

Made for the Shade

By Joe Covington

Our small, young trees we planted a few years back got big. Now all those full sun or partial sun plantings aren't doing so well. The good news is there are some really neat plants with color and texture for the shade.

First of all, you can't have a "shade landscape" without Japanese Maples! There's just nothing prettier and that comes in so many different size and color possibilities. Plus, they can be planted close to structures, such as the house, outdoor living areas, pool or patio, without being invasive.

Next, "the king" of all shade loving evergreen shrubs is the Aucuba family. Gold Dust Aucuba has big, tropical leaves speckled with yellow. Picturata Aucuba has the same big leaves with solid bright yellow centers and green edges. Both can be kept at 3 feet or about 5 feet full grown, if needed. Aralias are another tropical looking evergreen that is "Texas tough" achieving a height and width of 5 feet by 5 feet.

Perennials like hostas come in many leaf shapes and a multitude of different colors when a low-growing permanent plant with pizzazz is needed. Another relatively new perennial is heuchera (coral bells) which grows 15 to 18 inches tall and wide, and comes in some really cool colors such as burgundy, silver, "potato-vine" green, and peach. Coral bells can handle heavy shade or some morning sun.

Hydrangeas, azaleas, camellias and gardenias are fine in dappled shade, but do need some filtered light, along with acidic soil amendments. Groundcovers for shade include ajuga (in many colors); dwarf mondo grass, lamium, vinca major & minor, green & variegated ivies and pachysandra. Shade loving annuals are among the most colorful and beautiful. The old reliables such as impatiens, caladiums, coleus and green-leaf begonias add a festive, cool display to any shade garden. You've got lots of choices, so enjoy your special "Shade Oasis" this summer!