



TOP TEN SHADE GARDEN PLANTS

landscapes. They believe there is little hope to create gorgeous gardens without the sun's rays assiduously stroking plants. I am fortunate to live on an acre where there are areas in full sun and others in shade, but if forced to choose between the two, I choose shade.

Shade gardening is a gentler, kinder sort of gardening. Because foliage plays a major role, there is less dead-heading. Weeds are a minor annoyance instead of sworn enemies. You can work in your shade garden in the middle of summer without

breaking a sweat. And while gardening of any kind can be therapeutic, the shade garden is a special place for contemplation.

There are many beautiful perennials that flourish in the shade. When asked to choose the top ten perennials for shade gardens, I turned to some shady characters on staff at The Planter's Palette to help with my selections. Thanks to Maria Dvorak, Shirley Knetter, Pamela Matus, and Barb Richards for their comments.

Gardeners Hostas
 We all agreed there must be their shady hostas in a shade garden, but couldn't concur on exactly which cultivars. Top vote-getters were Blue Angel, Maui Buttercups, and Touch of Class. Blue Angel is a classic, large hosta with thick blue leaves. Touch of Class is a distinctive, medium-sized hosta boasting blue leaves with gold centers.

Maui Buttercups is a small hosta with bright gold, cupped and corrugated foliage. Plant these three together for a foliage combination as colorful as any blooming perennial grouping basking in the sun.

Ferns
 We all agreed that ferns should be included in a shade garden, but once again debated over exactly which variety was best.

Dvorak and Richards chose a newer variety, Dres Dagger (Athyrium filix-femina 'Dres Dagger'), because of the unique dagger shape of its fronds. Matus lauded the rigid, upright form and silvery fronds of Ghost (Athyrium filix-femina 'Ghost'). Knetter recommended any of her three favorites: Christmas fern (Polystichum acrostichoides),

Male fern (Dryopteris filix-mas), and Crispa Cristata (Dryopteris filix-mas 'Crispa Cristata'). My personal favorite is Maidenhair ferns (Adiantum pedatum). I love their shiny, black stems and light green leaflets. Although they are slow to establish, they are worth the wait.



Even though we couldn't agree on our favorite fern, we all agreed ferns add a needed texture to the shade garden.

Sedges
 Don't forget to include sedges in your shade garden. They form low, tufted clumps of grass-like, semi-evergreen foliage that contrasts nicely with many other perennials. Snowline (Carex conica 'Snowline') and Blue Sedge (Carex glauca) won top honors in this category. Snowline is a variegated variety; Blue Sedge has steel blue foliage. Both are ideal partners for large-leaved perennials like hostas or coral bells.

Coral Bells

Coral bells were another unanimous pick, and we all love Obsidian. Its sensual, deep purple, silk-like leaves hold their color well into winter. Pair it with pink-flowered neighbors and the dark foliage will make the pink flowers pop. Partner it with a blue hosta for a cool-color combo, or plant it next to a gold hosta in a sizzling set.



Heuchera 'Obsidian' is a unanimous pick for one of the top ten shade garden plants by The Planter's Palette staff.

Bugbane

Richards and Matus chose Bugbanes (Cimicifuga ramosa). Matus believes Pink Spike is the best choice because it is more vigorous and holds its color better in shade than other purple-leaved bugbanes. Its foliage grows 3' tall and pink, fragrant flower clusters appear above the foliage in July through September. Richards' top pick was the more common Atropurpurea. Make this plant happy and it will reach 7' tall.

Sturdy purple stems hold ivory-colored bottlebrushes of fragrant flowers that light up the shade in September and October.

The blooms of Cimicifuga are fragrant!



Lenten Rose

Lenten Rose (Helleborus orientalis) is near the top of Knetter's list. She appreciates its nodding blooms in April that remain beautiful as they dry on the plant. She also values its dark green foliage that stays attractive until the harshness of winter finally takes it toll.

Grapeleaf Anemone

Richards loves Grapeleaf Anemone (Anemone vitifolia 'Robustissima') in a shade garden. She loves the late-season color of its pink flowers and thinks it is most beautiful when planted in mass. Grapeleaf Anemone grows up to 3' feet tall.

Yellow Corydalis

"Corydalis lutea spreads happily through a shade garden," reports Dvorak, "I love how it

gives the garden a natural look." Yellow Corydalis is one of those rare plants that truly blooms from May to October with small, bright yellow, tubular flowers in clusters above delicate-looking foliage.

False Forget-me-not

False Forget-me-not (Brunnera macrophylla) is a staple in the shade garden. Its clouds of light blue flowers bloom an incredibly long time – six weeks or more – in April through June. The deep green coarse leaves are a good textural contrast to smaller-foliaged or variegated perennials.



Brunnera macrophylla is a must-have in any shade garden.

European Ginger

European Ginger (Asarum europaeum) is another must-have plant for the shade garden. It has shiny, evergreen leaves that slowly form a luxurious carpet. Although considered a ground cover, it creeps instead of leaps – use it more like any other perennial.

Design

end of the season. sky - the Bugbane and Grapeleaf
Anemone will perform this job
With these ten plants alone you admirably. Some should hug the
ground – the European Ginger
can have a beautiful shade These ten plants also provide a will happily play this role. Many
garden. Just choose a few hostas pleasing contrast to each other. will form the middle layer.
and ferns, and decide on your Texturally, some of the plants
favorite sedge and coral bells for have fine foliage; some have bold
attractive foliage all season long. foliage; and sedges have linear
leaves. European Ginger has
There will be something in bloom smooth shiny leaves; False Think about the layers of a
satisfying perennial border.
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sky - the Bugbane and Grapeleaf
The Lenten rose and false forget- stiffly upright; some are Anemone will perform this job
admirably. Some should hug the
me-not will give you spring mounding. ground – the European Ginger
bloom, Yellow Corydalis will will happily play this role. Many
bloom all season, and the Think about the layers of a will form the middle layer.
Bugbane and Grapeleaf satisfying perennial border.
Anemone will provide color at the Some plants should reach for the