

Got Shade?...

By C. Meyers

Homes A3, A4, and B7 have a significant amount of shade in their garden. Do you?

Finding plants for a shady area may seem impossible, but many of our homes (West A3, A4 and East-B7), illustrate some real options. Most shade plants are foliage stars that perform beauty throughout the summer. Here are some popular choices that offer a large palette to select from.

SHRUBS - *Hydrangea* can grow in a variety of conditions. Holly, daphne, summersweet, sweetshrub, japanese barberry and especially the right boxwoods are options in zone 5 shade.

PERENNIALS: There are some very popular perennials and annuals that are selected mostly for their leaves, that are stellar choices for the shade garden. These include:

HOSTAs - Has the widest variety of perennial shade plants to pick from. While a lot of us have the standard 2-3 hostas that are EVERYWHERE - there's plenty more to pick from. These plants add plenty of interest to the shady corners in your garden. The leaves in hostas vary significantly in size (tiny, small, medium, large, huge), shape (rippled edges or not), color -(green, blue, yellow, white or any mix there of), and height. The above photo of an Edgebrook Garden includes a wide variety in a small space. Consider: Miniskirt, Autumn Frost, Mouse Ears and Stiletto. Yellow leaved hostas are a favorite and rippled leaved Dancing Queen is popular. Empress Wu is the largest hosta available. What a statement!

FERNs - are a light, airy looking plant, that offer a range of textures for the garden. They like a light, highly organic soil with ample moisture during their growing season, more so as the plants are becoming established. Do not plant too deep; set the crowns at or just below soil level. Many types do well in Chicago with the right soil amendments.

SILVER-LEAVED PLANTS -include *pulmonaria* and *brunnera*. *Pulmonaria* (lungwort) has a modest selection of plants. Silver leaved, Silver Bouquet with a mix of pink/blue buds on the same plant, are a real special shade plant. They often have silver dots on the leaves. *Brunnera*, another shade star, shown below, provides clumps of round silver leaves that are dramatic. Here, the more shade the better.

GROUND COVERS - can really help fill in the space. Ivys are popular as are *vinca minor*, *liriope* and *pachysandra*.



Ajuga is a lower ground cover that comes in a variety of forms, from burgundy glow and black scallops, to chocolate chip.



LIGULARIA - is a popular shade and moisture loving plant. These have large dark leaves with a rich purple underside. These plants get tall yellow stalks that contrast so well with the leaves. Properly sited, they are dramatic in the garden.

ASTILBE - Here the flower plumes, not the leaves are the star. These come in a limited number of colors that can add punch to shade. From white, pink, red, to purple, they will naturalize and create clumps in the shade.

OTHERS - There are a number of other perennials that are very successful in shade including Lady's Mantle, variegated Solomon's Seal, many helebore and a host of grasses such as various carex including Ice Ballet.

Bulbs - can grow in some shade as well. Daffodils, Hyacinths and snowdrops are some popular flowers that grow well in our shade. Caladiums (elephant ears) with large heart shaped leaves with a variety of colors and patterns, are a great bulb-like (corm) star - that can be sensational in pots.

ANNUALS: are another quick fix for shade and there are many to choose from.

Coleus have become the shade-plant of choice, and for good reason! Here, the leaves have incredible colors and patterns that make them irresistible! They are great in pots or in the ground. The leaves are spectacular. While they start small, they quickly grow to form large, full clumps that can be very dramatic in the garden. With adequate sunny windows, cuttings from coleus are easy to over-winter in the home, creating brand new plants of your favorite plants for the next growing season.



Annuals that flower include begonias, impatiens, alyssum, cleome, and larkspur to name the most common. These can be used to deliver a significant impact to your shady yard.

Conclusion:

There are other less common plants for you to choose from, however those listed here, are tried and true performers in our area. Clearly, there are a lot of shade plants that provide a wide, diverse palette for the Chicago gardener! Many can be combined to create attractive compositions that can make all the difference in the darkest corners in your yard. Combinations of these shade-loving plants are found throughout the gardens in our GardenWalk and can be an inspiration of how foliage can help you make the most of the shady corners in your yard!

So feel inspired! On your next trip to the Garden Center pick up some shade plants to start reinventing the shady spots in your yard!!