

# Green Thumb

Don't sweat the shade | *By Nancy Crowe*

If something shady is going on in your garden, you're not alone. The shade could be from trees (which provide countless benefits), your house (can't help that) or the neighbor's shed (hanging out there could be keeping him sane).

Shade limits what you can successfully grow, but plenty

of plants tolerate or love shade. Here are a few good choices.

## IMPATIENS

This annual may seem obvious, but it's a favorite for a reason. You get a lot of color and cheer for little investment, and they're OK

with partial to full shade. They do need a bit more water than other annuals, and they'll remind you by drooping and pouting. (Admit it; you've seen plants pout).

A nasty fungal disease, downy mildew, hit the common species (impatiens walleriana) hard a few years ago. Better disease resistance has emerged since then. The same anti-fungus precautions you'd take with all plants apply: water earlier in the day rather than later, make sure you have good drainage and consider using a soaker hose to direct water to the roots rather than the flowers and leaves.

## CALADIUM

Sometimes known as



PHOTO BY MISCHIFF FROM PIXABAY

The caladium, sometimes called elephant ear, is known for its colorful foliage.

elephant ear, caladiums are favored for their colorful foliage. Another point: They don't mind heat and humidity. Most will grow in full shade, but their colors won't be as vibrant as in partial shade, according to the University of Wisconsin.

They look great by themselves or paired with caladiums of different colors.

Also try pairing them with flowers (such as impatiens) of the same or contrasting shades. They're great in containers, too.

The caladium is a tender perennial, meaning it probably won't survive a northeast Indiana winter. You can overwinter them (type "Purdue publication HO-85" into your search

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Heuchera, also known as coral bells, will do well in shade or sun.



PHOTO BY KATIE MCMURRAY FROM PIXABAY

Hostas like this blue-leaf variety require shade, but not all of them do.



PHOTO BY URFORMAT FROM PIXABAY

You can find columbine flowers in a variety of colors and color combinations.

engine) or just grow them as annuals.

### HEUCHERA

I planted my Heuchera ‘Glitter’ for the same reason many of us choose our plants: They looked pretty at the nursery and I couldn’t resist. Year after year, they come up with lovely black-veined, purple and silvery foliage. In the summer they produce spiky, fuchsia-pink blooms. This variety is listed for part shade, full sun or full shade. The tag should just say, “Put me anywhere and I won’t be a minute’s trouble.”

Wherever you plant them, heucheras (also called

coral bells) like a moist, well-drained soil. New cultivars and hybrids are showing up, so your choices are many.

Even better: Pollinators like heucheras. Deer do not.

### HOSTA

Here’s another “Thank you, Captain Obvious” choice. And I get that some folks are tired of hostas. However, if you’re landscaping a weekend lake house, you may not want to spend a lot of your time there on fussy flowers. Hostas will live long and prosper, thriving where other plants won’t. They’ll even produce white, pink and lavender

blooms to lighten things up.

You can find hostas with green, blue-green, yellow, dark, light or variegated foliage. You can find them large (I saw a photo of a hosta leaf the size of a dinner plate) and small (the ‘Daisy Doolittle’ hybrid’s leaves are less than 2 inches long). Some hostas can be planted close together for ground cover. The point is, you can find them—and get help picking them out—at local

nurseries. Not all varieties are happy in all degrees of shade, so choose one whose requirements match your shady spot.

### COLUMBINE

The columbine is another favorite of pollinators and not on the deer menu. Columbines come in more than 70 species with bell-shaped, spurred flowers in pastels and bright colors.

They have that “I’m fine in this brick-bordered bed, but I’m really a wildflower” vibe.

You can either buy the plants or get columbine seeds and sow them directly into the ground in the spring after the last frost date, generally mid-May. They like a well-drained soil, and you can extend bloom time by deadheading faded flowers. In the fall, cut the foliage down to the ground and add 2 to 3 inches of mulch for protection.

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