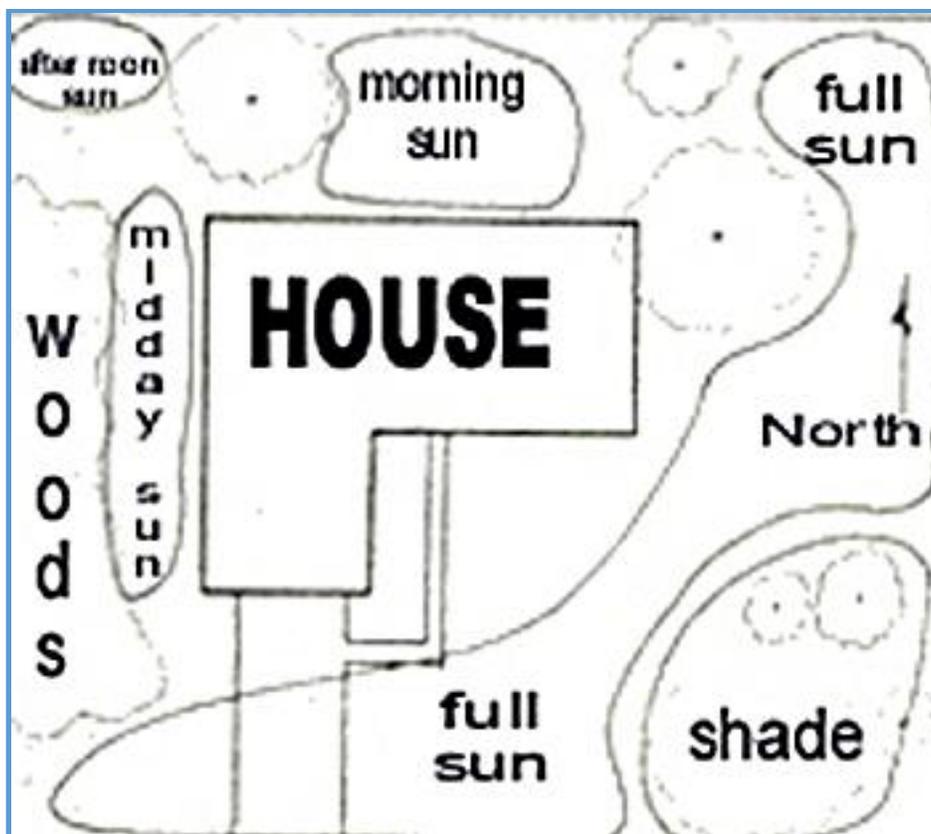


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## **Made In the Shade Planning Your Shady Garden**

by Susan Corey-McAlpine  
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Laboring under the Indian summer sun and dreaming of a shaded summer oasis? Time to plan (AND plant) it! Yes, right now! While warmth lingers in the soil and fall sun angles are more forgiving than in summer, your plants can go from nursery pot to soil and expand their roots, settling in before winter frost.

Check your sun exposure now, before hot summer days are a mere memory. North or east sun exposure will be cooler than west or south sun exposure. Planting up against a wall will result in different exposure (half-days of deep shade and full sun) from planting in a filtered space where sun is tempered by an overhead leafy canopy throughout the day. Angle of sun versus shade will change through the seasons. Plan for enough shade to protect your shade garden at noon in July and you will have planned for the most extreme circumstances. Easy-peasy design—a layered garden of three levels—could feature tall overlapping filtered shade, over mid-sized shrubs, over shade-loving ground covers.

Visiting (and enjoying) your garden once a day at different hours is key to catching potential problems at the get-go. Sunscald, when a plant is caught in a “spotlight” of overhead sun (even briefly), will burn and brown the edges of a leaf, hurting or eliminating altogether the leaf’s

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ability to photosynthesize. Cut the plant back to healthy, green growth and provide shade cloth or an umbrella. Conversely, not having enough light will result in spindly and non-productive (low bloom and few leaves) branches in the summer and early fall seasons, usually rapid growth times. Try cutting back the overhead canopy and post a calendar note to move the plant, when dormant (usually in the fall and winter months), to a sunnier spot.

Choose a canary plant (as in “canary in a coal mine”) which will indicate watering need. In my garden, it’s a hydrangea. When the hydrangea wilts slightly, it can be brought back to healthy hydration overnight, but that wilting signals that the whole garden needs water.

Choose shade garden plants with similar root structures—a maple tree shading a rhododendron shading a mass of campanula, for instance. All three plants have shallow, spreading roots, so they should be planted at the same time to avoid later deep-digging for new planting, fertilizing, or transplanting. Fertilizing shallow-rooted plants requires that you scatter fertilizer on top of the ground (gentle raking only) and avoid disturbing shallow roots. Just water the fertilizer in. Top with a good four inches of mulch to hold fertilizer and moisture over those roots.

Master Gardeners recommend deep-soaking a garden with driplines or spot-soakers rather than sprinkling plant tops with an oscillating sprinkler. Oscillators cause overhead evaporation and may water unnecessarily. Although some shade plants absorb water through leaf-misting, this is not enough moisture for thriving roots.

Water costs and long-term drought being a concern, I test plant selections by potting spring-purchased plants and auditioning the pots various locations during the hot summers. Thus, I quickly spotted canopy die-off resulting in a scorching spotlight on my Mouse Ears Hosta (*Hosta* ‘Blue Mouse Ears’). I just moved the hostas, protected in their pots, to deep rehabilitating shade temporarily and watered them well (less risky than disturbing the roots of an in-ground plant by transplanting to dry new ground).

Just starting out with plant choices? For groundcovers, try violets (they are sturdy but grow like crazy—read “may become invasive”), ajuga, and mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*). Taller shrubby could be Japanese maples or dogwoods which thrive under an overhead canopy. Pick inbetweeners like different varieties of Euonymous, ranging from “Emerald Gaity” (*Euonymous fortunei* ‘Emerald Gaity’), a hardy variegated-leaf mounding groundcover, to taller, broader varieties. Or try Lamium or Variegated Brunnera (*Brunnera macrophylla* ‘Variegata’).

Want more information? A vast variety of our published articles can be found on the UCCE Master Gardeners El Dorado County website (<http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/>), when you click on “Articles and Newsletters”.

And on Saturday, October 26, from 9:00-12:00, bring your shady questions to Master Gardeners’ free workshop on Shade Gardening, presented by Merry Campbell, at County Government Center Building C, 2850 Fair Lane Drive in Placerville.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512, or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located

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at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See [http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration\\_Garden](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden) for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see [http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener\\_e-news](http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener_e-news). Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.