



Color and Shade -- A Gardener's Challenge

by Merry Campbell

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Contrary to many opinions, achieving color, when also dealing with shade, is not just possible, but can be exciting to achieve.

First, any variation of shade is admittedly difficult to work with when wanting to grow beyond monochromatic hues. But that just adds to the challenge. A key point to remember is that color can be achieved simply by working with variegated plants. Many plants that have variegation also have interesting foliage shapes and thus can double their impact. Even tried and true Hosta species come in so many different variegations that a bed of Hosta alone can be very colorful, even when not in bloom. Look at a combination of ‘Earth Angel’ with blue-green leaves and white, creamy margins and ‘Guacamole’ with large chartreuse leaves and a bluish edge. These two can cause your shade bed to really stand out.

If you wish to expand beyond foliage shades and variegations, there are many other options to look for. Groundcovers may be used to enhance areas under trees. Remember that any time you plant under the trees found around here, particularly oaks, it means you are faced with looking for drought-tolerant groundcovers. *Lamium maculatum* (Dead Nettle) brings interesting silvery foliage, and in early summer it also brings blooms of pink, red, white or purple. Sadly, a couple of other shade-loving groundcovers are also considered pests in our area, however, *Convallaria majalis* (Lily-of-the-Valley) with its fragrant, bell-shaped flowers is not invasive around here. Another choice is one of my favorites, *Galium oderatum* (Sweet Woodruff); not only is it easy to grow, but it happily spreads (not too assertively so as to be obnoxious) and has wonderful, fragrant white flowers in late spring and summer. A groundcover I have not tried but plan to is *Asarum* (Wild Ginger); it is cold-hardy so is a good choice for those of us living in the snow-belt of El Dorado County.

If you have a partially shaded area that can be given regular water, there are two outstanding perennials to consider. *Astilbe x arendsii* (False Spirea) has a diverse selection of varieties that give you even more options for color; you can find flowers in lavender, white, pink, and vivid red. *Dicentra* hybrids (Bleeding Heart) have red, pink or white flowers to choose from.

For sheer variety, look no further than *Heuchera* (Coral Bells). In bloom, the spiraling flowers reach above the foliage to “wave” in light breezes. Even when not in bloom, Coral Bells brings a wealth of colored foliage with interesting leaf shapes.

For more information on gardening in shady areas, be sure to attend the free class on Shade Gardening offered by the EDC Master Gardeners on Saturday, November 3rd. The class starts at 9 a.m. and is held in the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C. 2850 Fairlane Court, Placerville.

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. The office is 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/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.

Do you have plant containers to recycle? Master Gardeners will gladly take them at the Master Gardener Office. Call before dropping them off and thank you for the donation.