



Perennials for a Shady Garden

Written by Adrian van der Bijl
Master Gardener

There is a shady area in most home gardens, and this is the ideal place to start a garden or rock garden with shade loving plants. There are many perennials that do very well in shade offering an alternative to annuals.

Mature trees shade one of my gardens. At the back of this garden I grow Foxglove (*Digitalis* spp.), a graceful biannual with long, stately spikes of tubular flowers that provide an elegant backdrop for this area. In front of the Foxglove are my dependable Bleeding Hearts (*Dicentra spectabilis*), a relatively fast grower that does not spread too quickly. Their height, profuse foliage and colour complement Foxglove as does Columbine (*Aquilegia*) an excellent flowering plant with many colours of star shaped blooms. Monarda (Bergamot or Beebalm) is happy closer to the front of the garden, and Coralbells (*Heuchera*) with its tiny bells on arching spires add just the right border for in the shade garden.

Hostas add season long impact to the shade garden with their wide variety of choices. Colours range from dark green to a blue to many different variegated shades. The stately flowers, which bloom into the fall in shades from pure white to azure blue, are an added bonus.

Other plants that are among my favorites for the shaded garden are:

Ferns add height and texture. With their fine leaves, they mix wonderfully with Hostas and daylilies.

Astilbe with its fine leaves and large flowering plumes in whites, reds and pinks, like an area a bit on the damp side and flourish next to ponds.

Lamium (deadnettle) Variegated border plant available in many varieties from silver to dark green, which is also a very good ground cover to hold weeds back.

Ajuga is a richly coloured border plant with variegated leaves and blue spike flowers that will tolerate dry soil and deep shade.

Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia*) has very fine leaves and yellow flowers, and can tolerate dry conditions.

Cranesbill (*Geranium*) pretty, cup-shaped flowers in pinks red, white and purple, and attractive foliage make this very undemanding plant a welcome addition to your garden.

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Monk's hood (*Aconitum* sp. A beautiful back ground plant that blooms from the end of July until well into August. The familiar blue 'hoods' also come in white and pink, is not invasive and very easy to grow.

Solomon's-Seal adds an exotic touch with its graceful arched stems. The white bell shaped flowers fill your spring garden with strings of pearls. This plant prefers moist soil but will survive a dry spell.

Alchemilla. (Lady's mantle) a beautiful green leaf and green to yellow flower adds a different texture in the garden. It never fails to draw attention to itself

One word of advice as you plan your new perennial shade garden. Save yourself a lot of work later by removing all weeds before you begin planting.