Shade Gardens

What is a shade garden?

If your garden is located under a canopy of trees, on the north side of your home, or in a corner that gets little sun, you have the perfect spot for a shade garden. Simply put, it's a garden made up of plants that thrive despite little or no direct sunlight. How little? Not more than four hours of sunlight a day. Plants native to woodlands usually do well in shade gardens (think hostas, ferns, and heucheras).

What are the disadvantages of a shade garden?

With a shade garden, you might have fewer weeds, which flourish in direct sunlight, but you may have to contend with tree seedlings instead if you're planting under a tree. As you would with weeds, you'll have to pull the seedlings out by the roots. Another drawback: Because plants in the shade take longer to dry after watering, they may be more susceptible to fungal diseases. And last, shade gardens simply don't have the breadth of color enjoyed by sun gardens. But what you'll lack in colorful blooms, you can make up for in interesting foliage.

Are there *any* colorful options for a shade garden?



Above: Pink astilbe lights up a corner of the New York Botanical Garden. Photograph by Kristine Paulus via Flickr, from Gardening 101: Astilbe. For more, see Astilbe: A Field Guide to Planting, Care & Design.

Yes! While it's true that most shade gardens tend to be foliage-heavy, that doesn't mean shade gardens are boring. Leaves come in many shades, from maroon to chartreuse to moss. Not to mention, if you are gung-ho on having some showy colors, there are some flowers that don't mind less sunlight. Astilbe and foxgloves were among my only triumphs that year I tried to impose my will over nature, and there's a reason for that: They are both shade-tolerant plants. Other flowers to consider for a shade garden include bleeding hearts, hydrangeas, and Solomon's seals.