

The Shade Garden

Fit your environment

If you have mature trees, you have shade. Everyone has shade on the north side of the house, the fence, or other structures. Shade makes the garden more inviting and comfortable. Shade gardeners spend lots of time in the comfort of their creation.

Shade Garden Construction

Plants adapted to shade expect to grow in an area where leaves have decomposed leaving the soil rich and with a good proportion of humus. If you have a new construction site, you are almost certain to need to amend the soil with compost or a rich soil mix. Sandy loam is out for shade. The best mulch is typically organic, most commonly bark. Forming berms will make the garden less boring, but also serve to give rich loose soil for plants to call home. Rhododendrons and other shade plants love soil with high organic content.

Shade gardens typically enjoy moisture. They grow more quickly when well watered, and tend to look lush and tropical. Make sure the irrigation system is designed for overlapping coverage, so as plants mature, there are no dry spots.

Select plants across all layers of the garden. Groundcovers such as *Lysimachia nummularia* (creeping Jenny), perennials like *Hosta* and *Astilbe*, shrubs such as *Rhododendron* and *Hydrangea*, understory trees like Japanese maples and dogwoods. Even shade tolerant vines such as *Actinidia kolomikta* will add drama to the shade landscape.

Benefits of mass planting and structural plantings

Boxwood and yews may be used in shade to create forms and outline beds. Any shade plant in mass will be much more impressive than a solitary specimen. Consider planting 25 or more of a single cultivar for the most dramatic outcome.

Remember that design counts

Variegated hostas are beautiful, but one of each type tends to form a bit of a mish mash--a museum more than a garden. Try using groups of blue, green or other soothing color.

Size matters

Shade plants do take a few seasons to mature. Be sure to take our word for it when we give advice on size of plants. Your finished product will look better if the garden is full, but not overplanted. It is very hard to estimate the size of a mature hosta or other perennial by looking at a 1 gallon plant.



Shade Garden Plants

Many gardeners feel challenged to build a beautiful garden in a shady location. The sumptuous blooms of summer are associated with sunny sites. However, color, structure and texture are actually best achieved by foliage. Shade loving plants take a bit longer to reach maturity, but a mature shade garden is among the most beautiful of all garden plantings. Here are just a few of our offerings.

- Acer palmatum** Japanese Maples. A host of gorgeous choices. Spectacular!
- Astilbe** Yes, a shade garden can have colorful blooms. Pinks, whites and reds in many sizes and color blends.
- Athyrium nipponicum 'Pictum'** Japanese painted fern. One of many attractive ferns.
- Carex elata 'Aurea'** There are several great grasses for shade, but this bright gold and hardy clump, called Bowles Golden Grass, is a definite favorite.
- Daylilies** These are surprisingly able to perform in partial shade or filtered light. Many "sun" plants do better than you'd think, like hardy geraniums.
- Hakonechloa** Several cultivars, including the popular *H. macra* 'Aureola'. The variegated (gold) Japanese Forest Grass is a must for the shade.
- Heuchera (and Heucherella)** An absolute color workhorse. Evergreen, and equally fine as potted plants, as specimens, or in mass plantings. Remarkable in large masses. Huge number of cultivars with white variegation, bright gold, iridescent purple, silver, deep obsidian, amber, orange/pink tones and more. Pick the color right for you, and the garden will glow.
- Hosta** The king of the shade garden. The main foundation plant in most shade gardens with thousands of varieties from which to choose. Tower stocks hundreds of these from tiny dwarfs to huge (up to 10' across) specimens once maturity is reached. The color and form varies dramatically, but a mature large specimen will be one of the most memorable plants in the entire garden.
- Hydrangea** So many choices, including many that are very hardy and reliable here.
- Petasites** There are several varieties that we list, and each is a giant statement. *P. japonica* 'Gigantea' is a massive specimen that is best contained, but worth any effort. Huge circular leaves on 3' stems.
- Primula** Primroses are gorgeous shade plants, some blooming early before the hostas emerge. Small and cheery, use them in groups.
- Rhododendron** Broadleaf evergreen foliage and colorful spring display. If you have a site that is challenging, consider *Prunus l.* 'Otto Luyken' for similar foliage.
- Rodgersia** Several varieties, all with large, bold foliage of interesting form. Not to be missed.
- Taxus** A fantastic plant for hedging or evergreen structure in the shade.
- Tsuga** The hemlocks are but one of the many conifers that do very well in the shade. There are many colorful and interesting forms available.