Friday’s Feature
By
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Gardening in the shade
Gardeners are often unhappy about how their grass and other plants look in a shady area, especially under trees. People can spend a lot of money, time and effort trying to make sun-loving plants grow in shady areas.

If you have a situation where shade is stressing the sun-loving grass or other plants, consider choosing plants that will thrive in a shady location. Gardening in the shade can and should be just as enjoyable and successful as gardening in the sun. When the proper plants are selected for shady areas, the results can be beautiful and long lasting.

There are several factors involved when plants fail in shady areas. Obviously, low light levels are a big part of the problem. Without sufficient light, many plants cannot carry out photosynthesis and simply shut down.

Shady areas often are created by trees as they grow larger over the years. So at some point, the original landscape will have to be modified to deal with the reduced-light conditions. Sometimes properly pruning overhanging branches will improve the light. The most effective solution, however, is to select plants that are naturally adapted to low-light conditions.

Another factor that contributes to plant problems in shady areas is the lack of water, especially if the shade is created by trees or other large plants. Trees can prevent rain from reaching the ground and will quickly soak up what little rain does reach the ground. While an irrigation system is an obvious solution, why not choose plants that will grow in drier conditions.

So what plants do well in shade in North Florida? For a complete list, refer to the online publication at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG252 or call your local Extension Office.

One group of plants to consider are the ground covers. Ground covers provide variation in plant height, texture and color in the landscape. Ground covers, such as monkey grass or Asian jasmine are reliable, easy to grow and relatively fast spreading.

Monkey grass, although not a true grass, looks a lot like a grass and will tolerate light traffic.
Asian jasmine requires much more maintenance, since it is a running vine it must be edged and cut back periodically to keep it looking neat. It grows equally well in sun or shade – making it ideal for planting areas that include sun as well as shade.

You don’t just have to stick with ground covers, however. Gardening in a shady area provides chances to grow a wide variety of beautiful plants. For colorful bedding plants, try impatiens, coleus, wax begonia, pentas, salvias, caladium and torenia in summer.

Shade-tolerant perennials include ferns, hostas, aspidistra, ajuga, cardinal flower and violets.

Shrubs to consider include hollies, azaleas, nandinas, cleyera, ligustrum, aucuba, fatsia, mahonia, pittosporum, hydrangea, sasanqua, camellia and many others.

There are even small trees that like partial shade, such as dogwood, Japanese maple, red bud, fringe tree, Japanese yew, cherry laurel and yaupon.

Many hardy ferns can be planted into the shady areas of your landscape. The different species range in size from under a foot to as much as 3 feet.

The leaves of ferns are called fronds and provide the primary ornamental feature of the plants. The fronds generally are finely divided and delicate in appearance, so they contrast beautifully with coarser textured shade plants such as hostas, aspidistra, fatsia, gingers and aucuba.

Some excellent ferns for use in the landscape holly fern, lady fern and Japanese painted fern.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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