



MSU Tollgate Gardens

THE SHADE GARDEN



Success with shade gardening is more a question of attitude than anything else. Don't moan over what you can't grow, learn to rejoice in what you can grow. Relax in your shade garden as it offers a respite from the heat and riotous colors of the sun garden. While many shade plants can and do flower, foliage colors and textures will play a greater role than they would in a sunnier spot.

The Shade Garden as well as the Farm-house Garden directly across from it,

offer a small sample of the outstanding perennial plants available to create a beautiful garden that will flourish under shady conditions. Consider these perennial plants for your shade garden.



Sweet Woodruff-*Galium odoratum*

Sweet Woodruff is a perennial ground-cover with fine textured green foliage that has white flowers in late May and early June. It prefers moist, rich soils in partial shade but will tolerate full shade as well as average soil. It is 4 inches tall but 6 to 12 inches tall when in bloom. You can find it growing down the hill in the Shade Garden.



Corydalis-*Corydalis lutea*

Corydalis can be found throughout the Shade Garden. Its golden yellow flowers are in bloom from late spring to early fall. It prefers part shade but will also do surprisingly well in part sun. Corydalis grows 12 to 24 inches tall with a spread of 6 to 12 inches. It prefers dry to medium wet soil and will perish if its "feet are wet" in the winter. For added variety and color Corydalis is also available in blue and white. Corydalis will self-seed readily. It is, however, easily removed if you should find it in a place that is not to your liking.



**Solomon's Seal
-*Polygonatum
biflorum***

Look for Solomon's Seal as you wander down the path that winds its way through the Shade Garden. It is an elegant plant with slender, arching stems that are either green or tipped with white. The small, tubular white flowers dangle underneath the leaves in spring and early summer. Solomon's Seal grows 2 to 4 feet depending upon the variety and has the added bonus of turning a lovely shade of yellow in the fall.



Lungwort-pulmonaria

What an absolutely terrible name for a lovely plant! It was so named because the mottled leaves look like a diseased lung and the plant was used to treat lung diseases in the 16th and 17th century. If you can get past the name, however, you will be truly rewarded with a wonderful plant for your shade garden. In early to late spring, blooms appear with buds that are pink and flowers that are blue. The foliage ranges from plain green to heavily covered in silver. Lungwort's form rosettes, then more as plants expand which they do without becoming invasive. After flowering, the leaves can look "tired" in which case you just cut them off and you will be rewarded with fresh new leaves. A mature plant, when not in flower, will resemble a Hosta and be 10 to 18 inches tall and 12 to 24 inches wide. In the Shade Garden, you can find Lungwort at the top of the hill, nearer to Meadowbrook Road.

"Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago." -Warren Buffett



Goat's Beard-Aruncus

If you are looking for a little height, drama and movement in your shade garden, then do consider Goat's Beard. It's a big bushy plant that looks more like a shrub than a typical perennial. Feathery plumes of creamy white flowers at the tips of its stems demand attention. Partial shade is best for this plant and although drought tolerant, it won't be very happy if too dry. In its native form, this is a big plant that will eventually reach 4 to 6 feet tall with equal spread. However, it can take Goat's Beard a full decade to reach that height and spread. If your garden is too small for the native variety, there are several varieties that are significantly smaller. "Kneiffii" is only about 3 feet tall and wide and will still offer the same feathery plumes which will add both color and movement to your shade garden.

A mature specimen of Goat's Beard can be found in Tollgate's Shade Garden in front of the split rail fence at the top of the hill nearer to the paved drive area.

A number of extraordinary plants really do thrive in the shade. Besides, you will be surprised by the amount of sun that actually reaches your shade garden in the morning or evening as the sun is lower in the sky. Plants in your shade garden will also receive filtered sun through the leaves and reflected light from surrounding surfaces. Cutting off the lower branches of your trees will add more light increasing the number of plants that will flourish.

Shade plants are not nearly as demanding of a gardener's time as sun perennials that require constant watering, fertilizing and dead-heading to look their best. All of the plants that we have highlighted here will grow well in Michigan with minimal care and attention. Many are readily available at your local nursery.

If you are unsure about how a plant will perform in your garden, ask a Master Gardener or visit a local garden center. They are happy to share their knowledge. An excellent reference source if you are interested in additional information about shade gardening is:

"Making the Most of Shade"
By: Larry Hodgson

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