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Rewards of Shade Gardening
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Light shade, filtered shade, dense shade, open shade; what's a gardener to do?

The same things that make a gardener a successful gardener in sun: know the conditions of the garden!

Whether planting in sun or shade, it is important to understand the type of soil you have:

- Is your soil acidic, alkaline or neutral?
- Is it clay, sand, or loam?

The answers to these questions will determine not only what you plant but also the need for soil amendments and watering requirements.

With water (or lack thereof) being on all of our minds, knowing the irrigation needs of your plants is critical. Equally important is grouping plants together based on their watering needs. For example:

- Are the plants drought-tolerant?
- Do they require regular water?
- Are they moisture lovers?

Some of additional things to know when thinking of planting in shade are:

- What type of shade does your property have:
 - Filtered/dappled?
 - Open?
 - Dense?
 - All of the above?
- Do you have a lot of trees?

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- What types are they:
 - Deciduous?
 - Evergreen?
 - Both?
- What are your hardiness and heat zones?
- What is your elevation?

Don't let the list above deter you from gardening in the shade or give up having a colorful garden. Most of the answers to these lists are known by either through experience in your garden and if they aren't known, the Master Gardeners are always willing to help you determine the answers.

As for a colorful garden in the shady areas of your garden, the question isn't if, but how much, when and how many hues. Many people think that shade gardens are predominately Hostas and ferns and not much else. While it is true that these two types often are seen together, it is more because of the fact that both these plants need similar soil and moisture. The more difficult decisions have to do with what colors do you want? Even bright colors can be found in shade gardens. Think Heuchera (Coral Bells), Aquilegia (Columbine), Rhododendrons, Geranium (Cranesbill) or Hellebores (Christmas or Lenten Rose).

Many plants that are labeled as requiring full sun can grow, and happily so, in partial shade. If you have an area that stays in the shade until early afternoon and then receives afternoon sun, most all "full sun" plants will do well. Conversely, if a plant needs partial to full shade, morning sun will likely suit it just fine, as long as the afternoon sun stays away.

A common experience many of us have had happen is the loss of shade that is required for a particular plant. This typically happens because a tree or shrub that provided shade may have died or been blown over. Do you have to forego the shade plants you love so well or move them to another shady area? While you certainly can transplant, you may be faced with having to provide temporary shade until the season or conditions are more favorable for the movement. The question then becomes what will provide temporary shade. The answer can be as simple as use of shade cloth. But if the shade garden is where you want it, or it isn't practical to move it, there are many options for you to choose from. To name just a few, you can add a pergola, use a large umbrella, or plant another shade-creating plant; remember, the new plant could require time to grow, in which case, using some temporary shade measure is necessary.

Shade gardening can be very rewarding, and doesn't need to be difficult. Plan to join Master Gardeners for the Shade Gardening class on March 7 from 9:00 a.m. to noon. The free class will be held at the Government Building Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court, Placerville. Shade gardens offer cool beauty to your landscape, as well as texture, color and flowers to your garden. Learn about all types of plants that can thrive in challenging shade conditions, from dappled to deep.

UCCE Master Gardeners are now teaching monthly classes in cooperation with the Cameron Park Community Center. The next class is on March 18th, "The Art of Growing Succulents," from 9:00 a.m. to noon in the Cameron Park Community Center.

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Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at the office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg> and you can also find us on Facebook.