhangs, fences or walls, and trees.

Obstacles

Soil: The soil in your shade garden will be one of the most important things to pay attention to. Ideally, it should stay moist but well drained. However, if you notice that it's unusu-



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Showing customers how and where to use different plants is extremely effective for selling more shade-loving varieties.

ally dry, you may want to seek out plants that are a bit more drought-tolerant. Mulching after you plant can also help retain moisture. We'd recommend that you add compost or some type of organic matter each year—it'll give your garden the nutrients it needs to flourish.

Roots: Tree roots often prove to be problematic. If roots near or on the surface prevent you from pushing a shovel into the area you want to garden in, you may want to add a few inches of organic matter. If you're planting ground covers, 2 to 4 in. of organic matter ought to do the trick, but you may need 6 or 8 in. for more established bedding plants and perennials. In either case, be sure to keep your soil amendments away from the trunk of the tree; try to leave a 1-ft. perimeter around the trunk.

Pests and diseases: While plant-munching insects may be fewer in the shade, the often-moist conditions can be a breeding ground for fungal spores. In addition to buying healthy plants at retail, you can help prevent disease by ensuring that plants

aren't planted too close together, which promotes good air circulation. For snails and slugs, you can choose from a number of different control products at your garden center.

Planting time

Don't get overwhelmed by the vast array of options for shade plants. You'll automatically narrow it down by figuring out what kind of shade you'll be working with. From there, you can look at trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, or a mixture of them all. You can further narrow down your options by looking at a theme or season to focus on, such as a woodland garden (usually for full shade), fall flowering, or spring flowering. Finally, you may want to search for plants based on height.

Remember, in the shade garden, foliage can be the focal point; blooming flowers aren't a necessity. You can even create a shade garden just utilizing the many hues of green. Variegated and/or colored foliage brighten up an area and add interest. Hostas come in an array of shades and patterns, while today's coleus varieties offer everything from green to red and purple foliage.

In most cases below, we've noted what type of shade the plant prefers, but that recommendation may vary by variety and region. Take a look at the tag on the plant in the garden center, too.

(F) = Full shade **(P)** = Partial shade **(F/P)** = Full or partial shade

Shrubs: A vast array of shrubs can provide height, flowers, berries, color and texture. Dogwoods **(F/P)** are a popular choice, but you might also look at burning bush **(F)**, winter creeper **(F)**, witch hazel **(F)**, rhododendrons **(P)**, and viburnum **(P)**, among others.

Perennials: Here's a sampling of shade-loving perennials, but this is just a brief listing—the options are endless. Ajuga **(F/P)**; *Brunnera macrophylla* **(F)**; lily of the valley **(F)**; bleeding heart (*dicentra*) **(F/P)**; cinnamon or ostrich ferns **(F)**; garden globe-flower **(F)**; hellebores **(F/P)**; hostas **(F/P)**; hairy toad lily (*Tricyrtis hirta*) **(F/P)**; lirioppe **(F/P)**; spotted dead nettle (*lamium*) **(F/P)**; *Sedum ternatum* **(P)**; periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) **(F/P)**; primula **(F)**; and pulmonaria **(F/P)**.

Annuals: A more limited selection of annuals love the shade; however, depending on your region, there may be shade perennials that won't overwinter but still make great shade plants if used as annuals. In climates with extremely hot summers, you may find that many of the annuals typically promoted for the sun will actually tolerate partial shade, particularly if they get afternoon sun.

Basic shade annuals include: wax and tuberous begonias **(F/P)**; caladium **(F/P)**; coleus **(F/P)**; lobelia **(P)**; impatiens **(F/P)**; nierembergia **(P)**; plectranthus **(F/P)**; torenia **(P)**; viola and pansies **(P)**; forget-me-nots **(P)**; and Dusty Miller **(P)**. 🍃

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