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So, You've Got a Shady Garden Area?  
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First, don't panic and impulsively decide not to plant a garden in the shady area. Shade gardens are many things but one they don't have to be is "boring." There are many ways to turn a shady area into a wonderful garden.

Before doing any planting, make sure that you have a good understanding of several aspects of your garden area. First, know your shade. It is important before acquiring any plants that you have a good understanding of the types of shade you must deal with. Basically, there are 4 types of sun exposure. How much sun your garden receives defines the type of shade you must deal with. Full sun is any area that gets 6+ hours daily. Part sun provides 4-5 hours of direct sun while part shade is 1 to 2 hours of direct sun. Shade is any area that receives only less than 1 hour of direct sun.

Two other considerations to your new garden area is the soil conditions. Do you have dry shade? Certainly, this is a more challenging type of shade to work with but it shouldn't cause you to scream in frustration. Conversely, wet shade while seemingly easier to work with, brings its own challenges.

And always before planting anything is determining your soil type and whether it is alkaline or acidic. The ideal soil to work with is loam but don't despair if yours is mostly sand or clay. Compost, compost, compost and organic compost will make all the difference.

Now that you have thought about all the above, the next step is to determine what you want in a shady area. What descriptions come to mind when you think of shade gardens? Retreat? Restful? Cool? Relaxing woodland area? Any of these can be achieved with a shade area.

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While one of the negatives often cited about shade gardens is their lack of bright color, I find it to be a positive point. Full sun gardens are colorful, certainly, but they are often so bright that they are not very relaxing. Contrast that with a shady area and you will find why it is more subtle colors that stand out when they don't have to compete with bright, garish color.

Some of my favorite plants can be found in shade gardens. While I love Hostas and Ferns, I must admit I have found that Hellebores (*Helleborus*) and Columbine (*Aquilegia*) are on my adored list. Hellebores, often called Christmas or Lenten Roses, are fun to grow and if they are happy, will give many new seedlings to expand their territory. After they bloom, usually in early spring, their seeds pop out of the drying blossom heads and start new plants under the shelter of the mature plant's leaves. The blooms themselves may be white, pink, red, deep purple or light green with purplish red edges if the plant is the Bear's-Foot Hellebore (*H. foetidus*). Columbine has a fascinating looking flower that looks to be a master of geometric shapes. Look carefully sometime at a Columbine in full bloom and you will be astonished at how perfectly it is shaped. And colors in a Columbine are many. Some have two colors while others have only one but in all cases, they are majestic looking as they wave around on lengthy stems sometimes as tall as 3 feet.

I could go on and on with many more plant suggestions but space is limited. I invite you to come explore the Shade Garden at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive, Placerville. Here, you will always find something in bloom in the Shade or any of the other 15 specialized gardens. The SDG is open Friday-Saturday, 9am – noon. Admission is free, on campus parking is \$2 per car.

I will also be presenting a Master Gardener class on Shade Gardening in mid-October. More on that will come later.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). 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://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at [http://ucanr.edu/master\\_gardener\\_e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news). You can also find us on Facebook.