

Gardening in Dry Shade

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How dark is heavy Shade?

Light shade – dapple sun all day or about 4 to 6 hours of direct sun. A wide range of plants thrive in this condition with minimal watering. If this is your only shade you do not need to be in this class.

Open shade – bright light, but without much sun reaching the area or overhead trees adding to the shade. Slightly less sun than light shade, but still very bright with a wide range of plant options. Great for golden foliaged and touchy plants that burn in full sun.

Medium shade – some dappled light during the day or two to three hours of direct sun, overhead trees. If you look up into the canopy there is roughly one quarter to one third of the sky visible through the trees. Still enough light to have a good selection of plants. Woodland favorites like rhododendrons will still flower here but only with about half the bloom they would have with more sun.

Heavy shade – No direct light, dense overhead trees. Less than one quarter of the sky is visible through the tree canopy. Few plants bloom well here look to texture and foliage to make the garden work.

Dense heavy shade – You cannot see your hand in front of you at noon. Pave location and decorate with garden gnomes or move.

Preparing the site without killing the trees

Tree work

Soil prep

Mulches and topdressing

Creating an interesting garden in heavy shade

keep the design simple

watering issues

texture and contrast

trial and error

other garden elements

* Plants that will tolerate very heavy dry shade

Perennials

Acanthus mollis
Acanthus spinosissimus
Actaea rubra
Asarum canadense (good groundcover)
Asarum caudatum *
Asarum hartwegii *
Brunnera macrophylla
Convallaria majalis (good groundcover)
Dicentra formosa *
Epimedium 'Black Sea'
Epimedium alpinum
Epimedium pinnatum ssp. colchicum (good groundcover)
Epimedium pubigerum *
Epimedium x perralchicum * (good groundcover)
Epimedium x rubrum * (good groundcover)
Epimedium x versicolor (good groundcover)
Epimedium x warleyense
Euphorbia amygdaloides 'Robbiae' (good groundcover)
Geranium macrorrhizum
Geranium nodosum
Helleborus argutifolius
Helleborus foetidus
Heuchera americana
Heuchera grossulariifolia
Iris foetidissima
Iris tenax
Luzula nivea
Luzula sylvatica
Ophiopogon japonicus
Ophiopogon planiscapus 'Nigrescens'
Oxalis oregana * (good groundcover)
Pachyphragma macrophyllum
Polygonatum biflorum (good groundcover)
Polygonatum odoratum (good groundcover)
Polygonatum x hybridum (good groundcover)
Rohdea japonica
Saxifraga x polita 'Dentata'
Saxifraga x umbrosa
Sedum oreganum
Sedum spathulifolium
Smilacina racemosa *
Smilacina stellata (good groundcover)
Thalictrum occidentale
Tolmiea menziesii
Trachystemon orientalis
Trillium ovatum
Vancouveria hexandra (good groundcover)
Vancouveria planipetala

Viola glabella
Waldsteinia ternata (good groundcover)

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Shrubs

Aucuba japonica *
Azara dentata
Azara microphylla
Berberis darwinii
Buxus sempervirens *
Camellia japonica
Cornus alba
Cornus stolonifera
Elaeagnus pungens *
Elaeagnus x ebbingei *
Euonymus fortunei
Fatsia japonica *
Garrya elliptica
Gaultheria shallon *
Ilex crenata *
Kerria japonica
Laurus nobilis
Lonicera nitida
Luma apiculata
Mahonia japonica
Mahonia nervosa *
Mahonia x media
Myrica californica *
Nandina domestica *
Osmanthus decorus
Osmanthus delavayi *
Osmanthus heterophyllus
Osmanthus x burkwoodii *
Osmanthus x fortunei
Paxistima myrtifolia (myrsinites)
Pittosporum tobira
Rhododendron macrophyllum
Rhododendron ponticum
Ruscus aculeatus *
Ruscus hypoglossum *
Sambucus nigra *
Sambucus racemosa *
Sarcococca confusa *
Sarcococca hookeriana var. humilis *
Sarcococca ruscifolia *
Skimmia japonica
Vaccinium ovatum *
Vaccinium parvifolium *
Viburnum opulus 'Nana'
X Fatshedera lizei *
Xanthorrhiza simplicissima

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Bulbs

Anomatheca (Lapeirousia) laxa (light or open shade only)

Arum italicum *

Cyclamen coum

Cyclamen hederifolium *

Cyclamen purpurascens

Conifers (best in light to medium shade)

Chamaecyparis obtusa

Cryptomeria japonica

Podocarpus nivalis

Sequoia sempervirens 'Adpressa'

Sequoia sempervirens 'Prostrata'

Taxus *

Thuja plicata 'Whipcord'

Tsuga canadensis

Ferns

Athyrium filix-femina (light or open shade only)

Blechnum chilense

Dryopteris affinis

Dryopteris dilatata

Dryopteris erythrosora *

Dryopteris expansa *

Dryopteris filix-mas

Dryopteris x complexa

Gymnocarpium dryopteris (disjuncta) (good groundcover)

Osmunda claytonia

Osmunda regalis

Polypodium glycyrrhiza

Polypodium scolieri

Polypodium vulgare

Polystichum acrostichoides

Polystichum braunii

Polystichum munitum *

Polystichum setiferum