



Shade Garden Design is Easy with Award-Winning Perennials

Some gardeners are discouraged by their shady landscapes. They believe their borders must be bereft of pretty perennials like the plants in their friends' sunny gardens. Shade gardeners fear not. Your beds and borders can be beautiful, too.

The Perennial Plant Association has chosen a Perennial of the Year since 1990 and plenty of their choices are suitable for shady sites. It's easy to create a beautiful design if you begin with these plants.

Palace Purple Coral Bells

Heuchera 'Palace Purple' was the first shade perennial named Perennial of the Year in 1991. Its bronze-purple maple-like leaves are red underneath creating a two-toned effect. Small, airy, creamy white flowers reach well above the 18-inch mounds of foliage in early summer.

Plant coral bells in rich, well-drained soil. They perform best in light to part shade. Prune winter-damaged foliage in early spring.

Aureola Hakone Grass



A striking combination of texture and color is created when *Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola'* is partnered with Palace Purple coral bells. Stunning green-striped gold, arching, grass-like foliage grows about 18 inches tall and wide. Let it cascade over the edge of the border.

Plant Aureola hakone grass in moist, well-drained soil amended with organic matter. Give them a mulch blanket when tucking them in for winter.

Variegated Solomon's Seal

Every garden needs an exclamation point to ease the banality, and the 2013 award-winning *Polygonatum odoratum 'Variegatum'* is an ideal choice. Growing up to 3 feet tall, gracefully arching stems hold small, white, and fragrant bell-like flowers. In late summer, the flowers are followed by bluish black berries. In fall, the white-margined green foliage changes to yellow.

Grow variegated Solomon's seal in moist, well-drained soil rich with organic matter and it will form a charming colony.

Sprite Astilbe

Another contender for the front of the border is the 1994 Perennial Plant of the Year and a mainstay in any shade garden: *Astilbe 'Sprite'*. It boasts shell-pink flower plumes over a mound of finely-textured bronze-tinted green leaves in mid to late summer.

Sprite Astilbe grows best in rich, consistently moist soil. Apply mulch in spring to help conserve moisture. Divide plants every couple years to keep them looking their best.

Lenten Rose

Whether or not it ever won an award, no shade garden would be complete without *Helleborus x hybridus*. Commonly called Lenten roses because of their very early bloom time, their flowers fade so delightfully they last in the garden for up to three months. Flowers may be white, light pink, red, purple, or a light shade of lime green.



Dark green, glossy and leathery, evergreen foliage on plants up to 2 feet tall and wide contribute bold texture to the shade garden ó a suitable companion for a Japanese painted fern, another award recipient.

Plant Lenten roses in moist, well-drained soil amended with organic matter. If their leaves get ragged in winter, prune plants back as new leaves begin to grow in spring.

Japanese Painted Fern



One of my favorite perennial ferns, *Athyrium niponicum* 'Pictum' is the pinnacle of foliage color and texture. Soft grey-green fronds lightly brushed with silver feature burgundy midribs. Arching, elegant, fine-textured foliage is a sharp contrast to the large, heart-shaped leaves of Jack Frost false forget-me-nots and the dark green, coarse texture of Lenten rose. Plant this trio and be prepared to be wowed.

Japanese painted ferns grow up to 18 inches tall and wide. Plant them in rich, moist but well-drained soil. Trim fronds to the ground in early spring.

Jack Frost False Forget-me-Not

Last of the Perennial Plants of the Year for shady sites, but certainly not least, *Brunnera* 'Jack Frost' received the coveted award in 2012. Also commonly called Siberian bugloss, it forms mounds of silvery white heart-shaped leaves veined and rimmed in green. Masses of tiny blue forget-me-not-like flowers rise above the foliage in spring.

Jack Frost *Brunnera*, weighing in at about a foot tall and a bit wider, belongs at the edge of the garden in average, well-drained soil.

By combining these prize-winning perennials, the design of your beautiful shade garden is well underway.



Diana Stoll is a horticulturist and the garden center manager at The Planter Palette, 28W571 Roosevelt Rd., Winfield, IL 60190. Call 630-293-1040 ext. 2 or visit their website at www.planterspalette.com.