



Department of Horticulture

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service • West Lafayette, IN

Landscape Plants for Shady Areas

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This publication lists and briefly describes landscape plants that are suitable for the specific site conditions of shady areas. These lists can serve as a guide, but are not intended to be exhaustive. Many other plants may grow well in shady conditions besides the ones on the list.

Winter survival is fundamental to success of perennial landscape plants. Indiana is divided into hardiness zones by the United States Department of Agriculture. Southern Indiana, from the Ohio River to approximately Bedford or Seymour, is in zone 6. The rest of the state is in zone 5. Select only plants from this list with a hardiness zone number equal to or lower than the zone for the location they will be planted. For example, in Muncie (zone 5), select plants listed for zone 5, 4, 3, or lower. There are many different types of shade—light shade, filtered through a tree; dense shade, created by woodlands and solid plants; or intermittent shade, caused by an obstruction blocking the sun for a portion of the day.

Most plants grow best in full sunlight. To increase light in shady areas, large trees can be pruned to allow the sun to penetrate. However, if pruning is not practical, simply select plants that will grow well in shade. Remember, all plants need some light, so if you have a densely shaded area it may be best to leave the area unplanted and substitute mulches for plantings.

NOTE: Herbaceous perennials die to the ground in winter and grow from the roots each spring. Herbaceous perennials are indicated by “HP” in the following tables.

Special alert: Due to its invasive nature, Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) is no longer recommended for Indiana gardens. Please note that it is illegal to buy, sell, or plant Purple loosestrife in Indiana. For further information, please refer to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources page on the subject:

<http://www.state.in.us/dnr/entomolo/nursery/purple.htm>

Groundcovers and Vines for Shady Areas

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Zone	Comments
Akebia, Five-leaf <i>Akebia quinata</i>	33'	4	Twining vine. Small, purple flowers in spring. Semi evergreen.
Ampelopsis, Porcelain <i>Ampelopsis brevipedunculata</i>	20'	5	Climbs via tendrils. Interesting blue fruit.
Bee Balm <i>Monarda didyma</i>	4'	4-HP	Blooms June to August. Scarlet flowers attract hummingbirds. Well-drained to moist soils.
Bleeding-heart <i>Dicentra spectabilis</i>	2'	4-HP	Requires well-drained soil. Pink flowers on drooping spikes. May to June.
Bleeding-heart, Wild <i>Dicentra eximia</i>	2'	4-HP	Pink-purple mid-summer flowers last up to 6 weeks.
Bugleweed, Carpet <i>Ajuga reptans</i>	10"	4	Sun or partial shade. Cultivars available with bronze, purple, or variegated foliage. Moist soils.

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Zone	Comments
Candytuft, Edging <i>Iberis sempervirens</i>	12"	5	White, flat flower clusters. Partial shade. Popular in rock gardens.
Cardinal Flower <i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	3'	3-HP	Red flowers July to September. Winter mulch recommended. Grows in wet areas.
Columbine <i>Aquilegia x hybrida</i>	15"-3'	3-HP	Many cultivars to choose from. Excellent for the perennial or rock garden.
Coralbells <i>Heuchera sanguinea</i>	2'	4-HP	Tolerates shade but prefers full sun. Plant in spring after frost. Lightly mulch for winter.
Cowslip <i>Primula veris</i>	1'	5-HP	Spring blooming plants. Many different types. Grows well in shade.
Daylily, Orange <i>Hemerocallis fulva</i>	6'	4-HP	Orange-red mid-summer blooms on 6-foot spikes. Tolerates a variety of soils. Sun or partial shade.
Dead Nettle, Spotted <i>Lamium maculatum</i>	18"	4-HP	Though somewhat weedy in shape, this plant has dark green leaves splotted with silver. Small, lavender flowers bloom through summer.
Epimedium, Long-Spur <i>Epimedium grandiflorum</i>	1'	3-HP	Partial shade. Red to white flowers in spring. Dense foliage with bronze fall color.
Gas Plant <i>Dictamnus albus</i>	3'	3-HP	Fine border specimen with white to rose June flowers.
Geranium, Blood Red <i>Geranium sanguineum</i>	11/2'	4-HP	Profuse, purple-red to magenta flowers May to August. Interesting foliage throughout the season.
Goutweed <i>Aegopodium podagraria</i> 'Variegatum'	14"	3	Sun or shade. Silver-edged leaves. Contain to prevent from becoming a weed.
Ivy, English <i>Hedera helix</i>	6-8" (ground- cover) 60' (vine)	5-6	Broadleaf evergreen. May climb walls by small, root-like appendages. Protect plant from winter sun and wind.
Japanese Spurge <i>Pachysandra terminalis</i>	1'	5	Spreads by stolons (creeping stems). Evergreen.
Joe-Pye Weed <i>Eupatorium maculatum</i>	2-6'	3-HP	Useful primarily in wet areas.
Lily-of-the-valley <i>Convallaria majalis</i>	8"	2-HP	Fragrant, bell-like flowers in spring.
Mahonia, Creeping <i>Mahonia repens</i>	3'	5	Evergreen groundcover. Protect from winter sun and wind.
Monkshood, Autumn <i>Aconitum henryi</i>	3-6'	3-HP	Showy blooms in late summer. Purple to blue, white, or yellow flowers. Plant parts are poisonous.
Periwinkle, Common <i>Vinca minor</i>	6"	4	Shiny, semi-evergreen foliage. Sparse, blue flowers. Invasive in natural areas.

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Zone	Comments
Plantain Lily <i>Hosta decorata</i>	2'	3-HP	Many cultivars available with variegated foliage. Flowers borne on spikes.
Rose Mallow, Common <i>Hibiscus moscheutos</i>	8'	4-HP	August to September blooms. Good wetland plant. Can become a weed problem. Attracts hummingbirds.
Shooting Star <i>Dodecatheon meadia</i>	1'	4-HP	Rich, light soil. Attractive blooms April to June.
Spiraea (Japanese Astilbe) <i>Astilbe japonica</i>	3'	4-HP	Attractive flowers June to August. Sun to partial shade.
Sweet Woodruff <i>Galium odoratum</i> (<i>Asperula odorata</i>)	1'	4-HP	White flowers May to mid-June.
Trillium (White Wake-Robin) <i>Trillium grandiflorum</i>	11/2'	2-HP	White flowers in spring. Prefers woodland soil.
Violet, Woolly Blue <i>Violasoraria</i>	6-8"	2-HP	Hardy woodland plant with purple spring flowers. Self seeds easily.
Virginia Bluebells <i>Mertensia virginica</i>	2'	4-HP	Prefers moist soil. Flowers open pink and fade to blue in early summer.

Shrubs for Shady Areas

Abelia, Glossy <i>Abelia x grandiflora</i>	5'	6	Pink flowers in late summer. Bronze fall foliage. Some stems may die in severe winters.
Aralia, Five-leaved <i>Acanthopanax sieboldianus</i>	9'	5	Essentially pest-free shrub that can be used as a clipped hedge. Has coarse thorns and texture.
Barberry, Japanese <i>Berberis thunbergii</i>	5'	4	Thorns present. Profuse flowers and red fruit. Grows well in a variety of soils.
Bayberry <i>Myrica pensylvanica</i>	9'	5	Adaptable to poor, sandy soils. Aromatic plant parts. Female plants bear gray berries. Semi-evergreen.
Chokeberry, Red <i>Aronia arbutifolia</i>	12'	6	Native shrub. White flowers and red berries. Fine red fall color. Grows in moist soils.
Coralberry <i>Symphoricarpos orbiculatus</i>	7'	3	Especially noted for their white, fleshy berries.
Elderberry, American <i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	8'	4	Partial shade. Edible berries attractive to birds. Grows in moist and wet soils.
False Cypress, Dwarf Hinoki <i>Chamaecyparis obtusa</i> 'Nana Aurea'	5'	5	Evergreen foliage. Many sizes and forms from which to choose.
Firethorn <i>Pyracantha coccinea</i>	6'	7	Vivid red-orange berries. Dark green foliage.
Fothergilla, Large <i>Fothergilla major</i>	10'	5	Yellow-scarlet fall foliage. Pyramidal habit; spring flowers.

Common Name Scientific Name	Height	Zone	Comments
Fringetree <i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>	30'	5	White flowers early June. Blue fruits on female plants. One of last plants to leaf out in spring.
Hazelnut, European <i>Corylus avellana</i>	25'	4	Small tree suited to shaded situations. Edible nuts.
Holly, Japanese <i>Ilex crenata</i>	15'	6	Evergreen. Should be protected from winter sun and wind. Prefers acid soil.
Hydrangea, Bigleaf <i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i>	5'	6	Large, white, globe-shaped flowers.
Hydrangea, Oak-leaved <i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i>	6'	5	Mid-summer blooms. Red fall foliage. May be killed to the ground in winter, in which case no flowers are formed.
Jetbead <i>Rhodotypos scandens</i>	3-6'	5	White flowers followed by shiny black berries.
Oregon Grape Holly (Mahonia) <i>Mahonia aquifolium</i>	3'	5-6	Broadleaf evergreen. Bronze new growth, interesting flowers and fruit. Protect from winter sun and wind.
Photinia, Oriental <i>Photinia villosa</i>	15'	5	Red-bronze fall color. White flowers in late May followed by bright red berries.
Witch Hazel, Common <i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>	15'	5	Small flowers bloom in late fall. Golden fall color. Plant in sun or shade, good or poor soil.
Witch Hazel, Vernal <i>Hamamelis vernalis</i>	6'	5	Small, fragrant, yellow-red flowers bloom in February or March. Brilliant yellow fall color.

Trees for Shady Areas

Alder, Black <i>Alnus glutinosa</i>	80'	3	Prefers wet soils. Somewhat weak-wooded. Invasive in natural areas.
Cherry, Pin <i>Prunus pensylvanica</i>	35'	2	Short-lived but does well in wooded situations. Red fruit and red fall color.
Dogwood, Flowering <i>Cornus florida</i>	40'	5	White or pink flowers in spring followed by red berries. Scarlet fall color. Protect from wind and spring frosts.
Hemlock, Canada <i>Tsuga canadensis</i>	80'	3	Requires slightly moist soil. Soft-needled evergreen.
Hemlock, Carolina <i>Tsuga caroliniana</i>	70'	5	Slightly more tolerant of city conditions than Canada Hemlock.
Redbud <i>Cercis canadensis</i>	40'	5	Purple-pink spring flowers. Yellow fall foliage. Protect from wind. Small tree or shrub.
Serviceberry <i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>	25'	4	White spring flowers; brilliant red fall color.

* Janie Nordstrom Griffiths assisted in the revision of this publication.

For more information on the subject discussed in this publication, consult your local office of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.