



SHAWNEE COUNTY EXTENSION MASTER GARDENERS

WOODLAND DEMONSTRATION GARDEN

SHADE GARDENS THAT THRIVE

Understanding requirements for growing in low light and difficulties presented in the local environment can help you create a shade garden that thrives. Appreciated by both people and wildlife, a well-planned shade garden can provide a cool respite from the hot, dry climate experienced during Midwest summers. The Shawnee County Extension Master Gardeners' Woodland Garden is designed to demonstrate plantings that grow in varying degrees of shade and under our local weather and soil conditions. Please visit the garden, located on the west side of Lake Shawnee near the Garden house at 37th and West Edge Road.

DEGREES OF SHADE

Light shade/part sun areas receive three to five hours of direct sun in the summer. They occur along edges of woodlands. In addition to receiving the required amount of direct sun, trees with high or thin canopies allow indirect and dappled light. The north side of the Woodland Garden, closest to the dry creek bed, is a good example. You can find perennial daylilies, ornamental sea oats and an eastern wahoo tree growing here. Other part sun perennials to consider are coreopsis, salvia, goldenrod and sedum. If direct sun is not received in early afternoon (when the solar intensity is high), golden leaf hostas and coral bells are good choices.

Partial or medium shade areas occur where plants get one to three hours of direct sun. The center island in the Woodland Garden is a good example of plants that grow in part shade. Shrubs such as hydrangeas, Japanese kerria and hollies can be seen. Hosta, painter's pallet, coral bells, bellflower, strawberry begonia, Italian arum and ferns are some of the perennials here. Most plants tagged as shade plants, thrive in partial shade.

Full Shade areas take in less than an hour of direct sun a day though they may glean filtered or dappled light throughout the day. This occurs naturally where there is complete canopy cover, as is the case in the Woodland Garden along the southern most path and east of the sidewalk next to the tall hemlock bushes. Your plant choices are limited in full shade but perennial ferns and shade loving shrubbery such as oak leaf hydrangea and rhododendron will grow in partial or full shade, if they get enough moisture.

Dense shade provides little indirect light and is found under shrubs, beneath decks or where buildings completely block out the sun. The ground is usually dry and few plants will grow in this environment.

LOCAL CONDITIONS

The areas in and around Shawnee County tend to have dry, heavy clay soils with a higher pH. Conditions do vary, however, and the only way to know for sure your soil composition and fertility is to have a soil test done. Shawnee County Extension office personnel send soil samples to Kansas State University and report back to you what the conditions are and how to correct them.

Adding compost or other organic matter is always a good idea. Most woodland species are accustomed to growing in soils rich in leaf litter compost. Mixing compost into clay soil provides more air space for plant roots and improves the ability of water to permeate the surface, take in moisture and allows drainage to prevent drowning the roots. Adequate water and mulch are also a must for a shade garden. Water deeply and less often to encourage deeper root development and maintain a 2 to 3 inch layer of mulch throughout the summer months.

Other improvements can be made to increase the amount of light in darker areas and improve your success. Selective pruning to remove lower limbs on large trees can increase light levels. Any diseased, unattractive or poorly placed trees can also be removed to improve the beauty of your landscape and to increase light. Chose light colored siding, fences, landscape rocks and other large surfaces to reflect light.

Once you understand your soil type and pH and your landscape's degree of shade, you are ready to choose your plants. Also pay close attention to the USDA Hardiness Zone and moisture requirements of the plants you choose. Keep in mind that intense summer heat, humidity and harsh winds are hard on plants so be careful not to plant a part shade plant that scorches or wilts easily in an area receiving more than three hours of direct sun.

GARDEN DESIGN TIPS

Slight variations in texture, form and color are used to create a serene garden in a shady landscape. A lacy fern in front of a large-leafed hosta highlight the texture of each. A cascading ground cover near a rounded or upright plant draws your eye because of the contrast. Light colors and variegated foliage stand out better than dark and solid colors amidst the darkness of shade and shadows. Planting in groups based on water requirements will make maintaining your garden easier.

Works Cited

- Heather Miller, MS with University of Illinois Extension. *Horticulture Learn and Grow*, "Gardening in Shade"
- Christopher J. Starbuck Department of Horticulture, University of Missouri Extension. G6911, "Gardening in the Shade"
- Johnson County Extension Master Gardeners, Kansas State Research and Extension. "Knowing your yard's Sun and Shade Patterns"

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