

**All Gardens
Great & Small**
by
York Co.
Horticultural Agent
Tom Becker



**PLANTS CONDITIONED FOR
DRY SHADE**

Farm woodlots often contain large trees, a canopy of smaller trees, a layer of shrubs and a rich forest floor of herbaceous plants. Why does this dry shade work in nature but not in the home garden?

First, the natural forest has had many years to build a layer of rich topsoil and humus from the decomposition of literally tons of leaves, plant parts and other organisms. A healthy forest is a combination of a variety of species that coexist in harmony.

In suburbia, we replant trees and shrubs into remaining subsoil, and select trees that survive in less desirable soils. Highly competitive trees, like norway maple, survive by having a shallow root system that sucks up all the surrounding soil, water, and leaves. These trees shade out competing plants. This condition is called dry shade. Here is a list of plants that survive in dry shade:

Acanthus hungaricus is an architectural plant with long deeply cut leaves with mauve-pink flowers in June.

Arum italicum "Pictum" has broad, spear-shaped leaves marbled with veins of grey that emerge in autumn, persist during the winter and disappear in summer. Stout 18-inch stalks support columns of glossy, orange-red berries that last through the summer.

Carex buchananii has orange-red foliage for the entire year. It grows to a height of 2-3 feet.

Corydalis ochroleuca is a dense, bushy plant that reaches 15 inches. It has evergreen, bluish-green leaves and pale yellow flowers from May until fall, followed by black, glossy seeds.

Crambe maritima is an architectural plant that grows to 2 feet. It has large blue, almost silver leaves that are thick and toothed. Sprays of white flowers bloom in June.

Deutzia gracilis 'Nikko' is a low-growing shrub (15 inches) with upright clusters of single white flowers in spring and wonderful burgundy foliage in fall.

Dryopteris affinis crispa congesta is a delightful fern with tight, dwarf habit, reminding one of a condensed version of a Chamaecyparis shrub.

Epimedium cantabrigiense is an eight inch tall perennial with olive-green foliage and light yellow flowers with reddish margins.

Epimedium grandiflorum "Lilafec" produces long-spurred lavender-violet flowers that rise through purplish new foliage in early spring.

Epimedium youngianum 'Niveum' has small heart-shaped leaflets borne on a 10-inch wiry stem. Pure white flowers open in late April or early May.

Equisetum scirpoides is often used as a bog or water garden plant, but it adapts well in dry shade. Evergreen 8-inch tall thin, jointed stems give it the appearance of bamboo.

Fargesia nitida is a clump-forming bamboo with black stems,

purple culms (joints) and soft evergreen foliage with an arching habit that reaches 8 feet.

Geranium 'Biokovo' is a perennial with light pink, almost white flowers and excellent, shiny foliage that turns crimson in the fall.

Helleborus argutifolius is a textural plant growing to 15 inches, with light green, almost grey leaves that are veined and coarsely toothed along the margins.

Helleborus orientalis has blush white-to-plum flowers with crimson and maroon spots. Its evergreen foliage and ability to seed itself make it a wonderful groundcover.

Heuchera 'Chocolate Veil' has large, bold, smooth leaves with patterns of purple and subtle overtones of silver.

Heuchera 'Pewter Veil' is

semi-evergreen with striking pewter-silver leaves and embossed black veins.

Kirengeshoma palmata is an elegant plant reaching a height of three feet with large maple-like leaves and nodding stems of bell-shaped yellow flowers appearing in late summer to early fall.

Polygonatum falcatum 'Variegatum' is a choice perennial boasting green leaves with creamy white margins and maroon stems.

Rohdea japonica is a bold perennial with spear-like leaves and greenish-white flowers. It grows to 12 inches and forms axillary clusters at ground level.

Waldsteinia ternata is a 6-inch perennial with dense, dark, evergreen foliage and yellow flowers.

Information was provided by Susan Barton, Extension Horticulturist, University of Delaware.

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