



Class Information

Perennials for Shade

For most people, shade is just another aspect of gardening that has to be dealt with and made the most of. It has its advantages. In shade, flowers will hold their colour longer and frequent irrigation is not a problem. However, shade also means that one has to search more thoroughly for those perennials that will perform well and provide the optimum enjoyment through floral or foliar display. For this reason, this class will try to explore the different types of shade that occur within the garden, the advantages and alternatives that exist with shade as well as provide a selection of perennials that will thrive in those shade situations.

Types of shade:

Part shade: this type of shade occurs when the area in question is in full shade for a part of the day and then in full sun for the other part of the daylight – essentially the area must receive at least two hours of direct sunlight per day. Often those areas that receive sun for the first half of the day are suitable for many shade perennials because by the time that the hot afternoon sun is in effect, those plants are sheltered by the cool shade.

Full shade: this type of shade is found below evergreen trees and shrubs or on the north side of a building or structure that never receives sunlight for any duration throughout the day. It is often the most frustrating type of area for gardeners to deal with because the soil never really dries out and air circulation is often minimal.

Filtered shade: this type of shade refers to the bits of sunlight that find their way through the leaves of deciduous trees – a sort of happy medium between full shade and part shade. The sun's rays are filtered through the leaves without scorching and damaging the shade perennials below. Many shade perennials can grow in this type of environment.

Woodland shade: this type of shade is commonly found in areas with either dappled sunlight to almost no sun at all. The soil is usually quite acidic due to a

layer of evergreen needles that take some time to decompose and/or full of organic matter from fallen deciduous leaves.

Advantages of shade:

- Flowers retain their colour much longer; they do not fade as they would in the hot sun.
- Gardeners do not have to water as frequently, especially if there is a layer of mulch in the area.
- Many perennials thought to be strictly sun-loving will grow very well in part
- Filtered shade situations – they will adapt to the site and may even be happier than having to sit in the hot sun all day long.
- The shade offers a welcome respite to the sun's strong rays in the growing season both for plants and gardeners – there is nothing nicer than a cool piece of shade on a hot day.

Alternatives for the shade garden:

Use of texture: many shade perennials have bold textures and leaf shapes that can be used to provide contrast with the surrounding vegetation. Whether the leaves are large, round and umbrella-like or delicate, ferny and dissected, they can help to break up a shady area and provide depth to the landscape.

E.g. *Acanthus mollis* (Bear's Breeches), *Dicentra Formosa* (Wild Bleeding Heart),

Asarum europaeum (European Wild Ginger), *Bergenia cordifolia* (Elephant Ears).

Use of colour: other shade perennials use interesting colour as their claim to fame in the garden to provide contrast with their neighbours. Variegated or lime leaves can brighten an area whereas burgundy, purple or dark green leaves will create depth in the shadows and draw the eye throughout the garden.

E.g. *Hosta* spp., *Ajuga reptans* 'Atropurpurea' (Purple-leaved Bugleweed), *Hakonechloa macra* 'Aureola' (Golden Variegated Hakonechloa), *Euphorbia amygdaloides* 'Rubra' (Purple-leaved Wood Spurge), *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens' (Black Mondo Grass).

Culture and Maintenance of shade perennials:

- * Because familiar with the type of soil preferred by the plant before you plant. If the perennial requires an acidic soil, add peat moss or sulphur when planting. If the plant requires well-drained soil and yours is clay based, add organic matter and sand to improve drainage.
- Use bone meal when planting to help establish healthy root systems, top dress annually to fertilize those roots.

- Use mulch in part and filtered shade areas to maintain soil moisture and reduce weeds. However, do not use thick mulches in full shade areas since the additional layer may house unwanted pests and/or diseased plant matter.
- Do not over water your shade perennials since they will dry out less frequently than the sun perennials: this also helps to avoid soggy soil that can lead to root rot or stem rot and future disease problems.
- Clean up leaf debris and dead or diseased plant matter on a continual basis to avoid providing hiding places for those pests in the garden, i.e. slugs, weevils, cutworms.
- Try to give your plants room to breathe. Provide ample air circulation in the shade garden to avoid diseases (powdery mildew, black spot) that thrive on stale, cool, moist air. These areas will not dry out as quickly or ever when compared to their sunnier counterparts.
- Use the proper plant in the proper place in the shade garden, i.e. do not plant full shade perennials in an area that receives part shade-that plant will not be happy and will eventually succumb to stress. Those shade perennials that require some direct daylight will not be happy in a woodland area below a dense evergreen canopy – their roots may rot or they will not flower well and become leggy. Even those perennials that are suitable for dry shade need to be watered well throughout their first couple of growing seasons until their roots become established.
- Maintain healthy, happy plants and they will reward you with flowers, fragrance, and foliage throughout the entire growing season!

Shade Perennial Selection: the following lists are just a sample of the perennials available for use in the shade garden.

Flower Interest:

- *Aconitum* spp. (Monkshood) – spikes of blue, purple, or white hood-like flowers above lobed leaves PART, FILTERED, WOODLAND SHADE, moist soil ****POISONOUS!**
- *Alchemilla* spp. (Lady's mantle) – airy masses of chartreuse flowers above rounded, light green leaves PART, FILTERED SHADE.
- *Astilbe* spp. - striking colourful flower spikes, dissected foliage PART SHADE, FILTERED SHADE.
- *Bergenia cordifolia* (Elephant-ears, Pigsqueak) - clusters of pink to magenta flowers above leathery, glossy, oval leaves PART SHADE (morning sun only); FULL SHADE; dry or moist soil.
- *Campanula* spp. – (Bellflower) – star and bell-shaped flowers in shades of blue, purple, pink, and white; dissected heart shaped green leaves PART, FILTERED SHADE.
- *Cimicifuga simplex* (Bugbane; Snakeroot) – long, arching, fragrant spikes of white flowers above eye-catching dissected, lobed leaves PART, FILTERED, WOODLAND, FULL SHADE; moist soil.

- *Convallaria majalis* (Lily-of-the Valley) – pretty fragrant white flowers atop bright green leaves, PART (morning sun best); FILTERED, WOODLAND SHADE.
- *Corydalis flexuosa* ‘Blue Panda’, ‘Pere David’ – blue flowers, feathery foliage WOODLAND, PART (morning sun only), FILTERED SHADE.
- *Dicentra spectabilis* (Old-fashioned bleeding heart) – graceful flowering stems in pink or white feathery foliage PART, FILTERED, WOODLAND SHADE.
- *Dicentra Formosa* (Western bleeding heart) – colourful, heart shaped blooms, lacy grey-green foliage PART, WOODLAND, FULL SHADE.
- *Digitalis* spp. (Foxglove) - old fashioned perennial with spikes of tubular flowers and luxurious, felt leaves PART SHADE, MOIST SOIL.
- *Dodecatheon meadia* (Shooting Star) – colourful shooting starflowers above foliage PART, FILTERED, WOODLAND SHADE.
- *Epimedium* spp. (Barrenwort; Bishop’s Hat) – hat-shaped flowers above heart-shaped leaves in shades of green, red, purple DRY SHADE, MOIST PART SHADE.
- *Filipendula* spp. (Meadowsweet) – airy clumps of red or pink flowers atop boldly divided leaves PART SHADE.
- *Geranium* spp. (Cranesbill) – cup-shaped, colourful flowers atop mounding, divided leaves PART SHADE.
- *Helictotrichon semperivirens* (Blue Oat Grass) – tidy clump of long steel blue grassy blades, arching tan flower spikes PART SHADE.
- *Helleborus* spp. (Lenten rose, Christmas rose) – nodding, cup-shaped flowers above thick, evergreen leaves FULL, FILTERED, PART SHADE.
- *Hemerocallis* spp. (Daylily) – lily-like flowers atop linear, grassy leaves PART SHADE.
- *Ligularia* spp. (Rayflower; Ligularia) – towering spikes of brilliant yellow flowers above bold dark green leaves PART SHADE (morning sun best); moist soil.
- *Lithodora diffusa* ‘Grace Ward’ (Grace Ward lithospermum) – brilliant blue star flowers amid fuzzy, dark emerald green leaves PART, FILTERED, LIGHT WOODLAND SHADE, acid soil.
- *Lysimachia punctata* (Yellow loosestrife) – bright yellow, star-shaped flowers clumps of spiky green leaves PART SHADE, moist soil.
- *Meconopsis* spp. (Blue Himalayan Poppy) – sky blue cup-shaped flowers, fuzzy green leaves WOODLAND, PART SHADE.
- *Polygonatum* spp. (Solomon’s Seal) – arching stems of waxy white bell flowers, oval green & white edge leaves PART, FILTERED, FULL SHADE, moist, acidic soil.
- *Pulmonaria* spp. (Lungwort; Bethlehem sage) – small flowers in shades of blue, purple, pink, white and red, thick, fuzzy leaves spotted with silver or white PART, FULL SHADE.

- *Tiarella cordifolia* (Foamflower) – spikes of fluffy white or pink flowers, fuzzy, lobed green leaves **PART, FULL SHADE.**
- *Viola* spp. (Violets) – delicate purple, white, speckled flowers amid heart-shaped leaves in shades of light green to purplish-green **PART** (morning sun), **FILTERED, WOODLAND SHADE.**

Foliage Interest:

Assorted Ferns:

- *Adiantum* spp., *Asplenium* spp., *Athyrium* spp., *Cyrtomium* spp., *Dryopteris* spp., *Polystichum* spp., etc – various foliage textures from delicate, lacy fronds to eye-catching, bold fronds **PART, FULL SHADE;** moist, acidic soil.
- *Bergenia cordifolia* (Elephant-ears, Pigsqueak) – clusters of pink to magenta flowers above leathery, glossy, oval leaves **PART SHADE** (morning sun only), **FULL SHADE;** dry or moist soil.
- *Cimicifuga simplex* ‘Brunette’ (Brunette bugbane) – noticeable burgundy, lobed leaves, provide attractive contrast **PART, FILTERED, WOODLAND FULL SHADE,** moist shade.
- *Dicentra spectabilis* (Old-fashioned bleeding heart) – graceful flowering stems in pink or white, feathery foliage **PART, FILTERED, WOODLAND SHADE.**
- *Dicentra formosa* (Western bleeding heart) – colourful, heart-shaped blooms, lacy grey-green foliage **PART, WOODLAND, FULL SHADE.**
- *Epimedium* spp. (Barrenwort; Bishop’s Hat) – hat-shaped flowers above heart-shaped leaves in shades of green, red, purple **DRY SHADE, MOIST, PART SHADE.**
- *Filipendula* spp. (Meadowsweet) – airy clumps of red or pink flowers atop boldly divided leaves **PART SHADE.**
- *Hosta* spp. (Hosta) – various sizes of heart-shaped leaves in shades of blue, green, lime and variegations **PART, FILTERED SHADE.**
- *Polygonatum* spp. (Solomon’s Seal) – flowers, oval green & white edged leaves **PART, FILTERED, FULL SHADE,** moist, acidic soil.
- *Pulmonaria* spp. (Lungwort; Bethlehem sage) – fuzzy, crisp leaves spotted with silver, white, **PART, FILTERED, WOODLAND, FULL SHADE,** moist soil.



