



SHADE GARDENS

Although some people find gardening in the shade challenging; shade gardens could be refreshing, tranquil, quiet corners in the hot summer days. Shade gardens can be host to an astounding number of flowering and foliage plants. Together temperature, air circulation, moisture, soil conditions and light exposure determine which plants will grow successfully in a specific area. Progressively as trees and shrubs mature, the degree of shade increases, therefore it is important to analyze periodically if plants are receiving the quality of light they require to thrive. In addition to low light levels, plants growing in the shade must compete with shade trees for nutrients and water; they also tolerate poor air circulation.

Shade in the garden it is usually categorized as follows:

Full shade or Deep Shade

It is an area that gets essentially no light at all, due to structures, thick hedging, beneath thick tree canopies, stairways, decks or covered patios on the north side of the house. The plant selection becomes much more limited.

Light shade

It is a shady bright area; it may be completely shaded for only several hours each day. It could receive filtered or dappled sunlight for long periods, such as under the canopy of lightly branched trees. There are numerous plant choices you can make in these locations, though by no means as many as are possible with five or more hours of direct, full sunlight.

Partial or medium shade

Direct sun rays are blocked from an area for most of the day, but receive some direct sun early or late in the day. Bright, north-facing exposure may also be classified as medium or partial shade.

Plants and Prep for Shady Gardens

When gardening in the shade you have an array of flowering annuals, perennials, bulbs, sages, and woodland plants to choose from. In light shade you might even be able to grow a few herbs or leafy vegetables. . Some examples of shade-tolerant vegetables include: arugula, chard, bok choy, lettuce, carrots, parsnips, beets, peas, spinach. Also, herbs such as thyme, lemon balm, parsley, marjoram, oregano, mint, etc.

Although partially or lightly shaded areas receive direct sunlight for only a small portion of the day, light intensity is still quite bright. There are numerous plant choices you can make in these locations, though by no means as many as are possible with five or more hours of direct, full sunlight.

Light is not the only major concern when gardening in shady areas. Frequently, inadequate moisture can be a problem. The thick canopy of a large tree or the overhang of a house will act as an umbrella, deflecting rainfall away from the ground directly beneath it. Worse yet, trees and shrubs will compete with smaller plants for every drop of moisture that reaches the ground. It is vital that plants growing in the shade of large trees and shrubs, or sheltered by your home or garage, be watered regularly even during times of seemingly adequate rainfall.

Soil fertility also can be a source of trouble. Trees and shrubs fill the soil with feeder roots that greedily use up nutrients as readily as they are applied. It often seems that the more you water and fertilize the more roots with which you have to contend. Yet adequate fertility is an absolute must for all your plants because without it they are bound to be small and their growth will be weak. In most cases a spring application of a balanced fertilizer, followed by one or two applications as the season progresses, will help your shade plants survive the competition of tree and shrub roots. If root competition is a serious problem, planting in containers above ground is a viable alternative. Containers should be replanted each spring with annuals, since bulbs or perennials cannot be expected to survive winter's cold.

With few exceptions shade-tolerant plants will do best in well-drained, relatively fertile soil. Both sandy soils and heavy, clay like soils will benefit from the incorporation of organic matter such as peat moss, compost, or well-rotted manure.



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