

Made for the Shade

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The garden centers are chock full with a dazzling array of colorful plants well suited for sunny locations right now. They are right out front and center where they blind you with their glittering colors and shapes. Many a well seasoned gardener will admit to succumbing to the siren's lure of a new plant bursting with flowers, foliage or fruit. It is usually when one gets home and is removing that said plant(s) from the car that reality sets in. Oops, where am I going to find enough sun? Those Live Oaks have really grown haven't they?

Shade. Shady characters. Shady dealings. Sounds negative doesn't it? Doesn't have to be that way though. Here in the Lowcountry we tend to have fairly light shade. Our tree branches are high enough to let in some light; this gives us some leeway in our planting. Traditionally, plants with colorful flowers or foliage that thrive in the shade have conjured up images of the old somewhat bland stalwarts; coleus, impatiens, begonias. The tried and true can be a bit tired and true. However, newer introductions of the same families of plants for the shade garden are plentiful. Some of the new coleus even have an iridescence to their leaves.

There are even some plants said to favor more light that actually prefer to avoid the Carolina sun. Those gorgeous and brilliant *Sunpatiens®* impatiens are a perfect example. Yes, they do well in the sun but they really shine in a less bright location. A massed planting would light up a spot. While they come in all colors can you just envision an all white planting in the moonlight?

Surefire® begonias will be a surefire hit in that less than ideal spot. These have bright green angel wing leaves and multitudes of large red or rosy pink flowers. They are speedy growers, very showy and need less water than the impatiens. Hostas are a good plant to combine with

these begonias.

For the showiest, most colorful offerings for the shadier spots look for Wishbone flower (*Torenia*), Flowering tobacco (*Nicotiana*), Cleome, Justicia (formerly known as Jacobinia,) Black-eyed Susan vine (*Thunbergia*), Pentas and Caladiums. I am growing a new, for me, Caladium called 'Starburst' this year and, so far, it looks like it will be stunning.

For the past few summers I have been planting some small, relatively inexpensive Rex begonias under the trees. The foliage is super colorful and they seem quite happy there for the summer. While they are still small, these are low growing plants that will spread out over the summer. They are considered annuals here so I take cuttings into the house to root during the fall and replant them outdoors in spring. After several years now I have many nice containers of Rex begonias in addition to what I have planted in the ground.

Planting under the trees can be tricky if not impossible at times. While I usually advocate for planting the largest specimens you can afford, when it comes to planting under trees I go with smaller starter plants and give them a bit of extra attention. The planting holes can be smaller which means fewer tree roots will be disturbed. I work in a bit of compost and mulch well and water more often until the plants are established.

Once again the Beaufort Garden Club will be offering the Garden A Day tour, their gift to us from June 6th through June 10th. Five of the loveliest gardens in Beaufort will be open, free of charge, a different one each day. Visitors from around the world have favorably commented on what a treat this tour is. Be sure to look for additional details in this publication. I always use garden tours like this to garner ideas for my own garden and to learn more about what growing conditions work for different plants.

I can only cover a few of the colorful options for shady spaces that are out there. Visit your local independent garden center and see for yourself and ask questions. Their employees are generally very knowledgeable gardeners and they can tell you if a plant will really do well for you - in spite of what the label might say. It is hard not to be dazzled by plants this time of year. Just don't blame me when your credit card melts.