

Colorful Shade Garden Plants

A close-up photograph of a fuchsia plant. The image features several flowers in various stages of bloom. One prominent flower is a deep purple color, with its long, slender stamens extending downwards. Above it, a large, bright pink flower is in full bloom. To the right, a smaller, unopened pink flower bud is visible. The background is filled with lush green leaves, some showing signs of wear or insect damage. The overall scene is set against a dark, blurred background, making the colors of the flowers stand out.

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

This guide helps you learn and discover beautiful and unique shade plants for your flower garden. This ebook is not the definitive listing of all these types of plants.

The information on each plant may contain inaccuracies about their histories, growing conditions, and hardiness. Each plant has its USDA hardiness zones, best growth conditions, and my recommended varieties to find and grow. Please be aware these plants may not be available, discontinued or replaced for better varieties by nurseries.

The following plants use their Latin name first then by a common name or names.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, public gardens, many nurseries within my area, and by Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Introduction

Shady characters are lurking about in your garden.

This descriptive ebook will help you identify colorful blooming plants that will thrive in the partially shaded areas of your flower garden.

There is a misconception that all shade gardens contain only green leafy plants such as Hostas and ferns. If any colorful flowers are blooming, it has to be Impatiens. No, many other colorful plants and flowers will brighten any shady area of a garden. This ebook helps you to identify these plants. This listing is not complete but highlights those found in many garden centers and nurseries.

One of the most confusing issues in flower gardening concerns shade. How much shade can certain plants tolerate or adequately require for best growth and blooming? We don't consider how much brightness sun-loving plants need. But, for planting in shady conditions, how much less-light is adequate for a plant? Sun-loving flowering plants can grow in partly shady areas as long as they get "enough" bright light for most of the day. The problem with raising plants in the shade is determining how much light and its duration they require.

For the sake of simplicity, the following plants listed in this ebook can grow and prosper in bright diffuse or partially shady locations. They can tolerate sun for a short part of the day – ideally in the early morning sun – or have dappled sunlight shining through trees or shrubs. Few plants grow well in constant, deep shade. All shade plants require diffuse lighting and grow best when not planted in the full intensity of the sun during the afternoon.

You also need to determine if your shade plants will grow in dry or moist soil. Woodland gardens may have dry soil most of the time due to the surrounding trees absorbing rainwater in a short time. You may need to add additional mulch or humus to the ground or install irrigation hoses to help recharge soil moisture. Shade plants that require moist soil will never thrive here. They will wilt and eventually

die. Some shade plants love moist soil, but never in soggy or boggy conditions.

Gardening in shady areas does not have to be confusing or discouraging. It is a learning process, but you will create the colorful garden you envision for those shadowy areas around your home. With help from this ebook, you will learn which plants will achieve your success. Take off your sunglasses and transform a dark space of your garden into one of color and brightness.

To find plants or seeds of the following species and varieties, please visit your nearby larger garden centers or search online to find specialty nurseries that grow and sell them.

Alchemilla – Lady's Mantle

Alchemilla mollis



You can experience shiny object syndrome in the garden.

This generational popular, 12 to 18 inches tall perennial (hardy from zones 3 to 9) may not be exceptionally colorful, but it provides other ornamental features to your garden. This olive-green plant doesn't add any significant excitement to a perennial shade flower bed, but appearances can be deceiving.

The yellow-green flowers are small but clustered together into branching stalks which florists love to add to bouquets. They appear like chartreuse-colored Baby's Breath (*Gypsophila*) and bloom in late spring to midsummer. After flowering, the spent stalks need to be

clipped off to prevent excessive self-seeding. This procedure will also encourage a new flush of bloom later in the summer.

The pleated leaves are pale-green and collect or pool rain or dew droplets which shimmer or sparkle even in partial shade. I suppose this is the main reason for this plant's popularity, but, many of us can't resist admiring shiny objects, even if they are droplets of water. It's like adding small, bright, festive lights to a shaded border but enjoyed only during the day.

This retention of water-beads is by tiny "hairs" (called trichomes) on the leaves. Think of them as being the wax you rub on your car. Like wax, they form beads or small pools on the leaf surface. These water droplets give rise to the common name of "lady's mantle." A mantle is a lady's coat or cloak, and the shimmering water-beads suggests diamonds decorating it. How stylish! Mother Nature is a talented fashion designer.

Although this plant can grow in full sunlight, it prefers more shade to look its best. Like most shady plants, if you can place this perennial so it can receive morning sunlight but partly shaded conditions for the afternoon, it should grow well for you. Make sure it receives moist soil for dry or drought conditions causes the plant to develop brown splotches on its leaves.

You should find it easy to get plants and seed packets in many nurseries and garden centers. If possible, purchase a variety called "**Thriller.**" It grows upright (instead of being floppy), has larger leaves, and blooms more often.

Anemone – Japanese Anemone

Anemone x hybrida and Anemone tomentosa

While strolling in the park one day..

On one of those delightful, sunny, crispy-cool Autumn days while leisurely strolling in a public garden, I came across these eye-catching perennials. “What in the world?” I thought. “I don’t recognize these flowers.” My first guess was late-blooming Dahlias but, no, they were something different. Later, after searching through many gardening catalogs, I discovered they were Japanese Anemones which bloom from late summer through the fall until mass plant murderer Jack Frost arrives.

Although native to China, the Japanese grew and bred them for hundreds of years. During this time, they created many varieties – not so much in different colors but in size, floral form and bloom time. These flowers only display in shades of pink, pale lavender and white but their form is exquisitely perfect.

If you want plenty of contrasting vivid colors, Chrysanthemums also bloom now, but Anemones grow taller, bushier and command attention. They are also hardier than Chrysanthemums; zones 4 or 5 to 8, depending on the variety. “Mums” are always touchy in their hardiness and winter survivability.

These plants prefer to grow in partly sunny or dappled-shady locations with very fertile, well-drained soil. They can tolerate full sunshine but will suffer in hot, dry soil. I suggest you plant them where they are in the shade for most of the afternoon. Always make sure the soil is moist during periods of drought.

I could not determine the identity of these perennials for I never find them offered in garden centers or nurseries in the spring. Then again, I rarely find Chrysanthemums either. Fall blooming plants always get a

'bum rap' in not being offered for spring sales in nurseries. A far better reliable method to get plants is by mail-order nurseries.

Two beautiful varieties you should find and grow in your garden are:

Anemone x hybrida 'Honorine Jobert'



This lovely antique or heirloom variety (1858) grows up to four feet tall with several two to three-inch, pure white blossoms with vivid yellow stamens. The petals have a lovely satiny sheen which dares you not to glance but gaze at the flowers. It blooms for several weeks beginning in midsummer to supply you with several long-stemmed cut-flower for your home. Not sure you should grow this in your garden? Well, it made the 2016 Perennial Plant Association "Plant of the Year" award if that helps your decision.

Anemone tomentosa 'Robustissima' or Anemone vitifolia 'Robustissima'



There is confusion about which is the correct species name, but there is no doubt concerning how wonderful this variety is for any garden. I particularly like the *vitifolia* species name for the Latin name matches the common name of this cultivar – the “Grape Leaf Anemone.” This robust plant can grow to four feet tall and is bushy with silvery-rosy-pink flowers produced continuously from midsummer until a killing frost.

Aquilegia – Columbine

Aquilegia canadensis and other species



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The eagle has landed in your garden.

Gardeners grow these hardy perennials for their beautiful, spurred flowers. The word “spur” in botanical jargon does not refer to the star-shaped cowboy boot doohickeys worn as an accelerator for horses. Here (and also for Impatiens) the spurs are extensions of the petals to store nectar to entice an insect (or hummingbird) pollinator. The blossoms bloom during mid-spring to early summer. They have a wide color range and seem to cross-pollinate religiously.

Most species and varieties grow well in partial to mostly shady areas in well-drained, fertile, moist soil but can tolerate drier soils. If grown in full sun, they need to have constant moist soil.

They have the nickname of “Granny’s Bonnets” which resemble the large puffy hats of the pioneers. The origins of the plant’s botanical and common names possibly refer to the shape of the petals resembling an eagle’s spread talons or from the words ‘*aqua*’, or water, and ‘*legere*,’ to collect. Water-carrier is a reference to the drops of nectar found at the end of the spurs. A possible reference to the common name, Columbine, which is from the Latin word ‘*columba*’ or dove. People think the flowers resemble several doves in flight. My goodness, people imagine seeing many things with these flowers!

All plants are hardy from Zones 3-9. Most species of Columbine grow well in shady locations such as the edges of woodlands, rock gardens, and flower borders. Try to find ***Aquilegia canadensis*** (shown above) with red and yellow flowers. They may not be as floriferous as hybrid varieties but they brighten-up shady areas.

Forget about finding many Columbine species in garden centers – most plants offered usually are hybrid variations which tolerate more sunlight. Your best bet to locate more shade-loving species is from exotic seed suppliers and raise them from seed. The seeds can be a challenge to germinate. They need a cold and moist period (stratification or over-wintering phase), and then they will germinate the following spring. Good things bloom for those who wait!

Astilbe – Dwarf Chinese Astilbe

Astilbe chinensis and var. *pumila*



Maybe it's time for a long, relaxing vacation...

This zones 4 to 8 perennial has the potential to bloom from mid-spring to late summer – only if the growing conditions suit it. Yes, that sounds ominous. According to numerous reviews and from my experience, this colorful plant can grow well but decide “enough is enough” and go dormant – even in the heart of summer. I initially believed my plants had suddenly died with no apparent reason. Good thing I did not perform an autopsy on them for I later read these plants can go dormant in the summer. Don't worry if this happens to your plants.

This plant grows well in partly shady locations. Yes, it can tolerate full sun but prefers shade during the hot afternoon hours. Try to prevent the fertile, well-drained soil from drying out too much, apply mulch to help conserve the moisture. I suspect most problems with this plant lies with the ground drying out too much causing it to undergo stress. Astilbe can be temperamental perennials!

You can grow these plants as medium-height groundcovers. The billowy or feathery purple, white or pink flower spikes can rise to almost 10 to 12 inches tall above the serrated fern frond-like foliage. Try to purchase **Dwarf Chinese Astilbe** (*Astilbe chinensis var. pumila*) plants from your local garden centers or online nurseries. They are spreading plants and can even grow (and bloom) in deeper shade and drier soil.

One particular variety called “**Visions**” is low growing and has better potential to bloom throughout the summer into the Fall with gorgeous red or neon pink feathery blossoms. Its foliage has a bronze-green color and is more serrated than the typical leaf form. For companion plants, try growing Astilbe with smaller-leaf Hostas and any ferns you can purchase.

Azalea and Rhododendron



That bathroom garden tub would look great in my flower garden.

Oh my goodness, this is a large group of beautiful shrubs, and it would take another ebook (well, several actually) to describe them all. Although they can grow in full sun, most enjoy thriving in a semi to full-shade areas. Most of our native species prefer to grow within woodlands. I believe most, if not all, bloom in the spring and need acidic, well-drained but moisture retentive soil to thrive.

For simplistic sake, contact your locally large garden center or agricultural agency to learn which species and hybrid varieties are hardy to your region. Do not depend on home improvement stores for they may sell varieties not hardy for your location. These stores sell paint, lumber and bathroom fixtures. Why pay for plants that will not

thrive in your garden? Go to your local garden centers or nurseries to find hardy stock. Many varieties have colorful (and sometimes fragrant) blossoms that will highlight a woodland setting or that dreary area in your garden.

Please learn where and how to plant these shrubs. Make sure they can grow in your area before purchasing them. One final reminder is they are slow growing shrubs – it can take many years for them to become large, but they can bloom at an early age. But, if you don't plant them now – you will never enjoy them! If you can afford it, try to purchase larger plants to get a head-start on your shade garden enjoyment.

Begonia

From small seeds, mighty pretty Begonias will bloom.

Mother Nature appears to have favorite flowers. She seems to have outdone herself in creating certain plants. Begonias are an example of her endearment for she has over 1,300 species. Most of these species are tropical or semi-tropical, but they grow well in partly shaded flower beds or containers.

Most begonias have thick, fleshy stems – an adaptation to store water when the soil becomes too dry. They grow best in well-drained soil that periodically dries. If subjected to soggy soil, the stems and tubers will rot and kill the plant. Some begonias develop tubers or thickened rhizomes (stems) that act as energy storage structures to survive during the dry seasons in the tropics but will die if subjected to freezing conditions.

No matter what type of growth, size or shape, their main popularity lies with their showy and colorful leaves and flowers. The flowers can be simple, single-petaled blossoms to flamboyant, billowy, large-petaled ones. Their leaves can be dark green to bronze with random contrasting patterns.

Let's concentrate on three types of Begonias we can plant in partly shady locations. Yes, they can become adapted to full sunlight but, depending on the variety or the species, that may cause discoloration of the flowers and excessive leaf dryness. Dappled sunlight or partly shaded locations and well-drained, fertile soil provide better growing conditions for these plants.



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Let's start with a surprise for new gardeners – there is a botanical creature called a **Hardy Begonia** (*Begonia grandis*), shown above. Winter hardy to zone 6 (possibly 5 but cross your fingers), this plant prefers more shady locations but can enjoy the early morning sunlight. It can grow to two feet tall and wide by summer's end and produce large clusters of red to pale-pink single blossoms all season long. The large heart-shaped leaves are also attractive.

Doesn't this Begonia sound ideal? Then why is it so darn difficult to find in garden centers? I had a difficult time tracking one down, and that was by ordering from a mail-order nursery. If you can, try to locate the varieties called "**Pink Teardrop**" or "**Heron's Pirouette**" for they produce larger flowers. Hey, nursery people – grow these plants!



Tuberous Begonias (*Begonia tuberosa* or *tuberosa hybrida*) – shown above – are popular annuals usually grown for displays in a hanging basket and containers. They are tender plants and treated as annuals, even though you can save the tough, fibrous concave-shape tubers over the winter. Well, that’s the theory, but the tubers may dry and die by spring. I recommend purchasing new plants each spring in any nursery or garden center.

Tuberous Begonias produce those colorful and flamboyant “fluffy” flowers which resemble roses. These are the male blossoms while the female flowers are less excessive in the number of petals.

These plants are sensitive to wet soil for the tubers and stems can rot if not grown in well-drained, porous soils. They can adapt to full sunlight, but the harsh heat can damage the blossoms and leaves. Deep shade limits blooming and can make the stems and leaves too floppy and succulent providing prime conditions for fungal and other disease

problems. So, the best “Goldilocks condition” is growing these plants in partly or dappled shady areas.

All garden centers offer these Begonias each Spring. A tried-and-true variety to purchase is the “**NonStop**” colorful selections.



The most grown Begonias offered to gardeners are the ordinary, low-growing annual **Wax or Bedding Begonias** (*Begonia semperflorens-cultorum*) – shown above. Their flower colors include red, rose, pink and white. The “waxy” or shiny leaves are grass-green to reddish-bronze.

Of all the Begonias, these are more tolerant to grow in full sun, but partly shady areas highlight their beauty. If you ever become tired and disillusioned over constantly planting Impatiens in shady areas, these are a great substitute. But, unlike Impatiens, these plants dislike growing in consistently moist soil. Well-drained but fertile soil that periodically becomes dry is to their liking. Otherwise, constant wet soil

will rot the roots and stems. I have seen spectacular bedding displays of these plants growing in partly shady slopes or banks. Here, they had excellent drainage, and the abundant pink and white blossoms brightened areas under several large trees all summer and into the Fall.

Even though they are excellent bedding plants, never underestimate the practicality of growing them in containers to highlight those dull areas on a patio or deck.

We can raise all Begonias from seed, but that can prove challenging even to the best “green thumb” gardeners. I gave up doing so eons ago and purchase plants from nurseries. The reason for this difficulty is their seeds are almost like dust. Naturally, you can raise blooming plants by sowing them, but it takes specific conditions and time – lots of time. Fortunately, many nurseries and garden centers offer plenty of inexpensive plants.

Bletilla – Chinese Ground Orchid

Bletilla striata



Possibly the easiest orchid you can grow.

When I first introduced myself to this perennial, I was astonished it was a real hardy orchid with blue petals. It was not an orchid-like imposter but an honest-to-goodness genuine orchid. This beautiful plant shows us never to assume tropical flowers are always 'tropical.' It is hardy from zones 5 to 9 and, as typical with all orchids, grows from small, swelled stem-structures called pseudobulbs. These produce foot-long grass-green leaves. In mid-spring to early summer, gorgeous pinkish-purple blossoms resembling Cattleya Orchids bloom abundantly. Oh my, are they stunning!

Unlike most tropical orchids which grow on tree branches, this orchid hails from China and Japan and is a ground-dweller. It prefers well-drained, moisture retentive, fertile soil. And, like its tropical cousins, prefers to grow in part to 'almost' fully shaded locations. Morning sunlight is agreeable, but these orchids can't stand the bright and hot afternoon sun. The heat and blinding light will cause the blossoms to fade and turn brown.

Yes, tropical orchids are gorgeous but are also a pain in the "you-know-where" to raise (for me, at least), but this low-maintenance relative is a joy to include in any shade garden. After flowering, the leaves blend in with other plants so learn what they look like to avoid accidental weeding-out. They need their leaves to produce enough energy to re-grow and bloom next year. By Fall, the leaves die, and the pseudobulb corms go dormant. Please, make sure the ground is well-drained so they will not rot. Also, try to avoid over-mulching to avoid excessively wet soil.

These hardy orchids also make excellent container plants for colder zone gardeners. Allow them to go dormant in the Fall and store the pots in a cool and dark location. Allow the soil to become dry but water occasionally during the winter. By Spring, new growth and blooms will develop.

This perennial may prove challenging to find in garden centers. Specialty or rare plant nurseries should prove to be a more reliable resource. As with all orchids, raising plants from their dust-like seeds is impracticable for most people.

Brunnera – Siberian Bugloss or False Forget-Me-Nots

Brunnera macrophylla



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You're not experiencing amnesia in your shade garden.

At home in shady, woody locations, this zones 3 to 8 perennial groundcover has gorgeous, bountiful clusters of small, azure blue flowers with yellow centers in the Spring. These blossoms are showy for several weeks and resemble Forget-Me-Not flowers and are sometimes mistaken for them. Well, that is not a bad thing considering both types are beautiful.

Brunnera thrives in partial to entirely shady areas, but the soil needs to have constantly moist, well-drained and fertile soil. The plants appreciate morning sunshine but avoid hot, bright afternoon locations for they will suffer by developing brown leaves. Individual plants grow to about one foot tall and wide forming an attractive mound. Over time, neighboring clusters will grow together and look like a green and blue carpet in the springtime sun-dappled shade. What an unforgettable sight!

With so many flowers produced there is also a respective abundance of seeds which helps to spread this plant in many new areas. But, for shady areas that lack beautiful flowers (especially blue ones), this is not a bad thing to form new colonies. I am not sure if garden centers sell these plants, but we can purchase seed packets.



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These plants are great to raise in any shade garden, not only for the flowers but also for their heart-shaped leaves. One variety called “**Jack Frost**” (shown above) has beautiful, whitish-silvery leaves veined in green. You need to add this plant to your garden! Please remember, its self-sown seed will revert to the regular green-leaf plants. Within a few years, they would outgrow poor Jack. It would be wise to take the time to cut off old flower stems to prevent self-seeding from this plant.

Caladium – Angel Wings

Caladium bicolor



You can add the Caladium Festival visit to your “bucket list.”

The other common names of this plant are “Heart of Jesus” and “Elephant Ears.”

Native to open areas of jungles and riverbanks of Central and South America (especially Brazil), this highly colorful leafy plant has been popular since the late 18th century. Its popularity is not for the flowers (which are rare to develop or see) but for the fantastic multi-colored heart-shaped leaves. The colors are combinations or mottled blotches of green, red, pink and white with contrasting veins. They resemble those of the unrelated Coleus plants but not as intricate or flamboyant.

The size of these plants, on average, grow to two feet tall and wide. They prefer to grow in partly shady, moist, well-drained, fertile soils. White or silver-leaved varieties need darker areas to look fabulous. Harsh sunlight will burn the leaves and form hideous brown spots and leaf edges. More colorful varieties will look better when grown in morning sunlight or later in sun-dappled locations. No matter where you plant them, please make sure they are growing in moist soil – never soggy, but well-drained, porous ground. They will suffer if left in dry conditions for an extended time and go prematurely dormant.

Although Caladiums look great growing in partially shaded areas, most varieties can slowly adapt to grow in full sunshine – like those growing in the large fields outside Lake Placid, Florida. The town's nickname is "The Caladium Capital of the World." Just like the tulip growing fields in Holland, but without windmills, this town (and region) grows, harvests and sells over 98% of the world's supply of Caladium tubers and potted plants to garden centers and nurseries around the globe.

Each year, on the last weekend of July, the town holds their Caladium Festival showcasing thousands of varieties – some are brand new hybrids. Now, wait one minute! How can this be? Shade-loving leafy plants are growing in 100% sunny farm fields – in the middle of summer – in Florida! Go figure! Something is mighty screwy here. Well, it happens for in Florida's springtime (when the soil is warm) growers plant the tubers in the fields, and the young shoots slowly adapt to the harsh sunlight. The fields are always moist, either by regular rainfall or by canal system irrigation. I suppose an occasional alligator may cruise on by now and then. Here, these plants grow and flaunt their energetic leaf colors to the amazement of tourists.

By late summer to Fall (before the weather turns chilly for Caladiums hate cold soil and air temperatures), growers harvest, condition and later ship them all over the world, including to your nearest garden center.



There are so many varieties to choose, but your selection should concern how much shade your garden or patio-deck receives for the summer. Gorgeous silvery-white leaf varieties grow best in shaded areas while vivid pinks and reds look fabulous in partly sunny/shady areas. Please wait until early summer to plant your tubers or potted plants. They need warm soil and air temperatures to grow well.

Cimicifuga (Actaea) – Sweet Bugbane

Cimicifuga ramosa or *Actaea ramosa*



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Sleep tight, don't let the bedbugs bite.

Botanists have transferred *Cimicifuga* to the genus *Actaea*. They always want to confuse growers and gardeners on plant Latin names. I grew up with the “not so correct name,” but I will still use it here. We can all agree on its nicknames of Black Bugbane, Fairy Candles, and Black Snakeroot. Don't you love the nicknames of some plants? Old-time gardeners called this species “Bugbane” for the smell of the crushed leaves supposedly repels bed bugs. “Cohosh” is an old Native American

Indian name for this plant. “Fairy Candles” represents the tall spikes of tiny white flowers.

Sweet Bugbane is a superb shady perennial you should grow in your garden. It is hardy from zones 3 to 9 and appreciates growing in well-drained but moisture retentive, fertile soil. Most of this plant’s height is the flower spikes reaching to three feet tall. Like most other perennials, the foliage is low-growing and blends in well to the surroundings.

By mid to late summer, light pink to small white flowers grow up slender spikes resembling “bottle brushes” – another generic nickname of this beautiful plant. They have varying degrees of floral fragrance. In her book “*Fragrance in Bloom*,” Ann Lovejoy describes the perfume as “... a strong and carrying scent rather like clover and honey.” For my nose, the scent has more of a warm, sweet but subtle licorice aroma.

Look for a stunning variety called “**Black Negligee**,” a seductive, sensual, alluring plant having unusual blackish-bronze leaves if grown in dappled sunlight. I would advise you to avoid planting this variety in constant full sunlight for these leaves can overheat and turn brown.

This attractive perennial is slow to become established but is long-lived. For any shade garden, this plant is a necessity for all summer enjoyment. Some larger garden centers should have this variety (and others) available. Another alternative is to search online nurseries.

Clematis

Clematis hybrida varieties



Even “upwardly mobile” plants need some shade.

In deciding what colorful garden vines to grow, many people will always choose these beautiful climbers. Train these vines on a trellis, pergola posts, fences and, for a more naturalistic approach, on other shrubs such as roses. They are floriferous and beautiful from Spring to Fall depending on the species and varieties.

Although they grow well and bloom while basking in sunlight, you can plant these vines in partially shaded areas such as under lattice, a pergola or even under a porch overhang. They may not be as floriferous

as full-sun grown plants, but the blossoms seem to compensate by becoming more substantial in diameter.

The best effect for this display involves planting varieties having pure white, light pink or powder-blue flowers. Even the small-flowered, fragrant **Autumn Clematis** (*Clematis paniculata*), which blooms in late summer, can achieve similar outstanding results.

Go to your favorite nursery or garden center in the Spring to view many colorful varieties. Several more, including rare types, are available from online and mail-order nurseries. Please order from specialist nurseries instead of generalized growers. Specialist nurseries take better care of their plants, are true-to-name, and ship the vines without stem bending or breakage.

Try not to damage the stems, such as bending them or damaging the thin bark. This breakage will only cause the vines to experience a significant developmental setback. Try to purchase undamaged vines and be very careful when planting.

Clematis is not a quick grower, for it may take two years or more for them to become established and bloom. Most species and varieties will survive zone 4 or 5 winters with few problems. Evergreen varieties need to grow in warmer zone locations. Prune these vines after they bloom so they can form flowers on last year's wood.

Several Clematis species are slow to wake up in the Spring after their winter slumber. This lethargy can cause concern for new gardeners thinking the vines are dead. Allow them enough time to awaken.

Coleus

Coleus blumei; Plectranthus scutellarioides or Solenostemon scutellarioides



Every gardener needs to grow a kaleidoscope.

Botanists are at it again changing the names of our favorite flowering plants. This time they have changed the multi-colored Coleus to another tongue-twisting name. No, thank you. For our sanity and easier use of this ebook, I will stick to the name of Coleus. We have to show the occasional civil disobedience even if it is in gardening.

Native to Southeast Asia, Coleus has always been popular as colorful foliage annual plants for gardens, containers, and houseplants. Newer varieties are pleasantly gaudy with eye-popping beautiful colors. You

can't resist growing a few when you see them in nurseries and garden centers. For my eyes, they resemble gorgeous stained-glass windows with vivid colors and unusual geometric patterns.

New varieties are now bred to develop fewer flowers. Yes, less flower formation! The small, blue blossoms on thin stems can distract the overall look of the plants when they are growing in the garden and, especially, in containers.



Although they can tolerate more sunlight than older varieties, these plants still grow and look best in partly shady areas. One word of caution when purchasing plants is to make sure which ones can grow in full sun. For most coleus plants, the full intensity of sunlight will damage the leaves, developing brown splotches and faded colors.

Coleus plants range in size from petite to extra-large – both in height and in leaf size. Whatever purpose you wish to display these plants there is, at least, one variety you can grow. Now, here is where Coleus

has the potential to look horrible. Take my advice to choose one colorful variety (or two complementary color patterns) for beds or containers. My rule is to match items – don't mix! Don't over-mix multi-colored varieties for their combined appearance can look ghastly.



Now, what is out there for you to find and grow? Look for the newer **ColorBlaze** and **Kong** varieties many nurseries and larger garden centers now sell. Again, read the labels to determine their sun-exposure and potential height.

Many growers raise most Coleus plants from seed and will have many leaf colors. No two plants will look alike. The most beautiful and expensive plants are cutting grown to keep their color complexities and leaf shapes. If you can afford it, purchase several for containers but not for flower beds. When grown in containers, you can get up-close-and-personal to enjoy those spectacular colors. They are worth growing!

Convallaria – Lily-of-the-Valley

Convallaria majalis



Ding-dong bell, this plant loves the shade to dwell.

This plant is one of the most loved and appreciated of all groundcover perennials. They are excellent for planting in those difficult shady spots around your home for they are long-lived with no pest or disease problems. The medium-sized deep green leaves unfurl in the spring and produce several 'waxy' white, bell-shaped flowers by late spring or early summer. These dangling blossoms release a heavenly sweet perfume. If you have never inhaled this stupendous fragrance, you are missing out of one of life's pleasures.

Hardy from zones 2 to 9, plant this groundcover in part to full shade and in moist loamy soil. You can adapt plants to full sunlight, but they can suffer both in leaf and flower health. Years ago, I had a large, aging but diseased tree removed near my house and underneath it was a well-established colony of these plants. A few years later, subjected to constant sunlight, they eventually died out – even with continuous tender loving care.

On one delightful spring day, as I was taking a long walk in a woodland park, the familiar perfume of these white blossoms overwhelmed me. I discovered a huge colony, a floral megalopolis, in full bloom, thriving under the trees. They received partially dappled sunlight and were thriving.

A recommended variety to find and grow is “**Bordeaux.**” Growers consider it a vast improvement over the regular species with more substantial, pure white, bell-shaped, scented flowers. They bloom above the foliage instead of between the leaves. It also blooms more than the species in the spring so you will have lots of flowers for several weeks. The foliage is also darker green and larger than the species. Because the flower stems rise above the foliage, you will have no problem picking many bouquets over the years.

Many garden centers offer bare root “pips” or shoots of the species plants in the spring. Plant as many as you can for many years of enjoyment.

Cornus – Flowering Dogwood

Cornus florida



Barking up the 'correct' tree...

Instead of looking down for what may be blooming on the ground let's glance up and see what is blooming under all the tall trees. If you are in the eastern and central areas of North America, in the springtime, you will view this delightfully beautiful, small tree.

Flowering Dogwood is one of the most cherished small trees in America preferring to live in the understory or outskirts of a woodland. Cultivated as early as 1731, it graced the gardens of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Much later, it graces the lawns and gardens of several million of lesser-known American citizens.

What we call its flowers is deceptive; the true blossoms are tiny, greenish-yellow and packed together in a central disk. Surrounding this disk are four bracts (modified leaves but look like large petals). On average, they are four inches in diameter, bright white or pale pink and bloom in mid to late spring based on their latitude location. Depending on the spring weather, these blossoms can remain on the tree for three weeks. For the summer and into the Fall, the flowers form clusters of small, bright red fruit or berries.

You can grow Dogwood as a specimen (single planting) but also in groups. Yes, this tree can grow in full sunlight, but, according to arborists, it will be under constant stress. This tree prefers to grow in partly shady areas – especially under the protection of taller trees. Woodland soil is also essential, for it contains plenty of water-retentive humus and a proper acidic pH vital to the health of the tree. You should avoid alkaline pH and dry soils at all costs!

Most healthy Dogwoods can grow to over 20 feet tall – after several years – and thrive in the shadows of tall trees. Hardy only to zones 5 to 9, they look fabulous when blooming alongside azaleas, rhododendrons and late-blooming spring bulbs such as Narcissus.

There are several varieties or cultivars available in garden centers, each having some unusual characteristic to set them apart from the common species. Several have variations of the pink bracts. One such variety (and it is stunning) is *Cornus florida rubra* “**Cherokee Chief**” with rosy-red blooms. I am a traditionalist and will always love the beauty of the white-flowered form.

Crinum – Giant Spider Lily

Crinum x amabile



Most spiders like shady and dark places.

Although the name says lily, this bulb is related to the Amaryllis and Hippeastrum (the large, popular bulbs sold at Christmas.) The spider name is for the long, pink to red petals and stamens that extend several inches away from the flower stalk. Another stunning feature is the leaves have a dark green to purple coloration. In a shady location, the leaves arch over and can look like a figure of a giant spider. Yes, it appears so exotic but, being a tropical plant, it should be!

This bulb and its relations are native to tropical areas of Asia. It is bulb-hardy from zones 9 to 11, but one of those rare winter freeze-ups will

kill the top growth. Most gardeners should plant this bulb into large pots or containers and then store indoors over the winter.

It is a favorite landscape plant in warm, frost-free locations. The flower stalk (called an inflorescence) can tower to over five feet when the plant is older. It loves to grow in partial shade, fertile, well-drained soil and blooms all summer with a sweet lily-like fragrance. It may be a challenge to find these bulbs in garden centers.

Dicentra – Old-Fashioned Bleeding Heart

Dicentra spectabilis or Lamprocapnos spectabilis



Talk about an achy-breaky heart!

Once known as *Dicentra* (and still is with us diehard gardeners), botanists now classify this outstanding spring-blooming, hardy perennial, as *Lamprocapnos*. I'm sorry, but this name sounds like a newly discovered dinosaur fossil or a comical beast straight out of a Dr. Seuss book. No, I will stick with the old name.

Time for an off-beat botanical history lesson. Who knows – it may come in handy someday, but I doubt it. This delightful plant was first introduced into Europe in the 1840s by Scottish plant hunter-explorer-extraordinaire, Robert Fortune. Bobby had a knack for going to out-of-the-way worldly places. One day, he came across this charming perennial growing in China, thought it looked pretty and brought it back home.

Bob had a darker side to him, and it involved being a spy – no, not your James Bond style of snooping but of seeking and pilfering (spy-talk for stealing) tea plants out of China. The British East India Company hired him to travel to China, get friendly with the locals, admire their gardens and their pretty flowers and when no one was looking stuff a few Oriental botanical treasures into his pockets or bags. And, if, by chance, he was to visit a tea plantation – which was his real mission – steal as many potted tea plants or cuttings as possible without the workers (and royalty) from finding out. You don't steal in China under the penalty of imprisonment, or, at that time, death. This plan sounds like a garden writer's screenplay script for a *Mission: Impossible* movie. Spoiler alert – he succeeded in his mission. We got pretty plants for our gardens and refreshing tea to sip while admiring them.

For a postscript of this historical account, growers shipped *Dicentra* plants to the United States and Canada in the late 1800s. Loved by the public, florists grew it as potted-gifts for Valentine's Day. Isn't that sweet? Who said history is boring? It depends on the subject and the people involved!

Dicentra is hardy from zones 2 to 9 and grows well in partial to entirely shady locations in your garden. It looks great when planted in a woodland setting and is trouble-free if you plant it in moist, but well-drained, fertile soil. Dry soil and hot sun result in poor blooming and a premature early dormancy. It is this dormancy that "turns people off" in growing it for they expect flowers all the time. Sorry, but enjoy the colorful blossoms when they bloom in the spring. The leaves are dark green while some varieties have a delightful blue-green coloration.

The common name of the flowers perfectly describes them. The heart-shaped “puffy” blossoms are usually pink, rose-red or pure white. The pink and red ones are the most stunning for they resemble a broken heart with the bottom showing a large drop of white blood (think of it as blood plasma). Don’t worry – a few varieties show crimson red drops giving these flowers a jolt of NCIS realism. In some ways, it looks semi-ghastly but is a well-constructed, charming, little flower! As you may suspect, this plant has several varieties with many exciting variations.

There are other colorful species available. One, *Dicentra eximia*, or the **Fringed Bleeding Heart**, is a wildflower native to the eastern parts of the United States. It is longer blooming (potentially all summer in shady areas), but the smaller blooms do not have more noticeable heart-shaped characteristics like those of the Old-Fashioned Bleeding Heart. The leaves of *Dicentra eximia* are deeper-cut like a fern and last all season. You can find both species in many garden centers and online nurseries.

Ferns

They don't look a day over 150 million years old.

I went rogue (temporarily) and changed the alphabetical listing to encompass this large group of shade-loving plants. I grouped them all under the label of "ferns" but specifically list two species-varieties you should grow in your shade garden.

First, we need to establish a few botanical facts concerning ferns. They are "primitive" plants – much older than the geologically younger flowering plants. Ferns do not flower or set seed but produce spores – carried by wind and water to colonize new areas. You can't sow spores and expect new ferns to grow in a few months for they take a long time to form the structures called fronds. Also, they are sensitive to growing conditions, especially moisture. Spores and mature plants need constant moisture to "germinate," grow and thrive. Hot, full sunlight and low humidity will kill them. Many ferns can survive cold climates but, again, they need moist soil to live.

Since I am specifically writing about colorful shade plants, the following ferns fit well into finding a prime spot in any shady area of a garden.

***Athyrium niponicum 'Pictum'* – Japanese
Painted Fern**



Are you unsure about growing a fern in your shade garden? Well, if so, I guess you would not be interested in what received the 2004 Perennial Plant of the Year award. Yes, it was this fern! Can you believe it? A fern! But, it's not a common green fern, although there are several pretty ones available.

Considered a low maintenance plant, it looks like no other fern with arching, serrated, grayish-green fronds. They have a stunning silvery sheen with dark red mid-ribs when grown in bright indirect light (but never plant them in full sunlight.) In deep shade, the color reverts to a pale green. Confused? Yes, this is one very unusual fern, but it is distinct from most (if not all) other hardy ferns.

This plant grows to under two feet tall and wide thriving in zones 3 to 8. By all means, try to find a cozy spot in the shade – especially where you spend time in your garden to enjoy this marvel of nature. Many

garden centers will have this fern, and a few other species, available each spring.

***Polystichum acrostichoides* – Christmas Fern**



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Compared to the above Japanese Painted Fern, this one may be less exciting, but I believe it is one of the best all-purpose ferns you can grow in any shade garden. The common name is a dead giveaway for, yes, you can enjoy seeing this fern even on the snow-covered ground by Christmas Day.

Reportedly used by American settlers as a makeshift Christmas evergreen decoration, the fronds are dark green, and, somewhat tough and leathery. This attribute may explain why it can survive the cold while most hardy ferns die-back and go to sleep for the winter. Instead

of slowly spreading outward to form new colonies, this one forms larger individual circular clumps.

Native to the moist and shady hardwood forests of eastern North America, it is hardy to zones 3 to 9. The fronds will die-back if they experience excessively cold temperatures. For moderate climates, they will eventually turn brown by early spring but suddenly re-sprout new fronds for the new, long growing season. Some botanists refer to it as a “four-season fern.”

You will probably not find this plant in any garden center, but specialty nurseries may have potted plants available. Please, never dig up a plant in the wild!

Fuchsia – Ladies Eardrops



Yes, you Can-Can grow these in your shade garden.

To brighten any cool, shady areas you can't go wrong displaying the hot colors of cascading fuchsia flowers. Visit any garden center and prepare yourself for the overwhelming beauty of stunning colors and abundance of bloom.

The colorfully gaudy sepals and billowy petals are usually bicolored (sometimes tri-colored) of rosy-red, white, pink and royal purple. For a strange reason, they always remind me of the 1800s French Cabaret dancers and their fluffy skirts and petticoats performing frenzied high-kicks at the Moulin Rouge. Oh, sorry, I must have been channeling Toulouse-Lautrec at the moment.

Garden centers sell these semi-woody, cascading, tropical plants in various sized hanging baskets. The plants prefer to grow in bright indirect light but can tolerate partial but not deep shade. They bloom well if displayed under an overhang or trellis structure to prevent being exposed to excessive sunlight. Make sure they grow in moist, fertile, well-drained, soil.

There is an incredible number of hybrid varieties created from various species. Their flowers are tubular with partial upright growth, but many plants are cascading and sold in hanging baskets. A few varieties grow upright but lack height to look their best. If you planted these in containers and placed on a patio or deck, they will look more attractive.

Have you ever wished for a hardy Fuchsia? Well, sorry, keep on hoping, but there is at least one type that can survive cold temperatures.

Fuchsia magellanica 'Riccartonii'



Growers call this variety the **Hardy Fuchsia** (shown above). Native to Argentina and Chile, it is not cascading but an upright growing semi-woody perennial.

It is cold-hardy to zone 6 if adequately protected. Mulching the soil helps protect the underground growth-crown and the root system. I live in a zone 5 growing area and heavily mulch the plants with a few inches of pea-sized gravel. This method provides excellent drainage and ventilation to the growth crown. Planting them near my house foundation also helps in their survival over a brutally cold winter.

Plant this Fuchsia in fertile, moist, well-drained soil preferably in an east-facing location which receives morning sunlight and afternoon shade. Avoid hot, dry, full sun, south-facing places.

Under the best growing conditions, this plant can grow to over 10 feet tall and become bushy, but my plants never seem to accomplish this feat – only a modest three feet tall. No matter, they bloom all summer with those gorgeous purple and neon pink blossoms which attract the hummingbirds.

Most garden centers do not sell this plant. My best guess is, it's more profitable selling the hanging basket Fuchsias. Try an Internet search to locate mail-order plants. Raising this Fuchsia in your garden is worth all the trouble of hunting for it.

Hellebore – Lenten Rose

Helleborus orientalis or Helleborus x hybridus



They will provide flowers for you for longer than 40 days.

You will probably question my sanity if I described a hardy perennial blooming in the dead of winter and continues doing so until late spring. Well, being an avid gardener is grounds for advanced peculiarities but, in this case, there is such a plant, and botanists call it Hellebore.

While we look outside from our warm homes to a snow-covered garden, bleak with no clear signs of spring, what we can't observe is what is happening under the snowpack. This perennial (zones 4 to 9) is slowly inching its stems and blossoms up out of the snow. You may think our familiar spring crocus bulbs set the pace for sprinting to early

spring blooming but, no, this plant has a two-month head start. It has evergreen leaves, and some remain – worse for wear – during the winter, but fresh new leaves will also slowly emerge with the flower stalks above the snow.

Its common name is Lenten Rose and is a member of the Buttercup family and not to the Rose family. Lenten is also a reference to the Christian season of Lent. It is during this time when this plant blooms – give or take a week or two. While most Northern Hemisphere garden plants are dormant, this one springs to life even in January and continues to grow and bloom into May. One species of Hellebore, called **Christmas Rose** (*Helleborus niger*), can bloom in December. Now that is a great Christmas gift for a gardener!

A perplexing question is why do these plants bloom now? Hellebores are native to Southeastern Europe, especially in the valleys of the Balkan Mountains. In these areas, the conditions are more favorable for early blooming. The species flowers face downward where they are pollinated by crawling insects (such as beetles or pre-flight flies) and small animals such as mice. Bees cannot be the pollinators since the air temperature is too cold for them. Well, they get pollinated somehow and by something!

These plants are great for planting in semi-shady locations. Like many early spring blooming bulbs and perennials, this plant loves the early spring sunshine, but as the season transforms into summer, it can't tolerate the intense sunlight and heat.



The flower colors range from white to purple (almost black) with all shades of chartreuse green, pale-yellow, light-lavender, and some reddish-pink added for additional pizzazz. Virtually all the blossoms have contrasting spots, veins or streaks. Please understand these flowers are not especially vibrant and tend to blend in with the dark green leaves.

Most mature plants will grow to almost a foot tall and wide but eventually form larger clumps or colonies over many years. Besides being raised in part shade, these plants also need well-drained, fertile, moist soil. Adding lime will also help in better growth and development.

Being an evergreen, before the onslaught of winter, trim back or remove the older leaves which are, by now, appear gnarly and scruffy looking. The removal of them helps the development of new leaves and flowers. It also makes the garden look a little tidier.

Over the past decade, there has been a massive interest in creating new colorful varieties. You can discover many of these new plants in larger garden centers and online nurseries. Sadly, the plants can be pricey for it takes time to develop saleable blooming plants. Seed grown plants are not reliably colorful and can take over three years to bloom. Well, think of it this way – if you don't plant them now you have wasted another year in not enjoying them!

Hemerocallis – Daylily

Hemerocallis fulva pleno



Some flowers need a higher SPF sunscreen.

The common daylily species, *Hemerocallis fulva*, known as tiger-lily, orange-daylily, tawny-lily, and ditch-lily grows near roadside ditches (foolish people say it is a weed) and many smart homeowners have adopted it as an easy-to-grow bedding display. This daylily is the quintessential flower of summer. Like most Daylilies, this species prefers to grow in full to partly sunny locations.

There is a double petal variation of this species (*Hemerocallis fulva pleno*) which can also grow in a sunny area, but I suggest you should raise it in more shade to protect its beautiful flowers from fading. I have

two large clumps of this Daylily growing in my gardens. I exposed one group to sunshine most of the day; the other bunch grows in morning sunlight but shade for the afternoon. The petals exposed to the hot sun fade and curl while the shady flowers look “fresh as a daisy.”

Here is a lesson that not all sun-loving flowers have to grow in full sunlight. Many can thrive and look better in partly shady locations. If you can, try to transplant a few plants to a partially shady area and see if they grow and bloom better. Their beautiful transformation may surprise you.

Hesperis – Dame's Rocket or Sweet Rocket

Hesperis matronalis



Well, it looks and smells better than cooked broccoli!

This hardy perennial (zones 3 to 9) is a popular wildflower grown in many flower gardens around the world for centuries. It is also found growing wild in many moist, partly shady roadside ditches. It blooms from early spring to midsummer with pale-purple or white flowers. They release a beautiful sweet lily perfume in the evenings.

Contrary to what the name suggests it has nothing to do with space rockets. Rocket is an old name for mustard plants or its close relatives

such as cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower. It is a vespertine flowering plant – meaning; it blooms in the evening. Somehow it became associated with Eve (as in the famous Adam and Eve couple) but in a more negative way. Seventeenth-century English herbalist, Nicholas Culpeper called this plant “Eve’s Weed.” Oh, poor Eve – all because of snacking on that juicy apple.

Plant this wildflower in partial sun to full shade in moist, loamy, and well-drained soil.

This plant does not produce “drop-dead with amazement” garden flowers. I hate to admit this, but they are boring – except for their sweet scent. If you have a shaded, wooded area that needs sprucing-up, purchase a few packets of seeds, sprinkle them here-and-there, and by next spring you should experience a beautiful sight. How easy is that in transforming a dull area into something bright and beautiful?

Heuchera – Coral Bells

Heuchera sanguinea



It's pronounced 'HOY-ker-ah'... or 'HEW-ker-ah'... or 'HOO-chair-ah'... or 'Hoo-CHEER-ah'... or 'Who-KER-ah'... oh, never mind.

Years ago, this North American native perennial was a dull green to lightly copper-colored plant. The only redeeming quality was the numerous little red, bell-shaped flowers on slender stems. Not only are they pretty but also attracts the occasional hummingbird. Breeders and growers knew it had the potential to form beautiful shade plants. They were proven right and later created stunningly colorful leafy plants.

Most of the attention has been with variations of leaf colors. Some plants have solid monochromatic colors while others sport multiple

shades. There are chartreuse, bright coppery-orange, rusty-red, silvery-white and purple-black varieties. To get the best leaf colors, this hardy perennial (zones 3 to 8) appreciates growing in partial shade; morning sunlight and then shade for the afternoon. Constant sunlight (along with dry soil) will “burn” the leaves – making large brown grotesque splotches and leaf edges. Only in zone 3 and 4 gardens is where these plants can grow in full sunlight.

Flower colors are also variable from bright red, pink and white. Blooming begins from late spring to mid-summer. Don't worry if you have a problematic shady area that may be too dark. Here, concentrate on the flowers instead of the leaf colors. I have seen stunning displays for green-leaf Coral Bells with bright white blossoms. The small, but numerous flowers resembled strings of bright LED lights. It was mesmerizing!

The plants will grow best in well-drained, fertile, moist to occasional dry soil. Mature plants will grow into bushy two feet tall clumps and has few if any insect or disease problems.

Many colorful varieties are available as bare-root rhizomes or potted plants in most garden centers. You can also raise the species from seed and is available from several seed companies.

Heucherella - “Foamy Bells”

Heuchera x Tiarella hybrid varieties



The best of both worlds.

Sounding like the name of a not-so-famous sister of Cinderella, this genus is a genetic cross of the above Heuchera with a Tiarella plant (described later). Plant breeders are always dabbling into crossing this plant with that plant – usually with disappointing results – but, this is a beautiful creation of colorful leafy plants. They amplify the colorful leaves of Heuchera with additional contrasting colors. The Tiarella genes contribute additional disease resistance but also greater adaptability to sunny and hotter climates – even though the plants still grow (and look) best in partly to entirely shady locations.

This bi-generic crossing was not a recent discovery, for in 1912 French mathematician, civil engineer and part-time plant breeder, Emile Lemoine, created a sterile hybrid of these two plants. They were not especially colorful, but the process proved anyone could make a new plant genus. Unfortunately, there were no additional crossings made until the 1950s when other breeders took up the challenge. They grew a few new varieties, but the gardening public was not so keen on raising them in their gardens. People considered them boring and unappealing.

Then, in 2002, the first colorful foliage Heucherella appeared. Later, they created even more genetically enhanced hybrids. These modern hybrid varieties made larger maple-shaped leaves with vivid colors and patterns with higher tolerance to heat and sunlight. Today, these plants are gaining in popularity for planting in partly shady locations. Part of this appeal is in growing them as a multi-colorful groundcover. Most new varieties are smaller growing, bushy and slowly spread.

As for the flowers, they are abundant on tall but branching, slender stems. The blossoms are much smaller than those of Heuchera but compensate by having more. American growers dubbed them the nickname of “Foamy Bells” for the flowers resembles sea-foam instead of coral. They bloom from mid-to-late spring with shades of pink and white. Hummingbirds and butterflies in your neighborhood will happily visit these blossoms.

Raise these colorful plants in well-drained, fertile, and moist soil. Having the Tiarella heritage, they can tolerate dry ground but can quickly perish in soggy ground. Their hardiness is still extreme – from zones 4 to 9.

There is an increasing number of new, colorful varieties introduced each year. Garden centers and nurseries may offer only a few, but specialist online nurseries will provide plenty of them. One company is *TerraNova* which specialize in growing these beautiful perennials.

Have a problem with deer and rabbits munching on your shady plants? They hate this plant for it tastes terrible to them – not to mention being

poisonous. Once they nibble these leaves, they will say “yuck!” and move on to your neighbor’s garden.

Hosta

Hosta plantaginea and other species.



Time to notice the elephant in the room.

Well, here we are with the most grown shade-loving perennial for any garden. I will later discuss the other major contender for most-grown shade plants, the Impatiens.

What would a flower garden be like without these outstanding plants? My first guess would be a bare or weedy garden. I am sure other attractive perennial plants listed in this ebook would take their place, but with hardiness, adaptability, gorgeous flowers, and beautiful leaves, this perennial has it “made-in-the-shade” for being number one for shade garden enjoyment.

The first mention of a Hosta plant was by Dutch traders touring Japan around 1712. Not included in their tourist brochures, it took over 200 years before it became more well-known and appreciated. Leafy plants for shade were not in the top 10 must-have items for any garden, although, I suspect many people thought about growing something beautiful in those darkened areas. Someone had a eureka moment and thought Hostas would be just the thing to grow.

One of the first Hostas species to come into general garden use was *Hosta plantaginea*, not so much appreciated for its foliage, but its large, white fragrant flowers. It gained the nickname of “Old August Lily,” reflecting the time it blooms. Other species of Hosta later became discovered, hybridized, grown and admired.

Eventually, plants with variegated leaves became fashionable for gardens, and growing Hostas were of no exception. Variegated Hostas stimulated a craving in “sophisticated” gardeners (we all know some, don’t we?) to nurture them in their flower gardens.



Hostas prefer to grow in partial sunlight (early morning sun is best) to full shade. Many species and varieties can grow in full sun for a limited time, but their leaves will suffer by developing ugly brown splotches. I know this for my large, variegated Hostas line the east side of my house and look terrible growing in the harsh sunlight during the summer. Variegated varieties are the most at risk for this to occur. I don't have the heart to yank them out – then again, I can't or won't. Have you ever transplanted a fully established Hosta clump? It gives me the chills thinking about it! Renting a large backhoe would help, I suppose. The lesson here is to be careful where to place your Hosta plants permanently.

Planting Hostas in shadier, north-facing areas or a nearby woodland location, in well-drained, fertile but moist soil will make them look fabulous. Always make sure the ground never collects pools of water which causes the roots to rot.

The height of Hosta plants varies, but their flower stalks can top to over three feet tall or more – especially the larger cultivars. Most varieties are hardy from zones 3 to 9.

Today, there is a gazillion (well, close to it) Hosta species and their varieties for any shade garden. The trouble is, which plants will you grow? A trip to your nearest larger garden center will provide you with a confusing assortment to ponder. Don't neglect mail-order, online nurseries for they always have rare and delectable offerings to brighten your shady acres.

Hydrangea

It may surprise many people these plants can thrive in partly shady areas. Yes, you can raise them in full sunlight for most or all day, but one major prerequisite is having them grow in consistently moist soil. This requirement is especially crucial for hot climate gardeners to provide. The reason for providing moist soil is due to these plants having large leaves and extensive growth. When raised in partial to entirely shady locations, the plants can experience periodic dry soil and develop no problems.

I will concentrate on two types of Hydrangeas you can plant in a shady area of your garden, lawn or near your house foundation. Forgive me for the extensive explanations on how to grow these plants. They have various essential factors and requirements needed to produce colorful, healthy and showy displays.

***Hydrangea anomala petiolaris* – Climbing Hydrangea**



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It will not vine before it's time.

This species has flat-topped, white lace-cap flower clusters but grows as a vine. And it isn't some puny vine either but a 30 to 90-foot-tall giant! Don't worry; you can control the height to a size that's more to your liking. It is hardy from zones 4 to 7, is deciduous (drops its leaves for the winter), and prefers early morning sunshine, afternoon shade, and moist but well-drained, fertile soil. Massive blooming begins in late spring, but you can expect sporadic flower clusters all summer long.

One important recommendation, though, is never to plant this vine near your house unless it is constructed of stone or brick. The plant, to support its weight, produces permanent aerial rootlets that cling and glue onto a support structure. Any porous surface, such as wood, will rot when covered by the massive amount of glossy leaves. This foliage can damage even a house covered with vinyl siding. Stone or brick

houses are more durable, but a supporting structure away from the house is best when growing this vine.

So, why is this plant popular? Most likely, it grows best in shady conditions where other vines would suffer. Yes, it thrives in dim to shaded locations – like the north side of a house. This requirement is essential when grown in hot and sunnier places.

Although having the potential to grow very tall, the stems also spread outward. Please be aware this is not a fast-growing vine. The first year after planting, the plant will appear “sick” – meaning, not much growth. The second-year growth shows improvement in attaining height while the third year makes a noticeable leap upward. You will not view flowers appearing on a healthy vine until four or five years. Well, that is disappointing! What you don’t see is the extensive growth of the root system during this time. A well-established root system, for any plant, is critical to creating top growth and prolific flowering.

***Hydrangea macrophylla* – Big-Leaf or French Hydrangeas**

It’s a miracle I never caused an explosion.

These hydrangeas always remind me of my old high school and college chemistry classes. It involved determining whether an unknown solution had an acidic or basic pH. I performed a process called titration using a pH identification chemical called phenolphthalein. If the solution turned pink, it represented a basic solution while blue determined it was acidic. The intensity of the colors represented how low or high the pH value. I loved chemistry experiments involving colors. Mathematical equations were, unfortunately, my downfall.

Hydrangea “flowers” have a similar method of showing different colors when grown in different soil pH levels. What we think as being flowers are bracts or modified leaves. The true flower structures are small and in the center of these bracts. To make the big bracts blue we need to acidify the soil by adding aluminum sulfate. To turn them pink, we need

to add lime (calcium carbonate) to the soil. The more we add either of these soil additives, the deeper the color of the bracts. But what happens to Hydrangeas having white bracts? Here, you do not have to add the chemicals for the plants will remain white no matter what the pH is of the soil.

I advise a word of caution when adding these chemicals to the soil. They can damage or “sicken” surrounding plants from the significant change of the soil pH.

Growers label these plants as being perennials or semi-woody shrubs. They begin growth as being herbaceous, like any other perennial, but later transform into woody hollow stems by fall. They are hardy to zones 5 to 9, but lesser zones are problematic. Severe cold conditions will kill the new growth buds on the older stems.

You also must be careful when pruning these plants. Cut them back at the wrong time of the year, and it will delay flowering for two years. My advice is to leave them alone. But, new varieties on the market show great promise of easing fears of not “messing things up” when pruning. They bloom on current growing stems and also provide longer enjoyment from spring to fall. Let’s explore a few varieties you should grow in your partly shaded garden.

Hydrangea “Annabelle”



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Never exclude a white blooming Hydrangea in any garden for they can illuminate partially shady areas during the summer. This variety has large, brilliant white flower-heads in June and July but slowly changes to chartreuse by fall. My mother grew these in a shaded area near the old farmhouse years ago for cut-flower displays.

This older variety does not care what the pH is of the soil. As long as it is growing in well-drained, fertile soil, it will thrive with little attention. It can grow to almost three feet tall and twice as wide and develops its flowers on the growing stems.

This plant and all other varieties of Hydrangeas will eventually lose their colors and fade, but they will make excellent dried arrangements for decorative crafts. I love multipurpose flowers!

Hydrangea “Endless Summer”



We are experiencing a great time in gardening concerning these plants. Older Hydrangeas usually bloomed only in the late spring with a few rare, sporadic flower clusters blooming during the summer.

Today's varieties now bloom from new growth all summer with either large blue or pink flower-heads depending on the pH of your garden soil. This aptly named variety has an outstanding display all summer. There are other varieties with similar names, but they all have this repeat blooming capability. This variety can grow to over three feet tall and wide and has sturdy stems to hold up the massive blooms.

Hypoestes – Polka Dot Plant

Hypoestes phyllostachya



Dancing to “*Stayin’ Alive*” with this plant.

I think of *Hypoestes* as disco *Coleus* plants – colorful leaves but highlighted with contrasting spots, like light reflected from a disco ball. You can strut around your garden like John Travolta (as character Tony Manero in the movie ‘*Saturday Night Fever*’) while listening to the soundtrack music. Your neighbors will stare at you, but, what of it? All weekend gardeners should experience an occasional “Saturday Afternoon Fever” while puttering around in their flower gardens.

Native to Madagascar, these plants are strictly tropical and treated as a garden annual bedding or container subjects. You can grow them as

houseplants but need bright indirect light to display their colors better. For an outdoor display, they also need bright indirect light but will appreciate occasionally dappled sunlight. They dislike full sunlight and will show it by developing brown leaves. If grown in full shade areas, the leaves are greener with fewer spots and become tall and floppy.



Breeders and growers have developed several hybrid varieties. There are the **Splash** and **Confetti Series** of small-growing plants having a base color of green but highlighted with various sized spots, smudges, smears, and streaks colored of vivid rose, red, pink, purple, lavender-blue, and, for brightness, pure white. For some varieties, it is difficult to determine if the leaves are splattered green instead of those colors!

These plants will grow to over a foot tall and wide. You can create stunning displays in beds and containers by planting different colorful plants together or added along with Coleus and smaller growing variegated Hostas. Many gardeners pinch off the spikes of tiny blue

flowers for they are “uninteresting” (sad, but true) and distract attention away from the colorful leaves.

Raise these plants in well-drained, fertile, and moist soil. Don't be in a hurry to plant them in your garden or containers until late spring or early summer. They dislike cool weather and cold ground.

You may have seen these offered in nurseries and garden centers but passed-them-by (like I did numerous times.) Next spring, purchase them and turn part of your shady garden into a discotheque.

Impatiens – Touch-Me-Not or Busy Lizzie

Impatiens walleriana, hawkeri, and balfourii



The times they are a-chang'in.

Hostas may be the go-to perennial for planting in shady areas of a garden, but the honor of bedding annuals goes to the Impatiens. They are grown everywhere in practically every garden and are the most purchased plant in any garden center or nursery. All hail *Impatiens walleriana*!

Okay. Time for a tough-love intervention with my fellow gardeners. Don't hate me for what I am about to relate to you. Impatiens are, for

me, sorry to say, BORING. There, I admit it. That may be heresy in many gardening circles, but they are your basic 'plant-and-forget' bedding plants. Well, you can't forget about them when they wilt in dry soil and later when you see your water bills. Each year, breeders create new varieties, but they lack any profound color differences.

Impatiens need to grow in shady areas – especially the white and pale lavender varieties. Those colors look great (in my opinion) when grown in large, shady beds or as sporadic individual “points of light” when grown with other shade-loving plants.

Impatiens have always been popular to grow – too much so that gardeners wishing for instant color have planted these flowers in the same beds year after year. Commercial growers have vast greenhouse areas devoted to raising these plants each spring.

Mother Nature gave all of us a scare and a dire warning about over-planting any plant, all the time, and especially in the same place, each year. In the summer of 2012, gardeners throughout the United States discovered their Impatiens plants were quickly dying. It was a classic case of “here today-gone tomorrow.” Their plants were succumbing to a terrible and fast-acting deadly strain of Downy Mildew fungus.

The prevailing winds across the country carried the spores. A slow but gradual panic enthused, not only by gardeners but nursery owners, and breeders. Newspapers issued dire warnings, massive fear would grip the public, and stock markets around the world would crash and burn. No, nothing like that happened, but it greatly alarmed gardeners, and garden center owners.

The following year, seed availability was low, and wholesale growers advised garden centers to stop selling all Impatiens plants. How did this predicament happen? Many reasons created a perfect storm of the massive die-off. Breeders realized they need to incorporate “new blood” of genetic qualities into Impatiens. That quality is not new names and shades of colors but disease resistance.

Another reason was garden centers and nurseries were raising these plants in too close of proximity. If one plant developed a severe disease, it could quickly spread it to others. As for gardeners, we are continually planting and replanting Impatiens each year, in the same soil, and, maybe, the same varieties. We need to practice flowerbed 'crop rotation' as farmers do to their grain and vegetable fields.

Fortunately, the **New Guinea Impatiens** (*Impatiens hawkeri*) came to the rescue in providing beautiful color for flower beds during that "brown thumb" year for they are resistant to the fungus. These varieties have better disease resistance and shrugged-off the disease much to the relief of gardeners, nursery owners, and breeders.

Research on breeding new hybrids of Impatiens began a few years ago. Many of these new hybrids involve the New Guinea Impatiens which tolerate shady areas but also more sunshine. They can also provide more vivid colors – not only to the flowers but some with variegated leaves. These varieties look fabulous when grown in partly shady areas.



One impressive variety recently created is **Fusion Yellow Glow** (shown above). Some plant suppliers call it **Creamy Yellow**. Breeders report it to be the world's first yellow flowered Impatiens variety. The petals are butter-yellow (some; I have seen, are a fantastic lemon yellow) with orange centers. Like most Impatiens, it blooms all summer. It took breeders years to create this unique plant.



Did you know you can also find and grow colorful wild impatiens species that thrive in the shade? *Impatiens balfourii* (shown above), called '**Poor Man's Orchid**,' is another old-fashioned species native to regions of the Himalayas and Kashmir. It was once common in gardens but now almost forgotten, eclipsed over these many years by the common bedding Impatiens.

Growing plants from seeds are easy with this species. They can grow to almost four feet tall and wide. Weekend gardeners will get nosebleeds at this height, but these dimensions add charm and interest. The flowers are a soothing bi-color of pink and white, resembling small orchids, and blooms all summer in full to partial shade.

This plant can also grow in large containers filled with rich, loamy soil. It self-seeds like crazy with many self-detonating (touch-me-not) seed pods so you will find new seedlings germinating throughout your garden the following spring.

Seeds are tricky to find, but some online English seed companies sell them. I have never seen plants offered for sale in garden centers. They are too busy raising more and more of those common bedding Impatiens!

Ligularia – Leopard Plant

Ligularia dentata; stenocephala



When you care enough to grow the very best.

This bold and “muscular” perennial is impressive to see in a shady garden but is unknown by most people. Part of that reason is garden centers and nurseries may not offer them to the public. I believe the main reason is due to their size – growing to over four feet tall. For some new gardeners, that may cause altitude sickness, but these plants are impressive when in bloom.

All Ligularias bloom by mid-summer until fall. Depending on the species, their small yellow daisy-like flowers are on thick, tall stems like Delphiniums. A representative of this would be *Ligularia stenocephala*

“The Rocket.” Another species, *Ligularia dentata* has large clusters of orange-yellow Black-eyed Susan-style blossoms on long, thick stems. Make sure you plant the varieties called **Othello** and **Desdemona**.

One of the most commonly planted varieties is **Britt-Marie Crawford** having dark purple leaves and reddish-purple stems topped with large golden blossoms. James Crawford of Fife, Scotland named this variety after his late wife, Britt-Marie. One day, while in her beloved gardens, she discovered this plant growing in a plot of ‘Othello’ plants. It may have been a chance seedling or a mutated section of the Othello plants. After her death, James wished to honor his wife’s memory and love of flowers by naming this stunning plant after her. He undertook the complicated procedure of introducing it into commercial production. That was a long process, but it now grows in numerous gardens worldwide. What a shining example of true love!

These plants are hardy from zones 4 to 8 and are native to the colder areas of China, Japan, and even to Siberia. Now that’s cold! They do not enjoy hot climates and dry soil; cool, moist soil is to their liking. If their large, heart-shaped, almost leathery, deep-green, toothed leaves become thirsty from dry ground, they wilt – big time. They prefer their roots to drill deep into moist, fertile soil, although they can tolerate soggy soil for an extended time.

Why are they called Leopard Plants? The big kitty cat’s fur has spots and so do Ligularia leaves, but these spots or blotches are purple depending on the species and variety. But it is those leaves and flowers that command – no, demand – attention. When you see them, you won’t forget them.

Phlox – Woodland Phlox

Phlox divaricata



If the color blue had a scent, this would be it.

The other common name for the Woodland Phlox (*Phlox divaricata*) is Wild Sweet Williams but don't confuse this with the similar nickname of *Dianthus barbatus*. This country wildflower became a big city garden "scent-sation." It blooms from mid-spring to early summer with hundreds of light blue or white flowers. They are lily-perfumed and if you clump all the flowers together with your hands and inhale you will be in seventh heaven. What a way to celebrate Spring!

This Phlox, hardy from zones 3 to 8, requires fertile, damp but not constant wet soil and slowly spreads on the ground by underground

stems. It will thrive in a shady, fertile, well-drained ground – especially at the edge of a woodland environment, unlike its relative, the sun-loving Garden Phlox.

Look for the variety called **Blue Moon** which has a slightly deeper blue flower color and bushier growth than the native wild plants. It makes a splendid, colorful, and highly fragrant groundcover. There is also a white-flowered variant of the wild species.

Garden centers and nurseries should have these perennials available by early spring. You can later dig-up and separate divisions or clusters in the fall to transplant in surrounding shady areas of your garden.

Polygonatum – Solomon's Seal

Polygonatum odoratum and other species



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Something to clap your flippers over.

Now growing in any woodland of the world, a new garden plant awaits discovery. Many of our garden flowers originally grew in and along the periphery of forests. Solomon's Seal was one such spring-blooming, woodland perennial until someone thought to include in a shade garden. Well, it is possible the garden was near the woods, and this plant grew in it. No matter, for it is here, with many species and varieties. Polygonatum may not win a popularity contest, but growers did award it the 2013 Perennial Plant of the Year.

This hardy perennial (zones 3 to 8) has a vast assortment of over 74 species and hybrid varieties. The wild species hails from the northern temperate areas of Europe, Asia and into North America. They are a close relative of Lily-of-the-Valley or *Convallaria* (discussed earlier.) A few species of *Polygonatum* (like *Polygonatum odoratum*) have fragrant flowers smelling of, yes, that's right, Lily-of-the-Valley.

The stems grow upward from the ground for about two to three feet but arch horizontally. At each leaf joint, one or two white or greenish-white blossoms dangles downward. A typical plant may dangle several flowers from mid to late spring followed by bluish-black berries by the summer.

One particular variety to grow is the variegated form – ***Polygonatum odoratum 'Variegatum'***. This variety received the 2013 Plant of the Year award for its beautiful green and white foliage and sweetly fragrant flowers.

Why is this plant called Solomon's Seal? No, it does not refer to someone named Solomon and his trained pet seal. That would be eyebrow-raising weird. There are two theories for the name. One assumption is the plant's sap has the alleged ability to close or seal wounds. Some guy named Solomon took credit for this discovery. The next theory suggests when the leaves drop off the underground stems (called rhizomes) they leave behind scars resembling the sixth seal of King Solomon or, better known as, the Star of David in Jewish tradition. I think this is the best explanation of the name.

Larger garden centers may sell these plants – depending on the species and varieties – but your best bet to find them is by mail order or specialty nurseries. The best-known type, '***Variegatum***,' described above, is easier to find, and it's worth seeking and growing!

Primula – Primrose

Primula x polyantha; acaulis; elator; auricula; veris; plus, more



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Instead of going down the path, remain in the comfort of your garden.

The colorful Primroses are always a welcome sight to see in the early spring. Most people see these magnificent flowers not in a garden but at a large nursery or garden center. For non-gardeners, this experience may happen in late winter during the numerous Home and Garden Expos. Table after table of potted, blooming Primulas of all colors and shades overwhelm our eyes. Purchasing all those plants is tempting! I

am sure there is at least one irresistible color you can't live without for enjoying indoors and later plan to plant outside – somewhere.

The sad truth about these beautiful plants is most will end up in the trash or compost heap. For many people, who lack gardening interests, become bored with the plants after they finish blooming. Too many people expect all plants to remain in bloom and then dispose of them when they don't re-bloom. Primula is of no exception; if not the worst casualty.

Some lucky plants find a home in a flower garden, but we may grow them in the wrong area. Primroses constantly need moist soil. If the ground dries, these plants will severely wilt and may not recover. They prefer partly shady locations, especially near woodlands or stream banks. In early spring they will appreciate full sunlight, but as the season transcends into summer, they desperately need shade. They love cool conditions for most of the Primula species originated in alpine valley locations – especially the Himalayan Mountain valley areas.

So, what can we plant in our shady gardens? If you have the area, you can plant over 400 (and counting) species and hybrid varieties available worldwide. Most species are hardy from zones 5 to 8. A few readily available species you can grow are *Primula vulgaris* (Wild Primrose), *acaulis* (the English Primrose), *elator* (Oxlip Primrose), *auricula* (Mountain Cowslip), and *veris* (Cowslip Primrose). These species names sound like a group of gardening comic book superheroes. To save your time reading (and wear-and-tear on my typing index fingers) I will allow you the honor to research (via Google) these species and all the other beautiful forms more in-depth.

There has been extensive hybridization with all these species. The greenhouse Primroses (mentioned above) are *Primula x polyantha* which is a cross between the *acaulis* and the *veris* species. Plant them in fertile, well-drained but moisture retentive soil. Check your larger garden centers for other species of Primulas. Seeds from specialty nurseries and seed houses usually have rare species available. Growing plants from seed can be challenging.

For many centuries English cottage gardens contained Primroses of all kinds and colors. Some Primroses were more popular than others including many unusual double petal varieties of the common *Primula vulgaris*. Many of those old double varieties are no longer with us, but some were eventually re-discovered and propagated with the wonders of modern tissue culture technology.



Double Primroses are antique floral treasures, and they are becoming more well-known and are in high demand – when found. The flowers resemble rose buds and even fully open roses when they bloom. They appreciate a moist yet well-drained soil and dappled sunlight, especially for the summer. You may encounter a few newer varieties in large garden centers, including one unnamed variety (shown above) I found at a home improvement center (go figure!). These plants grow to about eight inches tall and wide.

Pulmonaria – Lungwort

Pulmonaria longifolia, angustifolia, rubra, saccharata and hybrids



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Having malpractice insurance would be a good idea.

Once prized as a shade-blooming hardy perennial, this plant has slowly regained acceptance in gardens throughout the world. The perplexing question is why did we lose interest? I am not sure, but gardeners are rediscovering its beauty – not only of its changeable flower colors but also of the shiny spots or patterns that adorn their leaves.

Botanists describe the long-blooming spring flowers as being crepe paper-like in appearance and texture with a variety of colors – from blue, pink or white. The fun begins when they age (aging is fun?) and slowly change from pink to royal purple. The color changes may represent the age of the flower and if recently pollinated. The pure white-flowered varieties glow like festive lights in deeply shaded areas.

Let's not forget – impossible to do so – the stunning silvery-white blotches on the leaves. Not all plants have these spots, but the newer hybrids flaunt them.

This plant has a woodland-growing heritage and is hardy from zones 4 to 8. It prefers to grow in a shady area with moist but well-drained, fertile soil. Being a springtime bloomer, it will grow for a while in full sunlight, but as summer nears it then enjoys the shade.

Why does such a beautiful perennial have such a disgusting nickname? Ages ago, people had the belief that certain plants could provide medicinal curing remedies for specific body-part health maladies. This plant, presumably, could treat lung (respiratory) disorders because the leaves resembled a diseased lung. Okay, I can't remember the last time I saw a diseased lung so I'll reluctantly accept this reasoning. The genus name of *Pulmonaria* refers to pulmonary – defined as relating to the lungs. Since the plant regrows and blooms in the spring, its sap or an extract could, hopefully, cross-your-fingers and pray, rejuvenate diseased lungs. Well, it makes perfect sense but today's doctors would need to increase their malpractice insurance if they resorted to treating a patient with this method. Who knows? Maybe there is a future in becoming a botanical-medical practitioner.

You can raise *Pulmonaria* from seed, but you would get many sizes from the resultant plants. Some plants will not have the spectacular white spotting on the leaves. Choose instead to grow a few of the beautiful hybrid varieties offered by larger garden centers.

One highly recommended hybrid variety is **Raspberry Splash** with rose-pink turning purple flowers in the spring and shiny silvery-white spots on the leaves. Another outstanding hybrid variety is **Moonshine**

with pale-blue blossoms, but the leaves are almost white when mature. There are other colorful varieties in garden centers and online specialty nurseries.

Saponaria – Bouncing Bet, Soapwort

Saponaria officinalis



Rub a dub dub, Soapwort in the tub.

This European wildflower has a muddled history as far back to Medieval days or even earlier. It is a beautiful perennial related to the Dianthus or carnation family and is a terrific bloomer from mid to late summer until a killing frost. Clustered together, the single or double flowers are rosy pink or snow white. They have an incredible Concord grape perfume.

Another fascinating feature is the leaves form soapsuds when you crush and rub them with your hands in water. The Latin name of 'Saponaria' means 'relating to soap' or 'soap making.' Museums did (and some still

do) use the leaves to produce soap suds for washing delicate or irreplaceable fabric material. If you need a quick hand-wash pluck a few leaves, crunch them up, add a little water and presto – instant hand soap.

The plants grow to over two feet tall, thriving in part sun to full shade, and fertile, well-drained, moist soil. They are exceptionally hardy from zones 3 to 9.

Saponaria still keeps its wildflower heritage by being invasive, but not too aggressive, and can be controlled by the downward thrust of a sharp spade. Yes, that sounds horrible, but sometimes we have to practice 'tough love' on some overactive plants. It tolerates dry soil conditions and has few if any, insect or disease problems. No wonder, for the bugs doesn't want soap in their little mouths!

A recommended rare variety (which is the species only dressed-up) has double-petaled white flowers. It cannot form seeds; the only way to propagate it is by cuttings. The magnified grape fragrance is due to the extra set of petals.

Sarcococca – Sweet Box or Christmas Box

Sarcococca confusa



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Thinking outside the box on deciding what to grow in a shade garden.

This plant has one of the most tongue-tied Latin names that sounds like some bacterial disease. Be careful when saying to your friends and neighbors, “Come on over for a visit. I got the rare Sarcococca!” Make sure you stress this is a shrub and not something it should concern the Centers for Disease Control.

I added both “common names” to this unusual shrub that will punch you in the nose with its floral perfume. In most southern locations this

plant can bloom anytime from around Christmas to early spring.

Hardy from zones 6 to 9, but zone 5 growers can squeak by if you plant it out of those bone-chilling northern winds. This magnificent bush can grow to up to three feet tall but becomes bushy. The leaves are small but leathery and are evergreen.

The tiny, white flowers are clustered together in the leaf axils. They form during the summer and stay throughout the fall until in the winter they open and release one of the most enjoyable, potent, sweet lily-like perfumes into the air for a few weeks. You can smell this outstanding perfume many yards away including your neighbor's yard across the street.

Another unusual quality of this shrub is it growing in shade and dry soil. Plant it in a shady spot (no hot sun), and it will grow well – even in soils that occasionally dry out for the summer.

I have rarely seen this shrub offered by nurseries and “why not?” is an excellent question.

Tiarella – Foam Flowers

Tiareella cordifolia



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There is power in numbers after all.

Tiarellas (possibly pronounced ‘TEE-uh-rell-uhzs’ for those of you, like me, who professionally butcher Latin names) is native from eastern to mid-western North America. Many gardeners may not be familiar with this very hardy (zones 4 to 9) and colorful perennial which resembles Heuchera and Heucherella (both described earlier).

This plant has emerged as being increasingly popular for home landscaping – especially for thriving in those challenging shady areas. Finally, something to break the Impatiens monopoly on shadowy land!

Make sure to always plant these plants in moist but well-drained, fertile, high humus-based soil for best growth, leaf development and blooming potential.

With thick, deep-green leaves heavily mottled of bronze or black markings, this plant can tolerate more or denser shade than Heuchera and Heucherella plants plus it will grow better in hot climates. These leaves remain evergreen for most of the year – including the coldest of winters. In some varieties, the foliage turns a deeper bronze-red in the winter which looks outstanding against a light covering of snow. Ha! Top that Impatiens! Plant these perennials along with Hostas to enjoy their complementary appearances.

The other reason for Tiarellas growing popularity are the bottle-brush flower spikes containing hundreds of small, lightly scented, bright white and pink blossoms. It is these flowers that stand out like sea foam (thus the nickname) in the shade. They bloom heavily, sometimes covering the foliage, in mid-spring for several weeks and then off-and-on until late fall. These flowers are lightly lily-scented, but I have a difficult time detecting it.

Breeders develop each year newer (and more colorful) varieties – just like the Heuchera plants – and it may prove difficult for you to decide which type to plant.

You should be able to find these plants from larger garden centers and online nurseries.

Torenia – Wishbone Flower

Torenia fournieri



A flower for owners of daydreaming Jack Russell Terriers.

Tired of growing Impatiens and Begonias? The only other colorful annual you can reliably raise in a shade garden is Torenia. Related to Snapdragons and Foxgloves, and native to tropical Asia, these plants can provide a colorful show all summer.

They bloom better when they have partial exposure to full sunlight – preferably the morning sun – for a few hours. Before noon, and for all afternoon, the plants would appreciate cool shade or dappled sunlight. They will grow well, not only in moist, well-drained and fertile flower beds but also in containers and hanging baskets. Just make sure they

are also growing in partly shady locations. The plants rise to under a foot tall (possibly more) but become bushy over the summer with hundreds of blossoms.

The Gloxinia-like flowers are usually brightly bicolored or even tri-colored of blue, purple, and yellow along with contrasting throat colors. One other nickname of this plant is the “clown flower” due to these “circus” colors. The common “wishbone flower” nickname is for the two stamens fusing together in the interior center of each blossom. They look “somewhat” like a turkey wishbone. Okay, after mastering this mental challenge, you can later have fun interpreting Rorschach inkblot test designs.

If started early in the year, you can raise these plants from seeds (the more economical way) than purchasing plants. Garden centers and nurseries may provide them but not in quantity as begonias or impatiens. This neglect is a shame for I feel these plants have great potential in providing more colors and enjoyment in all gardens.

For now, grow the **Summer Wave Bouquet Series** for their bold and beautiful colors. They appear to grow well in any area of the garden – sun or shade, in beds or containers. Their colors range from blue-purple and pure yellow with white markings. Although Torenia prefers cool growing conditions (typical of the Snapdragon family), this series seems to grow well in hot and humid locations.

Another outstanding variety is “**Duchess Blue & White**,” with velvety purple-rimmed petals and white to powder-blue interior blossoms. A perfect splotch of yellow (called a nectar guide) makes these blossoms explode with brilliance.

Other members of the **Duchess Series** have rose-red, pink, pure white and light-lavender colored flowers. Unlike the Summer Wave varieties, this series prefers to grow and bloom well in deep shade!

There are other colorful varieties available (most by seeds instead of by plants) for your enjoyment. Add these flowers to your begonias and impatiens to include that missing blue color to a shady flower bed.

Tradescantia – Spiderwort

Tradescantia virginiana and *Tradescantia ohiensis*



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Peter Parker should have applied this to his spider bite.

I must give breeders of new flowers two thumbs up in developing beautiful hybrid varieties of this eastern North American perennial. Hardy from zones 4 to 9, the wild plants have long, blade-like dark green leaves with small (around one inch) three-petaled, blue flowers with bright yellow stamens. If you never encountered these flowers before you may think they were small Iris – but they are not.

These flowers bloom in clusters called umbels. A few clusters bloom each day, and each one lasts one day – like daylily blossoms. Over time, a large three-foot tall group of plants can display hundreds of these small blossoms from mid-spring to midsummer.

One surprising feature of these flowers is when they fade. The petals lose their color and become translucent; allowing light to pass through them. This feature created another nickname of “Widow’s Tears” – as for weeping over the death of the flower. The plants can grow in full sun, but the intense light and hot temperatures will make the flowers fade quickly causing the widows to sob themselves silly. No, these plants prefer part to full shade and can tolerate extended periods of dry soil. While visiting a botanical garden, I saw a bed of these plants thriving and blooming in dense shade in drought-cracked earth.

The wild plants are not exciting, but the new hybrid varieties are incredibly beautiful. Two main species are native to the eastern part of the United States. One is the Virginia Spiderwort (*Tradescantia virginiana*), and other is the Ohio Spiderwort (*T. ohioensis*). Each species has their differing traits, but when breeders crossed them (along with a few other lesser known species), the new hybrids pleasantly surprised them with larger, showier flowers – some with deep purple, white or pink petals. These new hybrid “prototype” plants became known as *Tradescantia x andersoniana*.



If you need a prime example of what breeders have achieved in creating a colorful variety, please grow **Sweet Kate** (shown above). This fascinating and pleasantly gaudy variety has purple-blue flowers nestled among bright yellow leaves. It is a stunning beauty for any shade garden!

Garden centers should (and I demand they should) have this variety and others available for you to grow in your garden. These newer hybrids will adapt to more sunlight as long as they have constant moist soil. If breeders could make these plants keep their beautiful flowers longer than a day, they would be ideal. Oh well, maybe we expect too much from certain plants, and we should enjoy them as they are.

We need to tie up a few loose ends. What does Spiderwort mean? One theory is it gets its name from the sticky sap that oozes out a stem when broken or cut. When this sap air-dries, it transforms into a whitish, thread-like substance. People thought spiders drank this sap to

make their silk for spinning webs. Theory number two is this sap helped to heal spider bites. Got bit by a large vicious spider? Cut a stem and apply the juice to the wound to neutralize the venom and treat the skin. Since the root word is “wort” – meaning, a plant used for medical use – I will vote for this theory.

The second loose end is the Latin name of this plant. The father and son British botanist and plant explorer team, John Tradescant (1570-1638) and John Tradescant Jr. (1608-1662) discovered it. They came to America (well, “The New World”) under orders from King Charles No. 1 to explore and bring back home exotic plants and seeds for the Royal Gardens. This plant was one from the many specimens they brought back to England. Charles later employed them both as Royal Gardeners. Not a bad way to advance your career!

Tricyrtis – Toad Lily

Tricyrtis hirta; T. formosana



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Guaranteed not to give you warts.

Throughout this ebook (and my other flower gardening ebooks – yes, shameless plug) I always write about plants and flowers I have either grown or viewed in nurseries and public gardens. This plant is different – I never heard of it. With all the numerous garden centers in my area, I never came across it. Out of intrigued curiosity, I researched it, and to my surprise, several online mail-order nurseries sell several varieties of this plant. Customer comments from these nurseries' websites rave about the beauty of these perennials.

Many gardeners may also be unfamiliar with this hardy, shade-loving perennial. One reason is, it blooms in the late summer and throughout the fall months. Garden centers and nurseries, large and small, have difficulty selling Fall flowering plants for springtime sales.

Another reason is this plant's name may discourage people to plant them. Toad Lilies? Toad! You can forgive the name if you look at the flowers – they are gorgeous!

There are over 20 known species of this plant, but they can interbreed and create humongous numbers of hybrid varieties, all with wild-and-crazy colorful flowers. The one to two-inch, star-shaped blossoms have a base color, such as white, yellow or pale blue (again, this depends on the variety) but has many contrasting colorful spots. Protruding from the center of each blossom are the pistil and anthers, and they too have spots.

Toad Lilies are hardy from zones 4 (or 5) to 8 and originate from eastern Asia, through China, Japan, and the Philippines. According to an unsubstantiated report, the toad nickname began with the Philippine Tasaday Indians smearing *Tricyrtis* flower juice on their hands before setting out to collect frogs for...a dinner entrée, a frog-jumping contest, something fun to do on a lazy Saturday afternoon – I don't know. They collected frogs – period. That "report" did not go into further detail.

Well, the word toad and not frog eventually became associated with this plant. The more rational (and simple) explanation for the toad-name is for those spotted-dotted flowers may resemble the skin-bumps on a toad. The things people imagine when naming plants is delightfully mindboggling.

Let's get back to real facts about this plant. It thrives in partial to full shade, moist but well-drained, fertile soil but will suffer if the soil dries for any extended time. The plants can grow from one to three feet tall and become bushy. In its native lands, it grows by woodland edges or near stream banks. Try to avoid exposure to the intense afternoon sun for it will limit flower production. Gardeners experienced with raising

these plants recommend growing them in containers to get up-close-and-personal to enjoy the beauty of the individual flowers.

There are several varieties of this perennial, and it would not be possible for me to list and describe them all. Two of the most “commonly offered” species and varieties belong to *Tricyrtis hirta* and *Tricyrtis formosana*. Breeders have crossed both these species with each other and with other species to form unusual hybrid varieties.

Vinca – Common Periwinkle

Vinca minor



This plant has its own designer color.

A shade garden is not complete without a maintenance-free, evergreen groundcover, hardy perennial. Well, I guess that quickly sums it up on why to grow it in those difficult shady areas. Maybe a few extra descriptive facts would not hurt.

These low-growing vines (three to six inches tall) can quickly cover the ground, no matter if grown in full sunlight to deep shade. If grown in full sun, it needs to have reliably moist soil, but in partial to deep shade, it can tolerate dry soil. Like most plants, make sure the ground is well-drained.

The plants have the potential to become invasive, especially in fertile soil, but not uncontrollably so. Periodic clipping back will keep this zone 4 to 8 perennial looking neat and tidy. There is another similar species, *Vinca major*, which has larger leaves and flowers but is less hardy from zone 7 to 9.

Each spring, a beautiful display of “periwinkle blue” tubular blossoms will carpet the ground. New varieties have pink or white blossoms, but you can’t top that stunning shade of blue. For a flashy display for shady areas look for the variegated-leaf variety called “**Variegata.**”

When I lived at the farm, *Vinca* grew extensively inside a part of the woodland near the house. The leaves were evergreen throughout a cold, snowy winter, looked outstandingly beautiful with fresh, new growth and blue flowers in the spring and kept the woodland looking cool in the summer. It behaved well for we never had to manage it – a welcomed benefit of any plant. My brother later dug up several sections and transplanted them to a sloped area near his swimming pool. They grew and bloomed okay – not great, but being in full sun and high humidity from the pool they did not look as lovely as the woodland plants.

I must relate a word of caution when planting these plants near or beside your house. Any groundcover has the potential to become a haven for unwanted pests. I once planted English Ivy (another sun or shade plant) around the house foundation to control weeds around my newly planted shrubs. At first, it looked great filling in the area but, after two years, problems developed. The vines grew everywhere and provided the perfect, cool, dark habitat for sow bugs, beetles, and other mini-beasts. They attracted nightmarish, ravenous packs of wolf spiders, then field mice, and, eventually, garter and black snakes. I had created a perfect storm of food-chain pests outside my door. During the winter, I ripped the ivy out. The lesson learned here is to be very wary when planting vines and groundcovers (including *Vinca minor*) beside your house foundation. You may unexpectedly harbor unwanted wildlife. If planted away from your house, there should not be any problems.

Not all garden centers sell these plants, but some specialty nurseries should stock them. Growers usually offer them as “plugs” or in plastic pots. You may have to search for them in your area.

Viola – Wild Violets

Viola species



These plants play instrumental roles in your shade garden.

I am hesitant to include these small perennial plants for gardeners (and especially non-gardeners) have a love-hate relationship with them. We love to see them in bloom but also call them weeds and try to eradicate them.

There are over 500 species and varieties of Violets world-wide. Many are perennial (hardy from zones 3 to 7) and prefer cool, moist, sunlit dappled woodland-like growing conditions. They can't tolerate full sunlight and will suffer if the soil becomes dry. They bloom only in the

spring, self-seed and then slowly settle into semi-dormancy during the summer. The plants are forgotten about for the rest of the year.

Native violets flaunt a diversity of colors, but the common woodland species have shades of blue or purple, yellow, and white. They can also spread outward to new territories – other areas of the garden and lawn – by self-seeding a-plenty.

The European native *Viola odorata* varieties have an overwhelmingly sweet perfume. Originally called Florist Violets, they have escaped into the wild and even into our gardens and lawns. Although not as hardy in some areas of the world, they can adapt to new places. Years ago, when I was operating my fragrant flower nursery, I sold blue and rosy-pink varieties. I rescued the unwanted plants from the fate of a compost bin to spend their years in the flower gardens. Here, they self-seeded with gusto, spreading all over the place, including into the lawn. Each spring more plants bloomed spreading a delicious perfume into the air. How can we hate a weed that does this?

Don't confuse wild violets with the larger-sized members of the *Viola* family, such as the colorful Pansy. Garden centers always sell these plants for they grow best in plenty of sunshine. For me, they are delightfully colorful but lack the simple charm of the wild violets.

I have never seen the wild violets sold in garden centers, and that includes the fragrant *odorata* varieties. I guess it's due to that weed phobia problem. You should be able to find plants from specialized mail-order nurseries. Fortunately, several seed companies, especially those specializing in wildflowers, offer seeds of several species. Scattering these seeds about a shaded garden can establish colonies within two or three years.

Don't be too concerned about these charmingly wild-and-crazy ground-covering perennials spreading here-and-there in your garden. I can think of many other plants being weedy and unwelcome. I say, embrace the wild violet for our shady gardens, and I hope you agree.

Conclusion

So many shade plants – so little time to plant (and enjoy) them all.

The plants listed in this ebook are only a small sampling of the many perennials, bulbs, ground covers, trees and shrubs you can grow in a shady area of a garden. I have tried to include those that offer colorful flowers or leaves to brighten those troublesome areas.

Please note, I have not included many spring-blooming bulbs or other plants that have a minimal bloom time. Botanists call many of these plants ephemerals; they bloom quickly, set seed, and then go dormant for the rest of the year – all before the tree leaves fully expand. They are lovely growing in the early spring woodland, soaking in full sunlight before the area becomes dark from the expanding canopy of tree leaves. By all means, learn more about these amazing plants and include them in your shade garden.

There are several reference books available on how to create a shade garden if your area is in constant sunlight. It will surprise you how wooden structures like pergolas, lath houses or rows of trellises can block enough sunlight to allow shade plants to thrive. Build these structures large enough so you, family members, and friends can have a serene retreat from the intense sun and heat of summer.

Let's also not forget the orientation of your house or property. We all have a north side area of a house or buildings where nothing much grows except green weeds. Take the time to improve the soil with added fertile topsoil, compost, and mulch. You can grow many plants that can tolerate deeper shady conditions but still bloom and grow well for you.

Gardening involves dreaming, planning, money, and lots of work. Within time, you can create a wonderful and beautiful garden thriving in the land of shadows.

Thank you for reading this ebook.

I hope you have enjoyed learning something new about the colorful flowers and plants you can grow in a shade garden.

Please visit my author website of <https://gedwinvarner.com> concerning my other gardening ebooks and contact information.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This early experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

For twenty years he successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, "I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs." Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is "read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!"

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.