

PERENNIALS FOR THE SHADE

Most gardens have at least one shady spot in them, places that for one reason or other just don't receive the full benefit of the sun's rays. The challenge many gardeners face is in finding plants that are attractive, but suitable for these sometimes-problematic areas. Many perennials in particular, some of which have very unfortunate common names (Lungwort is not a name which should be associated with a beautiful plant like Pulmonaria), are very well adapted to life in the shade. Some are short groundcovers, some are tall skyscrapers, and some just grow impressively large leaves for a grand show. Whatever your preference, there is probably a perennial to suit it. Following are some general descriptions of perennials that are perfectly happy in a shady environment.

Acanthus mollis - Bear's Breeches. A spectacular foliage plant for shade, it will tolerate even dry shade. This plant bears deep green, glossy leaves that have been known to reach a few feet long! In late spring, it produces spikes of white and purple flowers. The peculiarly shaped flowers give this plant its name...

Aconitum varieties - Monkshood, Wolf's Bane. This would be the best answer to "What is a Delphinium-like plant that can grow in shade?". Monkshood has fine-textured foliage, then tall spikes of flowers in summer, very similar in appearance to the Delphiniums. The individual flowers look like little hoods, hence the common name. Monkshood can be found in blue, white, rose-pink, yellow, and a few bicolor types.

Anemone varieties These plants will thrive in part shade, and add late season flower to the garden. Size will vary quite a bit, from the small mounding forms to the towering hybrids. The flowers range from white to pink to purple, and are quite showy for the late summer/fall garden.

Aquilegia - Columbine. Most states in the west have at least one native Columbine, and most gardens could do with one or two also. Most people are familiar with the nodding, spurred columbine flowers in reds, yellows, purples, and whites. A very adaptable plant for part shade.

Aruncus - Goatsbeard. Aruncus will grow in wet shade. In early summer, it bears soft, airy, cream colored flowers in plumes.

Astilbe - Much like the previous plant, but with the added perk of colored flower plumes. Astilbes come in white, pink, red and intermediate shades. They generally prefer to be in part shade.

Cimicifuga - Bugbane, Snakeroot. Cimicifuga is a tall growing perennial that is simply impressive. Some varieties, like 'Atropurpurea' and 'Brunette' have deep purple, almost black foliage. In late summer, they produce tall candles of white flowers that are definite attention-getters.

Corydalis - These plants are gaining in popularity with the introduction a few years back of three Chinese varieties that are shockingly beautiful. Most have ferny green foliage topped with electric blue flowers. Hybridizing has brought us some new forms with purple flowers, purple leaves, and other nice attributes. Some may go dormant in the summer.

Dicentra spectabilis, eximia, formosa - Bleeding Heart. Most people are familiar with the old-fashioned bleeding heart and its distinctive spring flowers. There are also many other varieties though, in varying shades of red, pink and white. Some even have extra attractive foliage. The common bleeding heart will often go dormant in the heat of summer, but the other varieties are generally very durable.

Ferns - Too numerous to list here, but a good idea for foliage effect. Ferns can be deciduous or evergreen, and many have interesting coloration.

Filipendula - Meadowsweet. Filipendula is very tolerant of moist conditions. It has very bold medium-green foliage, and is topped in late summer with plumes of white, pink, or red. This plant can get big!

Fuchsia magellanica varieties - Hardy Fuchsia. It's amazing how little most people know about hardy fuchsias, and yet they are one of the most worthwhile plants for a shady spot. They form shrubby branches that arch out, and bear hanging flowers that are just like the fuchsias you would grow in a hanging basket. They come in several shades of red, white and pink, and some even have variegated or golden foliage. Hardy fuchsias will generally die back to the ground in this area, but will come back quickly when the weather starts to warm back up. It may be beneficial to mulch these during the winter.

Geraniums - Hardy Geranium. Although many hardy Geraniums will do good in sun, many of them will actually thrive in shade as well. They will create large clumps of blooms and foliage that can often last all summer!

Heuchera - Coral Bells. The past several years have brought us numerous new varieties of these, most of which were actually hybridized here in Oregon. Heucheras are grown for their attractive foliage, and spikes of bell-shaped flowers in spring. Newer varieties can have ruffled or flat leaves. They can have many different shades of variegation, and some will even take on a deep purple leaf color. Flower colors range from white to red.

x Heucherella - Foamy Bells. These are hybrids between Heucheras and Tiarellas (see below), taking on some characteristics of both parents. They generally get the finely cut, attractively marked foliage of the Tiarella, and the bold flowers of the Heuchera. Heucherellas are becoming more common, and many new varieties are becoming available as time goes on.

Hosta - Funkia, Plantain Lily. Hostas are a very valuable shade plant, and will add something wonderful to almost any garden. Hostas are primarily grown for their foliage, which can reach mammoth proportions or stay small and compact. Hostas have undergone a lot of development over the years, and we now have Hostas of all shapes and sizes. Leaf color can also vary, from blue to green to yellow. Many varieties even have striking variegations in the leaf. The flowers, usually lavender but sometimes white, are formed on spikes in summer. Some varieties even have highly fragrant flowers. Hostas are very carefree and easy to grow (just watch out for slugs!), and will easily find a place in the shade garden.

Kirengeshoma palmate - Yellow Wax-bells. This is a really interesting perennial with large maple-like leaves and nodding waxy yellow flowers. This is a more unusual perennial, and it will probably become more widely known over the next few years.

Pulmonaria - Lungwort. Pulmonarias (Most people don't use its common name for obvious reasons) are a nice little spreading foliage plant with huge flowers in spring. The foliage is generally longer and narrow, and can have interesting spots and variegations. The flowers are large, funnel shaped, and clustered on stems above the foliage. They can range in color from white to pink to blue, with blue being most common. On one note, these tend to be both deer and slug resistant.

Tellima grandiflora - Fringe Cups. This native has long been overlooked by many gardeners. The introduction of 'Forest Frost', a wonderful plant with silver streaked foliage, has brought much attention to these plants. Tellimas are very closely related to Heucheras, in fact, it is difficult to tell the two apart. The flowers tend to be an interesting chartreuse green. One major attraction of this perennial is its ability to thrive in really dry, really shady conditions.

Tiarella - Foam Flower. This is another shade perennial getting a lot of attention recently, and it's easy to see why. Tiarellas are closely related to Heucheras, but their foliage tends to be much more intricate. The foliage can be very deeply cut, and many have dark markings on the leaf. The flowers are formed on short spikes comprised of many small star shaped flowers. Flower colors range from pinkish to white. This is a really attractive perennial!

Tricyrtis - Toad lily. Tricyrtis are an intriguing perennial that looks very tropical in many senses. Their foliage is narrow and long, and can have interesting spots or streaks. The foliage actually strongly resembles a tropical orchid. Then the flowers pop out, which stop people in their tracks. The flowers are usually 1-2" across, star shaped, and of the wildest color schemes you are likely to see on a hardy plant around here. The flowers can be yellow, white, or purple, and often have wild spots all over. These plants are spreaders, and quickly make nice colonies.

Trillium - Another native plant that loves the shade, Trilliums are highly valued by those who grow them. They aren't showy for much of the year, but their beautiful spring flowers make them worth it to those who have seen an established plant. This is a good plant to plant and leave alone, as they resent disturbance.