



Blooming in the Shadows

By Tammy Borden

As I worked the Master Gardener plant sale I had countless people ask me, "What flowers can I plant in the shade?" What few shade plants we had were snatched up quickly by eager shoppers, so I pointed apologetically to the few remaining Lily of the Valley plants that sat alone on the table.

It was I who had asked the same question many times before. Having recently moved from a home with towering pine trees covering the yard, I had searched for years to find the perfect shade plants. What once was a daunting dilemma soon became a challenge I enjoyed. I scanned countless perennial books and seed catalogues. I received divisions and cutting from friends with sun-loving perennials just to give it a try. And before long my yard had become a testing ground to see if the labels really meant it when they said, "requires full sun."

Over the fifteen years of living with a shady yard I found some surprising plants that did fairly well, despite the tags that suggested a sunny location. When I moved I made sure to divide all my beloved shade plants, including the 32 varieties of hostas I had accumulated over the years. Here is a list of my favorite plants that have done well in shade.

Snakeroot (*Cimicifuga racemosa*)

This 6-8' beauty is stunning in the back of a shady border. It's towering white spears arch gracefully over its full, glossy leaves in late summer.

Yellow Wax Bells (*Kirengeshoma palmata*)

Hard to find, but worth the hunt! The beautiful grey/green oak-like leaves are beautiful in themselves. The thick, yellow, bell-like flowers appear in mid-late summer.

Japanese Painted Fern (*Athyrium nipponicum "pictum"*)

A compact and unique fern sporting bluish green, maroon and jade colorations. Not as apt to take over as Ostrich Ferns. Gorgeous!

Foam Flower (*Tiarella lordifolia*)

Great variegated maple-like foliage and unique bottle-brush flowers in light pink brighten a shady spot in late spring. Perfect for the front of a border.

Gasplant (*Dictamnus Purpureus*)

While the labels say part sun, mine did well in a shady spot. Nice glossy foliage and pink flower spikes.

Coral Bells (*Heuchera*)

While mine didn't get as many flowers as it might have in full sun, it still did well and had enough to keep the hummingbirds coming!

Peony (*Paeonia spp.*)

This works best in shady spots that are covered by deciduous trees. It allows the plants to get enough sunlight in spring and gives them a chance to develop flower buds before the leaves come out on the trees.

Astilbe

Another bright feathery flower for the shade in lots of colors. Its ferny foliage also adds a nice texture against hostas and other larger leaved plants.

Continued...

Pee Gee Hydrangea Tree

This gorgeous ornamental tree, adorned with masses of white flower clusters in late summer that turn pink in the fall, is a treasure in the shade garden.

Others? You might not get as many flowers, but these plants will still brighten that shady nook...

Bleeding Hearts

Columbine

Bee Balm/Monarda

Daylilies

Tiger lilies

And of course, my favorite...

Hostas

Don't skip over this section! So often we hear shade and instantly think hostas, as though they are a boring and predictable iniquity of the shade garden. Not so. While hostas are rightfully treasured for their wide variety of foliage that can brighten a shady corner or flower arrangement in themselves, I have come to treasure their beautiful flowers, as have the hummingbirds. Here are just a few of my must haves...

- **Cherry Berry** – Unique maroon stems contrast the yellow and green variegated leaves, as delicate lavender flowers sway in the breeze above.
- **Montana Aureomarginata** – Large pointed yellow and green variegated leaves form a vase shape, and white clusters of flowers stand on strong stems.
- **Elegans** – Huge bluish green leaves form an impressive mound. The lily-like white blooms stand out and stand up – nearly four feet!
- **Tenryu** – A fast growing upright vase-shaped hosta of bluish green leaves form a cup shape to catch the rain for waiting butterflies, with lovely white blooms.
- **Ventricosa** – Shimmering true green leaves with uniform veining and masses of stunning darker lavender flower stalks. The only hosta you can grow from seed!
- **June** – Worth it for just the gorgeous combination of bluish green and yellow leaves. The lavender bell flowers are a bonus.
- **Guacamole "Fried Green Tomato's"** – Who says you can't have fragrance in the shade. You'll never say it again after smelling the sweet fragrance of these large, trumpet-shaped white blooms surrounded by large frosty green leaves.

So, go ahead! Go boldly into the dark recesses of your yard and try some new varieties. Dividing some sun-loving perennials? Put a couple divisions in your shady spots just to see how they do. You might be surprised to find a treasure waiting in the shadows.