



Top 20 Perennials for Shade

This is a list of some of the best perennials that will accept varying degrees of shade. See a Garden Advisor for help in determining the best plants for your situation.

Ajuga

Ajuga reptans—Attractive ground covers with glossy, green or bronze foliage and violet-blue flowers in late spring. Many varieties with varying leaf sizes and shapes. Grows in ground hugging rosettes 4-6" tall with blooms, spreading by stolons. Best in morning sun and afternoon shade from reflected heat, and consistent moisture in rich soils.

Aspidistra

Aspidistra elatior—This classic, tough houseplant is also dynamic for its bold evergreen texture when used in the garden. Perfect for a shady background to ferns and other perennials, or a low maintenance border or container specimen. This 2-3' easy to grow plant does best in loose organic soils, making a slowly spreading groundcover.

Candytuft

Iberis sempervirens—A hardy, low-growing, evergreen that is covered with small, white flowers February to April. Works well in shade to part sun. Growing 6-12", it's versatile in borders, foundation plantings, and rock gardens.

Columbine

Aquilegia spp.—Native. Shade loving perennial blooms in May. Beautiful yellow or red blossoms with a tropical look. Looks great planted with ferns or Turk's Cap. Evergreen foliage has a blue green tint. Columbines will cross pollinate and re-seed, and hybrid cultivars are available, with most growing 1-3'. Keep watered in the heat of summer.

Coral Bells

Heuchera sanguinea—Blooms in late spring with multitudes of tubular coral flowers carried on tall spikes above the foliage. Evergreen plant makes a low neat mound of leaves, with many varieties sporting very brightly colored variations in leaf colors. A showy, 12-18" plant that is good for borders and rock gardens, even when not in bloom.

Frogfruit

Phyla nodiflora—Native. Ground hugging, Texas perennial that spreads to create a sea of tiny, pretty white blooms in summer. A great 3-6" ground cover choice for sun to part sun areas, it's found in its native habitat around ponds and lakes, and areas of seasonally poor drainage. Semi-evergreen, drought tolerant and a butterfly larval host plant.

Hellebore, Lenten Rose

Helleborus orientalis—Attractive, leathery foliage on a compact plant, with graceful nodding flowers of white to pink to purple in early to mid-spring that give way to long-lasting attractive sepals. Ideal in sheltered, moist rockeries and well drained woody beds. Many cultivars with wide-ranging bloom colors, growing 8-15" in mildly acidic soil.

Hosta

Hosta spp.—The 'Queen of the Shade', Hostas are grown for their variations in leaf color, height, and large, clumping form, and many have fragrant, tubular spikes of flowers in mid-summer, ranging from white to blue to lavender. All like moist soil and full to partial shade, and protection from snails and slugs. Beautiful in containers or shady borders.

Inland Sea Oats

Chasmanthium latifolium—Native. A clumping ornamental grass treasured for its oat-like drooping flowers and rich, bamboo-like foliage. One of the few true grasses that grows in moist shade, growing 3-4' with seedheads. Clumps spread slowly and quite readily by seed, if allowed. Requires only a one-time cutback after the first hard freeze.

Japanese Holly Fern

Cyrtomium falcatum--Semi-evergreen fern with thick shiny fronds that can take the place of a small shrub. Appreciates shady areas with fertile soil, and takes some morning sun. Protected from direct sun or hot summer winds, it is slightly drought tolerant and typically evergreen. Large mature clumps growing 2-3' may be divided.

Leopard Plant

Farfugium japonica--Large, glossy-green circular leaves splashed with yellow make for a dramatic textural change, 18-24" in shade gardens. Autumn brings yellow daisy-like flowers on tall spikes. A great plant for damp, shady places, it is typically evergreen. Other cultivars, such as the larger *F. giganteum* without spots but attractive leaf shape and growing to 3-4' high, can tolerate a bit more sun. All appreciate even moisture but good drainage.

Penstemon, 'Gulf Coast' or 'Brazos'

Penstemon tenuis--Native. Lush, lettuce-like foliage with blooms of pale pink in mid-spring and sometimes in fall, attracting bees. Performs well in poorly drained soil or sandy loam, seeding out, growing to 18". Semi-evergreen.

Sage, Lyre Leaf

Salvia lyrata--Native. Lyre Leaf sage reaches 8" when in bloom in spring, otherwise it is a ground hugging perennial. Blooms are light lavender atop green and purple foliage. Used as a ground cover, it can withstand light foot traffic.

Sedges

Carex spp.—Attractive, group of grassy plants including several Texas natives with thin leaves, many edged in white or other colors. Tough, great choices for a grass alternative in part sun to shade. Adds contrast to beds, and softening in containers. Most handle drought to wetness with ease. Versatile, 6-12" varieties, and all are good.

Spiderwort

Tradescantia spp.--Native. Beautiful blue-green foliage and bright purple, white, pink or blue flowers, late spring and into summer, on a 12-18" plant. Best in part shade, they can tolerate more sun and can resist going dormant in summer heat with additional supplemental watering.

Turk's Cap

Malvaviscus arboreus var. *drummondii*--Native. Bright green foliage great for lighting up shady areas. A woody perennial shrub, 3-6', with attractive, red fez-like blooms from May to November, attracting hummingbirds and butterflies. Will take any soil and any light.

Umbrella Plant

Cyperus alternifolius—Graceful, palm-like leaves fan out like an umbrella 5-6' high in partial shade. Good where drainage is poor, or a pond up to 6 inches deep. Ideal for height and tropical drama in pots, ponds and perennial beds. Mulch heavily or sink in a pond in winter for protection. *C. diffusus*, a ground cover version, is a short hybrid.

Violet, Wood

Viola missouriensis--Native. Beautiful, small creamy-violet blooms appear in early spring to late spring. Dark green leaves make great, 2-6" ground cover under trees in our clay soils. Propagate by division, or allow to re-seed.

Wood Fern

Thelypteris kunthii--Native. Vigorous, true perennial Texas fern for shade areas that can also tolerate morning sun. Plant in loose, well-drained soil, and will spread by underground rhizomes to become a tough groundcover, 2-3' in height. Slightly drought tolerant once established, it is good for use as a backdrop for shorter plants or a good summer ground cover for spring bulbs.

Wood Sorrel, Pink or White

Oxalis crassipes--Native. A low-growing edging plant, forming a mound, 10-12" high. Dainty pink or white flowers bloom all spring and summer, attracting small bees. Clover-like leaves emanate from a cluster of bulb-like roots, making them slightly drought tolerant. Leaves are attractive alone, and many cultivars with dark purple coloration exist. Blooms in sun or light shade. Very dependable, and ideal in borders or pots.

Speak with a Garden Advisor for questions and availability.

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