



Shade Gardening -- Some Challenges
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Dealing with shade when gardening can be daunting, to say the least. And, living where we do, El Dorado County gardeners share two of the most challenging conditions: many trees creating shade, and dry shade. The latter has become even more of an issue with the drought. Even if El Nino is bringing some much needed relief from the drought, the one thing we can be certain about is that our climate will always have periods when drought conditions are more pronounced. Anticipating those conditions when planning and planting just makes sense.

When dealing with shade created by trees, first and foremost, gardeners need to know what type of trees and what type of shade they are dealing with. Evergreen trees tend to have more consistent and often denser shade than what is found under deciduous trees.

The foremost consideration when planting under trees is to meet the needs of the tree first. Some problems that commonly arise are soil compaction, especially due to home construction work. Putting more than two inches of new soil around a tree reduces moisture and oxygen availability.

Knowing how your trees react to having their roots disturbed by planting is important as well. Care must be taken when planting under Dogwood (*Cornus*), Buckeye (*Aesculus*), and pines (*Pinus*) to name a few. Some trees that will tolerate some disturbance are Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) and River Birch (*Betula nigra*). There are some that are fairly easygoing when it comes to disturbances under them such as: Hawthorn (*Crataegus*) and Willow (*Salix*).

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Another way to minimize disturbing trees when planting is to start small. First, disturb the soil only where you are planting. Choose plants that are the smallest available, requiring a minimal planting hole.

In our county, we frequently deal with oaks. Most of our oaks are evergreen and offer only filtered light under them. Compounding the lack of full sun, oaks also are very susceptible to oak fungus which can grow in moist soil and can slowly kill the tree. For this reason, care must be taken when planting under oaks; plants needing frequent watering in summer months can be very problematic.

Working around the problem of oaks means selecting plants that need little water once established, or planting in containers. Hostas are very good, shade-loving plants and bring two things that are needed to every shade garden: interesting textures and a wide range of colors, from white, to gold, to shades of green to blue. But hostas need regular water. Just because you have oaks though doesn't mean you have to forego hostas -- plant them in containers! Even some of the very large hosta cultivars (e.g. Sum and Substance) can be successfully grown in large containers.

Other plants that do well under oaks even when planted in the soil are Western Columbine (*Aquilegia Formosa*), any *Artemisia*, Oregon Grape Holly (*Mahonia aquifolium*), and a native grass, Purple Needlegrass (*Nassella pulchra*). These are just a small sampling of the plants that, with some care, can bring more interest to the oak shade area.

Space doesn't permit providing much more information, so if you'd like to hear more details be sure to attend this Saturday's free Shade Garden class being put on by the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County. Class is January 30th from 9 a.m. to noon at the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court in Placerville.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.