

SHADE/PARTIAL SHADE GARDENING FOR PARKER COUNTY

by La Donna Stockstill
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Often mature landscapes are shade gardens; these can be beautiful and restful but can also be a challenge to achieve the look many gardeners want.

When planning a shade garden, it is important to incorporate plant “layers” into the design. The first layer is comprised of large mature trees then planting smaller, understory trees beneath them creates another layer of interest.

A third layer would consist of shrubs and in a well-planned garden; these can be evergreen as well as deciduous. Perennials, annuals, vines and groundcovers complete the shade garden by adding much desired and needed color.

Consider your soil type, the cold and heat zone for the plants, the light requirements, size of the plant at maturity and water requirements. Moisture is an important factor in a shade garden. As you select a shade plant, be sure to check the label to see if it grows best in wet areas or is more drought tolerant. Do your research and always read the plant label before making your decision on any purchase for your landscape. NOTE: Parker County is in Zone 7b for cold and Zone 9 for heat.

Many plants can tolerate some sun if that sun comes early or late in the day.

Light requirements are defined as:

- **Sun** – At least 6 to 8 hours of direct sun per day
- **Partial Shade** – Morning sun (3 to 4 hours) and shade in the afternoon
- **Dappled Shade** – Filtered light, as through tree leaves or overhanging leaves of bushes or vines
- **Shade** – Little or no direct sunlight

PARTIAL LISTING OF PLANTS FOR SHADE/PARTIAL SHADE GARDENING

* denotes that these can be found in *the real dirt A Gardening Handbook for Parker County*

Annuals:

Wax begonia (*Begonia semperflorens*)*
Caladium (*Caladium bicolor*)*
Coleus (*Coleus hybridus*)*
Elephant ears (*Colocasia esculenta*)* bulb
Flowering tobacco (*Nicotiana glauca*)*
Geranium (*Pelargonium x hortorum*)*
Impatiens (*Impatiens wallerana*)*
Purple Shield (*Strobilanthes dyerianus*)
Scarlet sage (*Salvia splendens*)*
Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*)*
Sweet William (*Dianthus barbatus*)*

Perennials

Astilbe (*Astilbe x arendsii*)
Blue mist flower (*Eupatorium coelestinum*)*

Cast iron plant (*Aspidistra elatior*)*
 Columbines (*Aquilegia sp.*)*
 Coral bells (*Heuchera sp.*) * 'Coral bells'-green, 'Palace Purple'-purple, 'Snow Angel'-variegated
 Ferns*: Holly fern (*Cyrtomium falcatum*), Japanese painted (*Athyrium niponicum*), Wood fern (*Thelypteris kunthii*), Tassel fern (*Polystichum polyblepharum*)
 Helleborus 'Lenten Rose' (*Helleborus orientalis*)*
 Horse herb (*Calyptracarpus vialis*)
 Iris (*Iris species*)* Many members of the iris family are shade-tolerant under deciduous trees or shrubs. Louisiana and bearded iris are spring bloomers.
 Obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*)*
 Oxalis (*Oxalis sp.*)* green and purple - bulb
 Phlox- Woodland (*Phlox divaricata. P./ x 'Chatahoochie', P. Pilosa*) Garden phlox,
 Salvia (*Salvia coccinea*)*
 Sedum-Stonecrop (*Sedum*)* Many of the sedums do well in shade.
 Summer phlox, Louisiana Phlox (*Phlox Paniculata*)* NOTE: most phlox will bloom best with some sun.
 Plantain lily (*Hosta, sp.*)*
 Snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*)* bulb
 Soapwort (*Saponaria officinalis*)
 Spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*)*
 Sweet violet (*Viola odorata*)*
 Turk's cap (*Malvaviscus drummondii*)*

Groundcovers

Ajuga or Carpet bugle (*Ajuga reptans*)*
 Asiatic jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum*)*
 English ivy (*Hedera helix*)*
 Lamium (*Lamiaceae maculatum* 'White Nancy'*, (*Lamia galeobdolon*) 'Archangel'* 'Herman's Pride', 'Pink Pewter'
 Mock false strawberry (*Duchesnea indica*)*
 Moneywort (Creeping Jenny) (*Lysimachia nummularia*)* (Creeping Charlie)
 Purple winter creeper (*Euonymus fortunei*)*
 Strawberry geranium (*Saxifraga stolonifera*)
 Vinca (*Vinca minor*)* This is an aggressive groundcover.

Ornamental Grasses

Inland sea oats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*)*

Herbs

Aloe vera (*Aloe barbadensis*)*
 Chamomile (*Anthemis nobilis*)*
 Chervil (*Anthriscus cerefolium*)*
 Chile pequin (*Capsicum annuum*)*
 Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*)*
 Hoja santa (*Piper auritum*)*
 Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*)*
 Patchouli (*Pogostemon cablin*)*
 Pineapple sage (*Salvia elegans*)*
 Sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*)*

Shrubs

Aucuba (*Aucuba japonica*)*
American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*)*
Bridal wreath spiraea (*Spiraea cantoniensis*)*
Boxwood (*Buxus microphylla*)*
Cleyera (*Ternstroemia gymnanthera*)
Coralberry (*Symphoricarpos orbiculatus*)*
Dwarf wax myrtle (*Myrica pusilla*)*
Japanese aralia (*Fatsia japonica*)*
Leatherleaf mahonia (*Mahonia bealeii*)*
Mock orange 'Natchez' (*Philadelphus virginialis*)*
Spiraea 'Anthony Waterer' (*Rhus aromatica*)*
St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)*
Sweet olive (*Osmanthus fragrans*)*
Rusty blackhaw viburnum (*Viburnum rufidulum*)*
Snowball viburnum (*Viburnum opulus sterile*)*
Yew (*Taxus*)*

Trees

Carolina buckthorn (*Rhamnus caroliniana*)*
Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*)*
Bigtooth maple (*Acer grandidentatum*)*
Shantung maple (*Acer truncatum*)*
Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)*

Vines

Boston ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*)* Deciduous
Confederate jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*)*
Coral vine (*Antigonon leptopus*)*
English ivy (*Hedera helix*)*
Fig ivy-Creeping fig, Climbing fig (*Ficus pumila*)*
Japanese climbing fern (*Lygodium japonicum*)*

COLORFUL PLANTS FOR SHADY AREAS

Listed by height or growth habits

Very low-growing plants and/or groundcovers:

- Wedelia (*Wedelia trilobata*)* Rapidly spreading groundcover, glossy green leaves, brilliant yellow daisies on six-inch stalks.
- Oxalis (*Oxalis crassipes*)* Clover-leaf, prolific tiny flowers, mixed colors. Leaves appear in winter, flowers in spring.
- Plumbago (*Plumbago articulata*)* Blue or white flowers on cascading branches.
- Hostas (*Hosta spp.*)* Striking broad leaves fountain out from a center crown. Delicate mixed-colored flowers on tall, slender stalks.
- Dwarf Ruellia (*Ruellia* 'Blue Shade')* Same purple wild petunia flower as the standard Ruellia. But this one grows only four to six inches high and spreads horizontally by clumps.
- Ardisia (*Ardisia japonica*) This is not exactly colorful, but it does have red berries in the fall that birds love. This shiny-leafed, low growing evergreen looks the same every day.

Low-growers:

- Pink polka dot plants (*Hypoestes phyllostachya*) Annual.
- Louisiana phlox (*Phlox* sp.)* Good to plant in with summer bloomers like Wedelia and dwarf ruellia. Blooms in spring, perennial.
- Pentas (*Pentas lanceolata*) The dwarf variety gets four to six inches tall. The standards grow two to three feet. They come in multi-colors and produce clusters of flowerets at the top of the stalk. Annual.
- Cyclamens (*Cyclamen* spp.) Plant in winter. They like shade even from the winter sun and will bloom until it gets hot.

Medium Growers:

- Columbine (*Aquilegia* spp.)* Spring bloomer, make sure you get a Texas-hardy variety.
- Jacobinia (*Justicia carnea*) Annual but very colorful for shady spots. Pineapple-shaped flowers in pink, white and gold.
- Begonias (*Begonia* spp.)* Annual – cane (angel wing), shrub and rhizomatous.
- Obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*)* This native is so called because you can turn the little flowers growing up and down each stalk any which way you like and they will stay put. Can be an aggressive grower.
- Coleus (*Coleus* hybrids)* Annual. These don't flower (if they start to bolt, pick off the unattractive flowers and pinch the branches back) but the colors are beautiful.
- Gingers (*Zingiber* hybrids) Annual.
- Grasses: * Don't overlook the wonderful variety of ornamental grasses that are available. The variegated grasses look spectacular in the shade.

Tall flowers great for interspersing throughout the groundcovers:

- Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*)* Red or white spikes.
- Ironweed (*Veronica* spp.)* White or purple flowers.

SHADY LAWN PRODUCTION

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Shaded lawns require special care to maintain satisfactory grass cover. That means mowing higher and more frequently, watering more often, giving particular attention to controlling leaf diseases and removing fallen tree leaves.

Shaded turf is weakened by lack of sunlight and competition for water nutrients from roots of trees and shrubs. Thus, grass that is growing in shade generally is shallow-rooted and is more succulent and less hardy than grass growing in full sunlight.

As a result, the shaded grass is more susceptible to drought stress and disease attacks. To reduce stress and to promote healthy turf, mow the grass ½ to 1 inch higher than grasses growing in full sunlight. Also, mow shaded lawns frequently enough so that only 1/3 of the foliage is removed at each mowing. Thus, grass mowed at a height of 2 inches should be mowed when it reaches 3 inches.

Because shaded turf is shallow-rooted and tree roots are competing for available moisture, water more frequently during drought stress periods. And, because grass growing in shade is not able to utilize fertilizer as readily as grass in full sunlight, fertilizer should be applied only in early spring and fall.

Leaf diseases, particularly Gray Leaf Spot and Helminthosporium, can seriously thin most lawn grass that has been weakened by the effects of shade. So apply a fungicide containing PCNB (Turfcide) or chlorothalonil (Daconil) to shaded areas at monthly intervals during the growing season. Severe disease infestations will require more frequent applications. Treated areas should not be watered for 48 hours.

It's not a good idea to use chemicals for weed control on St. Augustine grass in heavy shade because they may further weaken the grass and increase its susceptibility to disease. Some weed killers may also damage trees and shrubs.

Removing tree leaves that accumulate in the fall will also help shaded grass.

In many home landscapes, shade develops to such a degree that grass cannot be maintained. Even St. Augustine grass, the most shade-tolerant of turf-grasses, requires at least 30% direct sunlight to maintain satisfactory growth. Consider replacing shaded grass areas with bark mulch or a ground cover.

SO REMEMBER:

- Use shade tolerant grasses, such as St. Augustine or Zoysia
- Raise the height of the mower blade 1 inch. Instead of 1 ½ - 2 inches, mow up to 3 inches in height.
- Avoid excessive nitrogen that may promote diseases - particularly in shade.
- Avoid foot traffic in these areas.
- Select trees with more open crowns.
- Thin out crowns of existing trees to allow more light to penetrate.
- Improve air movement by removing solid screens of nearby shrubbery.
- Remove fallen leaves promptly in the fall and winter.
- Prune tree limbs to a height of 8-10 feet to permit more sunlight to reach the grass.
- If the above practices do not help, try some of the shade-tolerant ground covers.

Ground covers are frequently used under or around trees where grass grows poorly or where exposed tree roots make mowing a hazard. Ground cover plants eliminate the need for mowing as well as concealing the exposed tree roots.

Ground covers are slower than grass in covering bare ground. Consequently, weeds are likely to grow, especially the first year. A mulch of bark, compost, or other organic material will control most weeds, as well as retain moisture in the soil. Pull the weeds by hand if they break through the mulch or use a fusilade-containing product such as Ortho Grass-B-Gon, which will kill all grass without damaging the ground cover.

Water on a regular schedule throughout the growing season, particularly during dry weather. During the winter months, water the plants thoroughly when the weather is dry and the temperature is above freezing.

Ground covers usually need pruning only to removed dead wood and keep the plantings in bound.