

Shade vs. Sunlight

All plants need some degree of sunlight to grow properly. Shade gardens have different types of shade; it's important to figure out how dense your shade is: bright to deep.

A garden spot that gets less than four hours of sun a day cannot be used for growing full- or partial-sun plants. If the shade is the result of a north-facing exposure, a high roofline or overhanging eaves, there's not much you can do to get rid of it. If trees cast the shade, more sunlight can be provided by selectively thinning the canopy to let more light in or limbing them up, which is removing low-growing branches.

The amount of shade a spot gets can vary dramatically during the day and throughout the year. For instance, when deciduous trees are dormant, the area beneath them gets full sun, but once the trees leaf out in spring, that same area may get no sun at all, why many shade perennials bloom in spring.

Soil and Mulch

Organically rich soil is the secret to growing plants successfully in the shade. A layer of leaf litter covers the forest floor, which can be re-created at home by incorporating shredded leaves or compost into the soil.

Mulching helps reduce weed growth, retain soil moisture and gives the garden an attractive, finished feel. Use pine needles or hardwood mulch that will break down into the soil and also provide a natural woodland look. Avoid smothering plants with too much as it can prevent sunlight and oxygen from getting to the plants and their roots.

Design Considerations

Shade gardens are beautiful with different layers – tall trees, lower ones, shrubs and perennials. Look for ways to brighten your shady garden with light-colored flowers or variegated foliage. The color white glows in a shaded area, so it's especially welcome. Texture is wonderful in a shade garden, with ferns, sedges, or hosta.

WHY PLANT NATIVES?

By definition, a native Delaware plant is one that grew here before the European settlers arrived, as opposed to exotic plants that came from other countries after that time period. **Natives have many advantages.** Because they evolved here, they are well adapted to our climate and are generally easy to care for once they are established in the right place. Many native perennials like less fertile soil and require the addition of little or no fertilizer. Perhaps the most compelling reason to choose natives is to preserve Delaware's biodiversity. Development is rapidly reducing natural areas that shelter a wealth of our native plants; the landscapes that replace our natural areas consist mostly of lawns and exotic plants. Recent research from our Dr. Doug Tallamy of the University of Delaware has determined that 90 percent of our native insects are specialists that feed on three or fewer families of plants. The insects rely on native plant hosts and cannot eat the exotic plants that have become common in our yards. A reduction of native insects means that birds have fewer insects to feed to their young, and that will lead to a reduction of bird species. **In the next fifty years, what we plant in our yards will determine the kind of wildlife that can live in Delaware. By planting natives, gardeners can help retain our natural history and the beauty and diversity of our coast.**

Inland Bays Garden Center

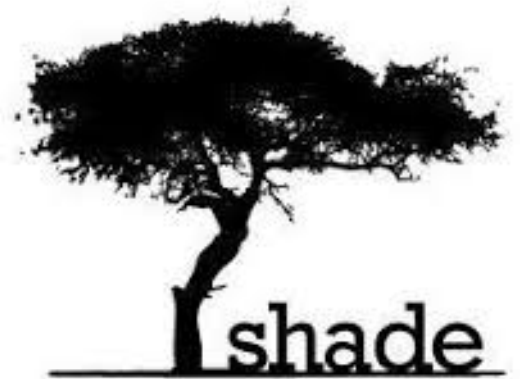
Gardening to make a difference

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SHADE PERENNIALS



If your yard is full of large shade trees, it's already a challenge to grow sun-loving plants, but you can take advantage of this potential problem by creating a cool, shady refuge from the summer heat. Follow these steps to preparing your shade garden for success.

DRY TO AVERAGE SOIL

Helleborus orientalis - Lenten rose is a clump-forming, late winter-blooming perennial, which typically grows 1-1.5' tall. Features large, cup-shaped, rose-like flowers, which usually appear in clusters of 1-4 on thick stems rising above the foliage. Blooms in February to April. Appreciates having untidy leaves cleaned up before it blooms. Fine in deep shade.

Lily turf - *Liriope muscari* is a tough perennial that copes even in the darkest and driest of conditions. Its purple blooms are a valuable asset, rising above its evergreen, straplike leaves. Not native. Deep shade ok.

Christmas fern - *Polystichum acrostichoides*. Adapted to a wide range of conditions, from very dry to moist, and is hardy to Zone 3. 1- to 2-foot fronds are dependably evergreen—hence the common name—but they lie flat on the ground through the winter. Appreciates extra compost, and having winter damaged leaves tidied up in spring. Deep shade ok. Native.

AVERAGE SOIL MOISTURE

Japanese Anemone Honorine Jobert - Excellent fall bloomer. Perennial borders, cottage gardens, woodland gardens. Effective when massed. Attractive with hostas and astilbes. 3' tall. Doesn't like to dry out.

Columbine - up to 2 ft. tall, well known for its showy nodding, red and yellow flowers. Likes a little extra lime. Cut back the leaves if they get leaf miner, they'll grow right back. Good spring butterfly plant. Native.

Coral Bells - *Heuchera* - a wide variety of foliage and flower colors, and a mounding habit. Great color and texture. Foliage about 8 - 10", flowers to 2'. Spring blooms. Thrives in bright shade. Mostly Native.

Wild Geranium - Beautiful pink to purple flowers cover the sturdy foliage in spring for up to 6 weeks. Likes extra compost. 18" tall and wide clumping plant is easy to grow. Native

Green and Gold - Short, showy plant with yellow, daisy-like flower heads on hairy stems. Blooms spring to fall in bright shade. Better neglected, but likes to be divided every few years. Wonderful and reliable. Native.

Woodland phlox - *Phlox divaricata* - short perennial with light blue blooms in early spring. Beautiful! Bright shade. Native.

Hosta - well known, favorite shade perennial. Many, many different foliage colors, and sizes. Plants range from 6" tall to 4'. Leaves from dainty and small, to huge. Some have fragrant flowers. Ok in dense shade but will shine with extra compost in bright shade. Some drought tolerated but grows best with average watering.

Ferns - Many different kinds, with different sizes and shades of green. Some prefer more moisture than others, but all are beautiful and easy if given the right conditions. Beautiful textural contrasts. Some are native.

AVERAGE TO WET SOIL

Sedges - Many kinds with different textures, and shades of green. Not flashy but beautiful in a quiet way. Provides a grass like texture. Important for pollinators. Prefer average to wet, but some will tolerate dry sandy soil too. Native.

Goatsbeard - Tall (4 - 6') plants are excellent background for shady, moist spots. Showy, plume-like spikes of tiny, cream colored flowers rise above the foliage in early to mid summer. Bold and beautiful! Needs consistent moisture. Bright shade. Native.