

SHADE GARDEN IDEAS

Gardening in shade can be a difficult endeavor without the right plants. Planning a shade garden begins with choosing suitable shade garden plants and an understanding of the various types of shade and soil within these areas. By learning more about these factors and plants for shade gardens, you can turn any shady spot into a beautiful garden. No more dealing with dark, dreary landscapes. Keep reading for all the shade garden ideas you need for planning a garden that fits your needs.

Wildflowers for Shade Gardens

Wildflowers can be a lovely addition to all types of gardens, but especially perennial beds and natural native gardens. If you have a lot of shade, look for woodland species. The best shade wildflowers grow naturally and easily in the dappled shade under trees.

It's important to remember that when growing wildflowers in shade they do need some sunlight. Flowers native to wooded areas don't grow in deep shade. They grow on the edges of forests and under tall branching trees that allow for some sun to penetrate. So make sure you plant these flowers where they get partial shade and sun.

Woodland wildflowers need well-drained soil, no standing water, and a good amount of moisture. The soil should be rich in organic matter. These flowers are adapted to growing with year-round natural leaf mulch for the best results. Mulch keeps the soil moist and cool and protects wildflowers in winter.

There are many shade-loving wildflowers you can choose from for your woodland garden or shady beds. Some choices include:

Mayapple - Also known as American mandrake, this pretty forest plant grows umbrella-like leaves with delicate flowers under them. This is a good choice for a spring to summer woodland groundcover.

Virginia bluebells - The gorgeous spring flowers of Virginia bluebells carpet forest floors where they grow naturally. The early spring color is hard to beat, but the flowers will die back in the middle of summer, so you'll need to mix it in with other plants.

Dutchman's breeches - The name for this unique flower comes from the pant-shaped blooms. Dutchman's breeches is a spring bloomer that needs a lot of moisture.

Jack-in-the-pulpit - The flowers of Jack-in-the-pulpit consist of a spathe, shaped like a pitcher and a spadix, emerging from it like a preacher in a pulpit.

False Solomon's seal - This is one of the taller woodland species and can grow up to 36 inches (1 m.) tall. False Solomon's seal has bell-shaped flowers that hang over on arching stems.

Solomon's seal - The real deal can grow even taller, up to 48 inches (1 m.). Solomon's seal produces white flowers.

Columbine - These are among the prettiest of wildflowers. Depending on the species, columbine may be blue and purple, red, or yellow.

Wild sweet William - This is a woodland phlox that produces clusters of delicate flowers in blue and light purple.

Jacob's ladder - Jacob's ladder grows tall, up to three feet (1 m.), and produces pretty hanging bell-shaped flowers in clusters. They can be blue, yellow, white, or pink.

Choosing Stunning Flowering Native Shade Plants

In shaded areas, it's often difficult to establish healthy plant populations unless they are native to the area. Native shade perennials have acclimated to local conditions over thousands of years, so are more likely to survive those conditions. In fact, if biodiversity is your goal, you should incorporate at least 80% native plantings to the area. Native shrubs for shade areas provide habitat, sanctuary and often food for many species, and blooming native plants for shade promote a healthy population of pollinators. And the best news is they are often low maintenance shade plants requiring little regular maintenance.

Phlox - A favorite perennial is phlox, and the variety Blue Moon is partial to full shade. Blue Moon is a lovely, low-growing, spring blooming perennial native for USDA zones 3-8. It is perfect for the woodland garden.

For anyone keen on growing phlox, this creeping, semi-evergreen is lightly fragrant and looks lovely combined with spring flowering bulbs as an underplanting. It is one of the best native plants for dry shade, requires little maintenance and can be divided to form new plants every three-five years. A pretty native that attracts butterflies.

Virginia Creeper - Native to North America and Mexico, Virginia creeper is a flowering perennial vine in the grape, Vitaceae, family. In the wild, this vine can grow up to 100 feet (30m), but don't panic, it does quite well with aggressive pruning to retard its size. Its leaves are made up of five coarsely toothed leaflets with a pointed tip accented by blue berries. In the fall, the foliage bursts into vivid hues of red, mauve and purple.

Celandine Poppy - Wood poppy or celandine poppy is native to the moist soils of deciduous woods and looks beautiful along a shaded path or amongst a wildflower garden. This wild poppy loves partial shade and moist soil, making it an excellent native choice for stream beds or

shaded landscape water features. This plant emerges in the early spring in a tangle of lobed, dark green foliage accented by silver, followed by showy clusters of yellow blooms by mid-late April.

This herbaceous native shade perennial can be grown in USDA zones 4-9. Excellent groundcover plants, wood poppies are also attractive cover for native wildlife. Celandine poppy aggressively self-sows, so a perfect placement is an area that needs full coverage with plenty of room.

Fringed Bleeding Heart - Similar to the Pacific bleeding heart, fringed bleeding heart is native to the Eastern US. Both have similar heart shaped, pink blooms and wispy, fern-like, gray-green foliage but this one has narrower flowers with curved outer petals. Bleeding heart is a deciduous perennial and blooms from early spring through the first frost. A bushy plant, it is quick to send up leaves in the spring and matures to a height of 1-2 feet (30-60cm) and three feet (just under a meter) across. It spreads slowly by rhizomes.

This plant enjoys moist, well-drained, soil in filtered shade. Combine it with other native shade plants or use it as a mixed border plant. It's especially showy when planted en masse. Grow in USDA zones 3-9.

Bush Honeysuckle - Bush honeysuckle are low-maintenance, suckering native plants, good for soil stabilization and erosion control. They also work well in mass plantings or as hedges. This deciduous shrub can be grown in USDA zones 3-7 in sun or shade, is unfussy about soil, and is drought tolerant at maturity. There are two types of honeysuckle available to the home gardener keen on natives – Northern bush honeysuckle and Southern bush honeysuckle.

Bush honeysuckle has a mounded habit and grows to 3-5 feet (1-1.5m) in height and the same across. The first flush of leaves in the fall are red, becoming green then bronze. Tubular blooms form in clusters from June to September, which are extremely attractive to pollinators. After flowering, small seed capsules appear from July to September. In the fall, the Northern bush foliage stuns with hues of red, yellow, orange and purple, making it one of the most vivid native shrubs for shade.

Flowering annuals for shade

Begonia - Begonias are one of the most popular annuals for shade and for good reason. Many begonias can be kept as low light houseplants as well.

Fuchsia - Fuchsias are prized for their bright, tube-shaped blooms that are adored by hummingbirds. Site this plant out of the hot afternoon sun and shelter it from damaging high winds. This plant will bloom all summer long in varying shades of pink, white, purple and even bi-colors.

Impatiens - There are dozens of different types of impatiens. All will bloom to their fullest potential from spring until the first frost in part shade to heavy shade.

Lobelia - Lobelia is an easy-to-grow, carefree plant that enjoys cooler weather. This summertime bloomer will continue to produce flowers on up through the first frost in part shade. They prefer moist, rich soil and would make a terrific addition to window boxes, along the border or wherever a cheerful splash of color is needed.

Wishbone Flower- Torenia, also known as the Wishbone flower, is a shade loving annual that produces adorable little trumpet shaped flowers in an array of colors depending on variety. They will bloom all summer until the first frost. The wishbone flowers are also deer resistant and attract hummingbirds.

Shade Loving Foliage

If you like the feel of a woodland garden, try some foliage plants that love partial to full shade. It's easy to create a magical space with lots of woodland plants - the more the better.

Ferns are the most well-known of shade loving foliage. Most ferns thrive in shade, and many species are native to North America. A few examples include maidenhair fern, lady fern, cinnamon fern, and ostrich fern. You can find native ferns in various sizes, from ten inches (25 cm) tall to four feet (1.2 m). These are among the most well-adapted shade native plants. The shadiest areas of the garden, where little else will grow, are perfect for ferns. Many ferns prefer moist soil, so don't grow these in dry areas.

Other shade loving foliage include:

- Caladiums
- Coleus
- Hosta
- Pulmonaria
- Aspidistra
- Liriope
- Wild ginger
- English ivy
- Pachysandra
- Purple wintercreeper

Shade Loving Shrubs

If you want bigger plantings to cozy up your shady space, try planting some of these shrubs and trees that only need a bit of sunlight to make them happy.

- Boxwood
- Mountain laurel
- Cherry laurel
- Privet

Yew
Rhododendron