

Plants in the Right Place: Shade

A brief guide on selecting the right plants for shady locations.



How Do I Begin?

A way to begin the process of selecting plants to grow in shade is to study the site you wish to plant. Go out and look at it at various times of day and in varying weather conditions. Is it sunny in the morning and shaded the remainder of the day? Is it shaded at all times? Does the site receive partial light through the branches of a large tree? Is the site well drained or does water sit after a rain? Is the soil a hard clay or is it easy to crumble between your fingers? Does the soil hold moisture well or does it dry quickly? These are just a few things to note as you examine the location. The answers will help determine which plants may be suited to your environment.

What Happens Next?

Think about what uses the site will have in the landscape. Are you looking to grow grass under a tree? Are you wanting a shady garden get-away? Are you looking to brighten up a bleak spot in the yard? Are you looking to add privacy? Is year-round beauty of interest to you? The answers will help determine which plants may suit your landscape goals.

Plant For Your Zone

The USDA has classified the United States into 13 plant hardiness zones. Knowing which zone applies to your geographic location is essential to the plant's ability to survive the winter. Wisconsin has 3 cold hardiness zones: Zone 3 (Northwest WI), Zone 4 (North, Central, Western WI), and Zone 5 (Southern and Eastern WI to Green Bay and Apostle Islands). For more information and detailed maps please visit:

<https://hort.uwex.edu/maps/>

Troubleshooting

If you continue to struggle with vegetative growth in a shady location, a soil test may be helpful. This test may reveal a deficiency or abundance of nutrients essential for growth. For more information on soil testing, please visit: <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Assets/pdfs/A2166.pdf>

Plant Suggestions

Groundcover: Canada Wild Ginger,* Pachysandra, Dwarf Bush Honeysuckle,* Periwinkle.

Flowering Plants: Astilbe, Bleeding Heart, Hosta, Begonia, Lobelia, Sweet Alyssum.

Small Deciduous Shrubs (2 to 5 feet): New Jersey tea*, dwarf Weigela, Green Velvet Boxwood, Running Black Serviceberry,* Glossy Black Chokeberry.*

Medium Deciduous Shrubs (5 to 8 feet): Red Chokeberry, American Filbert, Regel's Border Privet, Korean Spice Viburnum.

Vines: American Bittersweet,* Climbing Hydrangea, Boston or Veitch Boston Ivy

Turf Grass: Blends of Fescue, Bluegrass, and Ryegrass.

* denotes a Wisconsin Native Plant

There are many, many more plants which grow well and thrive in shaded areas. These are just a few suggestions of plants which grow well in our Wisconsin home.

Feel free to do your own research for your garden projects and let us know which plants work best for you!

Contact Us

Washington County Master Gardeners

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