

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mg helpline@masshort.org.

Plants for Containers in Shady Locations

Containers with shade-loving plants can make a bold and dramatic statement in a dark corner of your entryway or garden. By using the right plant in the right place, together with a good quality potting soil and an appropriate container, you can have colorful flowers and foliage year round. Container gardening in the shade has some unexpected benefits as well. Shade pots do not dry out as quickly as ones in the sun, there is no competition from tree roots, and there are plenty of wonderful shade plants that do well in our area.

Shade container gardening takes a little time to research and to design. If the container you choose is large, fill in the bottom with Styrofoam peanuts or empty plastic bottles. This will make the container lighter and easier to move. Remember that life in a container is much different for a plant than one in the ground. Containers can offer excellent drainage, but the plants depend on you for water and nutrients.

GETTING STARTED

Before you start to choose your plants, first, determine how much light will be available for the plants. Buy plants that meet the sun/shade criteria for your specific use. You can use annuals, perennials, houseplants, grasses, and small evergreens/shrubs. (Small evergreens, perennials and shrubs can last for several years in a container if they receive the proper protection in the winter.) Consider color, height and shade/sun requirements.

Plant a tall, upright bold plant as an accent to balance the height of the planter. Next, choose a medium height mounding plant to buffer the vertical and trailing plants. Use this plant as a “wow” factor with large or small, multiple blooms and/or colorful foliage. Finally, use a trailing plant to create a flow. Houseplants (i.e., tropical or semi-tropical plants) are a great source for colorful foliage.

Container gardening doesn't have to stop when the growing season is over. In the fall, the tender plants can be replaced with colorful fall plants. Beware that containers do not insu-

late a plant's roots from winter temperatures. Strong plants and seasonal cuttings will keep your containers going into spring.

As an alternative, consider one showy perennial plant in a pot - large hostas look especially good and can live several years without needing to be moved. In December store perennials in a very cold spot, out of the sun, and tip the pot on its side until March to avoid freeze/thaw issues. Make sure that the pot is not ceramic, which may crack.

SUGGESTED PLANTS

Upright plants that do well in shade include hardy ferns, large hostas, daylilies, elephant ears, Persian shield, flax lily, ostrich fern, variegated Solomon's seal, tall shade-loving grasses, pentas (partial shade), and Flamingo lily (low light).

Medium height plants that provide the wow for your container may include annuals such as begonias, impatiens, coleus, primula and fuchsia which offer bloom in the shade. Some container perennials are Euphorbia, sedum, St. John's wort, lamium, bleeding heart, ferns, forget-me-not, hosta, hardy geraniums, and Japanese sedge. Houseplants like caladium, asparagus fern, maidenhair fern, polka-dot plant, African violet, cyclamen and peace lily will add a delicate texture, and some tropicals like Alocasia provide a lushness to your container. Spring plants could include pansies and fall plants could include asters, kale or chard.

Suggestions for trailing plants include English Ivy, vinca vine, Algerian ivy, variegated ground ivy, wishbone flower torenia, licorice, and sweet potato vine.

Depending on exposure to sun, there are countless combinations and varieties of the above plants. Do a little research, get your container ready, plant your selections, water and feed. Have fun and enjoy your creations as they provide all season enjoyment!

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>