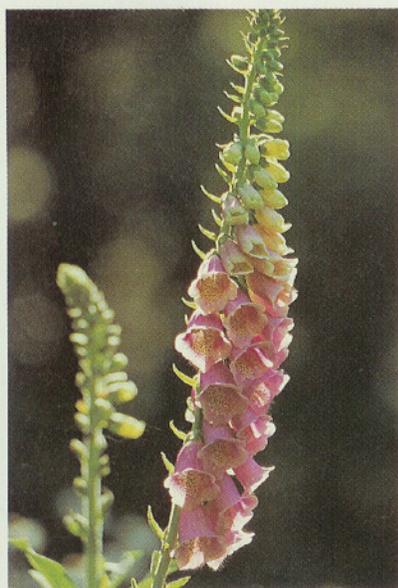


My grandmother's
back yard faced south.



A Shady Proposition

FROM WOODLAND WALKS TO
FORMAL TERRACED PLANTINGS,
ATLANTANS HAVE CREATED
GARDENS AMONG THE TREES

Tended by her green
thumb and fed by a steady
stream of sunbeams, it

thrived with roses, peonies,
berry bushes and herbs. One of the areas I remember
best, however, was a small rectangle of earth at the rear
of her property. Wedged between the back wall of the
garage and a cluster of lilacs on the adjoining property, it
was perpetually shaded. I think that's what created its
allure throughout my childhood. It was a cool place to
rest after a rollicking game of tag and a quiet place to
savor the scent of lily of the valley in early spring. It was
where I picked ferns to show my classmates what spores
looked like for a school science report. It was where I
discovered the delightful little man named jack-in-the-
pulpit. And it was where I learned that shade can extend
a garden rather than limit it.

With Atlanta's famous trees sheltering many metro
neighborhoods, nearly everyone has, at the very least, a
shady corner that can be cultivated. As local residents
have proven, shade gardens can be as intriguing and
unique as sunny perennial borders.

CLASSIC DESIGN

Mention a shade garden and what comes most readily
to mind is the image of a sylvan glen, with its carpet of

BY HILDA J. BRUCKER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MONIKA NIKORE



Foley adds scattered color to shady spots with pansies, columbine and Siberian iris.

leaf litter and random scattering of woodland wildflowers. Where shade is created by standing timber and plantings must accommodate tree roots, a natural forest garden is a simple solution to the limitations of a wooded site.

Where shade is created by aspect and orientation of the land (open shade), however, possibilities multiply. Sandy Springs gardener Joyce Williams drew upon her love of classic garden design to create a formal, terraced landscape. Her shade comes not only from a wooded perimeter, but also from the topography of her lot. Carved from a steep hillside, her yard slopes upward from the house. At the rear a 15-foot retaining wall bolsters the adjoining property — leaving Williams to garden in its shadow. “Ironically enough, I had lived in another home with a similar situation,” she says. “I found that terracing is a great way to extend the gardening space.”

Today Williams gardens on four different levels, each defined by a brick wall and accessed by wrought iron and redwood steps. “The terraces bring order to the garden,” says Williams. They add structure, height and symmetry.

Williams chooses plants by carefully noting what kind of light each space receives. She’s transformed a dim upper level into a moss garden, with Japanese maples and two benches. “It’s not really a classic Japanese garden,” Williams explains. “But it has the

same feeling of simplicity.” She has also experimented extensively with the sun requirements of her favorite plants. “The garden may look like it’s finished, but I’m always moving things around,” she admits. Through the years she has discovered, for example, that antique roses succeed in a center area that receives filtered light, even though hybrid roses don’t thrive there. Likewise, she has given up on zinnias but enjoys daylilies.

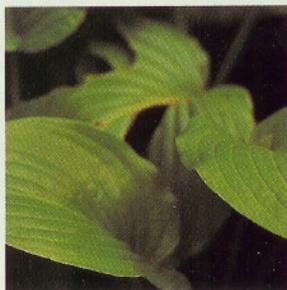
Foliage plants such as hostas and ferns provide the backbone of Williams’ garden. She adds seasonal color, such as shade-tolerant impatiens, only sparingly. “I’ve tried to concentrate mostly on texture,” she stresses, “and to rely on

the contrast between different shades of green.” Evergreen and semievergreen plants, including *Ajugas*, astilbes, hellebores, boxwoods and camellias, are carefully interspersed for winter interest. The faded mopheads of hydrangeas are allowed to hang on through the fall and winter.

Garden art and accessories that would seem out of place in a woodland setting are right at home in this space. “I like a very traditional look, and I try to work objects into the design — as long as they don’t look new,” Williams says. A wrought iron bench with a broken back adds the air of antiquity. “I found it broken, and I had to have it.” Williams also bought a cracked statue, fashioned it into a fountain and encouraged moss to grow on it. In keeping with the yard’s peaceful mood, the fountain runs at a snail’s pace. Sheltered from the sun, the little girl holds out a shell, which fills slowly with water that drips over the edge.



Daylilies, hydrangeas and hostas are favorite shade plants. Also try these perennials that adapt well to shade: *Anemone x hybrida* (Japanese anemone), *Astilbe chinensis* (“Pumila”), *Begonia grandis* (hardy begonia), *Helleborus orientalis* (Lenten rose), *Phlox divaricata* (wild sweet William), *Athyrium nipponicum* var. *pictum* (Japanese painted fern), *Cyclamen neapolitanum* (hardy cyclamen), *Arum italicum* (Italian arum).



SPLIT PERSONALITY

The front yard of Blanche Foley’s corner lot is an asset to her Buckhead neighborhood, featuring an exuberant perennial garden that is enjoyed by all who pass by. But her back yard is a shady hideaway. A stately oak spreads its canopy over much of the gar-

den, and evergreen magnolias filter out the hustle and bustle of the street. While the more public front garden stimulates the senses, the back garden soothes.

Like many shade gardens, this one evolved slowly, over three decades. With its southern exposure, the plot had once hosted a sun-loving vegetable garden. As the oak tree matured, however, the shade moved in, and the garden had to change. It's harder for grass to survive, so the trunk is encircled by mondo grass and rings of brick pavers. Foley finds that spring bulbs, including tulips and grape hyacinths, do well, as they catch the sun in early spring before the oak leaves out. Other flowering perennials include Siberian iris, self-sowing columbines and blue woodland phlox. All of these prefer afternoon shade in Atlanta's hot climate, as long as they get the morning sun they crave. One of Foley's

favorite shade plants is the hardy begonia (*Begonia grandis*). From spring to early summer its red-veined, lime-green leaves complement the bold foliage of hostas. Pink blooms appear in August, followed by attractive seedpods.

Foley feels that her two distinctly different gardens give her the best of both worlds. "I like the cool quiet of the back and the color of the front," she says. She hasn't pumped bright colors into the shade garden, forgoing impatiens, a shade garden standby throughout Atlanta. Instead, she's kept her back yard understated. "People have this idea that plants have to have a million blossoms on them to be pretty. But a stalk with four or five flowers can be just as attractive," she says. Her shade garden offers proof that a gardener can touch the earth lightly yet still have an impact.

SHADES OF SHADE

Gail Eaton first encountered shade gardening in her midtown condominium courtyard. "My expectations had to change with that garden," she says. "I had always grown roses before that, and I had to give up a lot of my ideas about what a garden needed to be. . . . I had to accept that beauty would come from the different shades of green, instead of from flowers." Her garden not only faced north, but it was shadowed by nearby tall buildings. "I think shade created by buildings is the least rewarding kind of shade," she notes. "It's very static, and there's no inherent beauty in it. Tree shade creates movement. It's energetic. The dappled patterns of light and dark are always moving." Now that she has moved to Morningside, she's still gardening in the shadows, but she finds tree-shaded cultivation much less



Shade gardens don't have to be all green. Flowers that normally require full sun may adapt to partial shade. Experiment with the sun tolerance of shade-lovers and with the shade tolerance of full-sun plants. Foley's foxgloves and daisies thrive in the light filtered through the tree limbs above.

challenging.

There are no set ground rules for determining the amount of shade a plant requires for optimum health. Especially here in the South, plants that would normally require full sun can get by with partial shade. Don't be afraid to experiment with new plants or to move an ailing plant around until you can find it a happy home. When talking to other gardeners about a plant, ask them to describe the type of shade it grows in. Ask about the orientation of the site, the tree canopy and what time of day the site receives light. Early morning or very late afternoon rays can make the difference in a shady setting.

Here are some general descriptions to go by:

- *Filtered light.* A sparse, spotty dappling of shade through at least the hottest part of the day (10 a.m.—6 p.m. in summer), a condition often found under tall pines. Although large patches of the site may be in sun part of the time, the sun/shade pattern is always changing.

- *Half shade or semi-shade.* Shade for four to five hours daily. Similar to morning or afternoon shade, except that as the sun moves behind structures or trees, periods of full sun will alternate with periods of full shade. In a situation where the sun comes during midday, many full-sun plants will adapt. Try daylilies, foxgloves, hardy geraniums and columbines.

- *Full shade.* Spreading tree canopies let only the laciest pattern of dappled sunlight pass through. Use ferns and variegated hosta. Experiment with spring bulbs and woodland wildflowers that bloom before deciduous trees leaf out (mayapple, bleeding hearts and trilliums).

- *Afternoon sun.* Areas that catch the western sun from approximately 2 p.m.—6 p.m. These areas will prove too bright or too hot for many woodland plants. Best if combined with some filtered shade from high pines.

- *Morning sun.* Areas that catch the eastern rays. Often the ideal condition for shade plants, as long as the sunlight becomes diffused by midday.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

Piccadilly Farm

(best local selection of shade plants; hostas and hellebores are a specialty)

1971 Whippoorwill Road

Bishop (11 miles south of Athens)

(706) 769-6516 (call for hours first)

