

Landscape

The background of the cover is a close-up photograph of a plant with large, rounded, light green leaves and several stems of small, five-petaled pink flowers. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the leaves and the delicate structure of the blossoms.

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**It's Pruning Time
for Young Trees**

Living Fences

**Late bloomers:
Natures Bio-fuel Station**

**Conquering
Various Levels
of Shade**

Plus: The Benefits of Turfgrass

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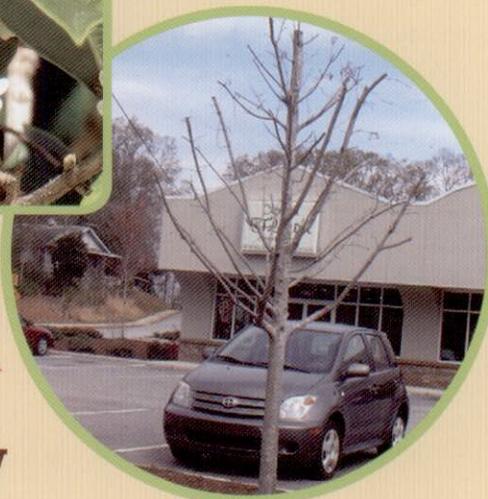
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Foliage can be the most budget-wise and successful addition to a landscape project, as it can bring unique textures, colors and contrasts that are difficult to achieve with grasses and blooming varieties. Photo credit: Terra Nova Nurseries

Conquering Various Levels OF SHADE

By: Leslie Kirk and Don Eberly

Shade can be a difficult challenge for professional landscapers as the intended design must contend with the various levels of moisture, temperature and soil condition that commonly deter plant growth in low-lighted areas. However, success can be achieved by understanding shady conditions and the extent of available plant material on the market.

In recent years, breeders and growers have noticed a growing interest among consumers in shade gardening. Due to this rising trend, horticulturists such as Dan Heims, president of Terra Nova Nurseries and his laboratory team, have specifically directed attention to cultivating breakthrough new plants for shade. Thus, the result has encompassed the introduction of a wide range of shade plants with bold colors and unique textures rarely thought possible in these areas.

Sometimes, the appropriate plants for shade are already widely available and tested, but simply unconventional as “go-to” plants for these environments. Fran Hopkins, founder of the Stepables brand of creeping perennials, has recently dedicated a good deal of time educating landscape professionals about low-growing groundcovers and creepers that serve as a solution plant under extreme

conditions. According to Hopkins, knowledge of essential and robust shade varieties as well as fundamental elements to shade design and installation is key to reducing plant replacement.

Back to the Basics

Analyzing the amount of shade in each area of the landscape is always the first step to creating an installation plan. There are four degrees of shade: light, dappled, partial and full. “The various levels of light may ultimately determine which plants will be the most successful and require the least amount of long-term maintenance,” says Heims.

Light shade areas can be found where there is a good deal of indirect sunlight, possibly only shaded for a few hours each day. Dappled shade can often be found under immature trees or other small- to mid-size plantings, where blotchy sun shines through. Partial shade can include direct sunlight during the morning or evening hours. A full-shade area will rarely, if ever, see sunlight.

Because of the various levels of shade, a walk-through of the site at different times during the day is critical. Keep in mind that once a landscape is established

and has had a chance to mature, medium or heavy shade may develop in areas originally planted for light or dappled shade. In an area like this, where a mature plant is expected to alter light conditions, consider choosing varieties that will succeed in most any degree of shade, such as heucheras or ferns.

After determining the square footage and levels of shade at the site, a landscape planner can then begin selecting varieties that will capitalize on space, budget and time. Most growers, like Heims and Hopkins, are willing to discuss specific



Many plant varieties, such as Terra Nova Nurseries' Bergenia 'Lunar Glow', can be planted en masse, as the variegated foliage and season-long blooms create all the color contrasts a landscaper could want in a colorful shade design. Photo credit: Terra Nova Nurseries

conditions with landscape contractors and managers to help determine the most advantageous line-up of plants based upon need.

Tradition and Innovation

Understanding the extent of plant materials now available for large or small projects can bring new bursts of color, texture and interest into the landscape. It is important to keep in mind the differences between shady and sunny landscape design elements, and how colors and textures of shade plants will need to be carefully chosen to create the appropriate results.

Landscapeers traditionally advocate a calming design concept for low-light areas because shade-tolerant live goods are most commonly available in color variations of blues, violets, browns, and deep reds. If this is the goal of the customer, it is best to use strong textural contrasts to insight supplemental interest where desired. A mix of matte and velvet-like foliage may be best for this model, with combinations of smooth and serrated edges. One excellent option for textural interest includes the unparalleled, fuzzy texture of Begonia 'Curly Fireflsh' from Terra Nova Nurseries.

If the shade area is expected to blend seamlessly with the sunny areas surrounding it, the use of colorful flowers and glossy foliage in unison creates a flowing combination. This approach is many times achieved by choosing lighter colors such as yellows, white, pinks and bright reds. While vibrant and vivid colors are less common in shade plants, many are cultivated with high-level genetics to tackle the need. The variegated foliage and bright-pink blooms of Terra Nova Nurseries' Bergenia 'Lunar Glow'

can electrify a space and develop a sense of design diversity.

Evoke a sense of depth by placing bright, large-leaf foliage in deep, heavy-shade areas. This will brighten the darkest spots in the landscape and allow for bolder, complimentary colors in front, ultimately extending the space. "One of the most intriguing shade varieties being introduced to the market this year is Heuchera 'Plum Royale,'" says Heims. "This herbaceous perennial has remarkable color, remaining a deep, shiny-purple for months in summer without fading." Accent the rich purple of 'Plum Royale' with golden or chartreuse foliage that will make an area pop all season.

Additional Shady Snags

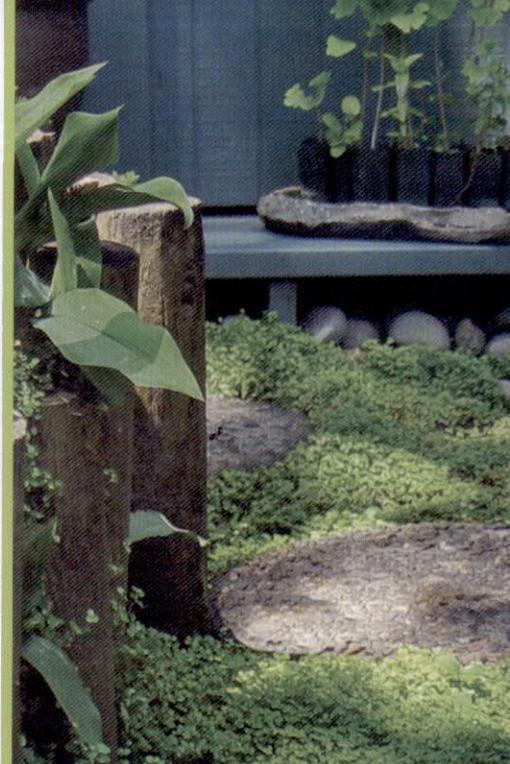
Unfortunately, finding plants tolerant of shade is not the only problem that must be addressed when planting in shady areas. Other difficulties with maintenance and low nutrients can occur in areas with little to no direct sunlight.

Under trees, shade plants must often compete for nutrients and moisture, causing landscapers to lean towards mulching to avoid losing product. Low-growing creeping perennials can provide a unique solution of color and style to an area typically left bare. "Creeping perennials can be a real money-saver and a handsome addition if selected appropriately,"

says Hopkins. "Plants such as Sedum album 'Baby Tears' make excellent under-plantings around trees because the roots are extremely shallow, and the plant will thrive even under stressful and shady conditions."



For areas surrounding trees, where soil is often shallow and devoid of many nutrients, plant creeping perennials such as Sedum album 'Baby Tears' to successfully grow in these difficult conditions. Photo credit: Stepables



Low-growing groundcovers can make excellent plants for establishing a finished look in tight shady areas where maintenance can become difficult, as these plants rarely grow above 2 inches, and naturally deter weeds. Photo credit: Stepables

Low-growing creepers and groundcovers may also be the perfect turf substitute for shady areas because mowing and other forms of maintenance can become difficult if the shade is derived from multiple trees and tall plantings. Creeping perennials generally do not grow above a few inches and naturally deter weeds.

A New Sense of Comfort

Landscape professionals may cringe when approached with a project that is predominantly shady or has several difficult shady beds, but the union of knowledge between landscaper and grower can enable synergistic results, yielding a successful and long-lasting shade bed, border, or other area. **LMI**

Resources

Check growers' Web sites as many include detailed plant information pertaining to specific growing conditions. To learn more about the sources in this article and hundreds of plants for shade, log onto any of the following:

www.terravanurseries.com
www.stepables.com