



## Landscaping in Dry Shade 15 Great Landscape Plants for Dry, Shady Areas

*Helen Muntz and Larry Rupp*

Finding the right landscape plants for dry areas that are also shady can be challenging. Most of the drought tolerant plants used in Utah's residential and commercial landscapes come from dry environments and are adapted to full sun. Therefore, these plants do not grow well in shaded environments.

Shade produces a microclimate with unique cooling effects, reduced soil evaporation and reduced plant transpiration (Lin & Lin, 2010). In spite of the common perception that shade gardens are always cool and moist, often there is not ample soil moisture. Often the very conditions that create shade can reduce soil moisture. For example, the soil beneath the canopy of a mature blue spruce is heavily shaded; however, between the canopy's ability to shed snow and water to the drip zone and the water demand of the tree itself, the soil immediately underneath the tree can be very dry. This is especially true in Utah where high elevation and low humidity increases solar radiation and transpiration from the very canopy that may be creating the shade (Mee, et al., 2003).

Typically, shade plants have developed certain traits such as thin, shade adapted leaves that are less adapted to resist water loss. On the other hand, adaptive traits of most drought tolerant plants to full sun, such as small pubescent or thick succulent leaves, reduce their ability to grow in a shaded environment. The end result is a paradox where the adaptations which make a plant shade tolerant may also make it drought intolerant and the adaptations that make a plant drought tolerant may also make it shade intolerant.

The challenge to gardeners is to find plants that are tolerant of both shade and drought. In spite of the challenges of dry shade, there are a number of plants that can perform well in such an environment. Utah State University Extension compiled a list of plants that grow in dry shade. The list was sent in survey form to the Utah Public Garden Network to verify excellent performance of these plants when grown in dry shade. The following is a list of 15 plants that perform well in dry shade areas.

# Top 15 Plants for Dry Shade

## Key To Symbols:

-  Partial Shade / Low Water
-  Full Shade / Low Water
-  Partial Shade / Moderate Water
-  Full Shade / Moderate Water
-  Deer Resistant
-  Attracts Butterflies
-  Attracts Hummingbirds

## USDA Hardiness Zones:

- 3 -40 To -30 °F
- 4 -30 To -20 °F
- 5 -20 To -10 °F
- 6 -10 To -0 °F
- 7 0 To 10 °F

### 1. *Alchemilla mollis* / Lady's Mantle



Lady's mantle is a medium-sized, mounding perennial hardy to zone 3. It grows 1-1 ½ feet tall and 1 ½-2 ½ feet wide, with lime green, medium-large leaves. Lady's mantle produces chartreuse flower clusters in June. Its flowers are good for cut or dried floral arrangements.



Bloom Season	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Color Options			

### 2. *Aquilegia* / Columbine



There are numerous species and varieties of columbine. They generally grow about 2 feet tall and 1 foot wide, and are hardy to zone 3. Columbine have light green, fernlike foliage and produce drooping flowers attractive to hummingbirds. Columbine cultivars are available in a variety of colors from whites, yellows, blues, and reds to bicolored.



Bloom Season	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Color Options			

### 3. *Mahonia repens* / Creeping Oregon grape



*Mahonia repens*, commonly called creeping Oregon grape, is a small woody evergreen native groundcover growing to about 2 feet tall and wide and hardy to Zone 4. Creeping Oregon grape has dark green, holly-like leaves and produces clusters of yellow flowers followed by blue-purple berries in fall.



Bloom Season	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Color Options	Yellow	Light Green	Light Green

### 5. *Convallaria majalis* / Lily of the valley



*Convallaria majalis*, commonly called lily of the valley, is a low growing perennial about ½ to 1 foot tall. It spreads by rhizomes and is hardy to zone 3. It has deep green, large, lily-like leaves and produces very small white and fragrant nodding flowers in early spring.



Bloom Season	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Color Options	Light Green	Light Green	Light Green

### 4. *Brunnera macrophylla* / Siberian bugloss



*Brunnera* is a mounding perennial, 1 ½ feet tall by 1 ½- 2 ½ feet wide hardy to zone 3. Foliage is heart-shaped, dark green or with silver/white variegated leaves depending on the variety. It is also commonly called “false forget-me-not” after the small blue flowers produced in spring.



Bloom Season	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Color Options	Blue	Light Green	Light Green

### 6. *Corydalis lutea* / Yellow corydalis



Photo credit: Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder

*Corydalis* is a mounding, herbaceous perennial growing 1 to 1 ½ feet tall and wide and hardy to zone 4. It produces small nodding yellow flowers on top of medium green, fern-like foliage, and blooms sporadically spring through fall.



Bloom Season	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Color Options	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow

### 7. *Epimedium x rubrum* / Red barrenwort

Photo credit: Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder



Red barrenwort is a perennial groundcover, 8-12 inches tall, and hardy to zone 4. Foliage is light green and heart shaped. It produces small nodding red blooms in May.



Bloom Season	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Color Options			

### 8. *Galium odoratum* / Sweet woodruff



Sweet woodruff is an herbaceous perennial groundcover that grows 1/2 to 1 foot tall and is hardy to zone 4. Foliage is light green and whorled. It produces small clusters of white fragrant flowers in April and May.



Bloom Season	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Color Options			

### 9. *Hedera helix* / English ivy



*Hedera helix*, commonly called English ivy, is a woody climbing and spreading perennial with dark green, lobed foliage. It is hardy to zone 4 and grown for its vine-like or groundcover foliage. It rarely produces inconspicuous green-white flowers.



Bloom Season	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Color Options			

### 10. *Heuchera* spp. / Coral bells



Photo credit: Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder

Heuchera, commonly called coral bells, is an herbaceous perennial with a mounding habit that grows 1 to 1 1/2 feet tall and wide. Coral bells are hardy to zone 4 and produce small showy white, red, or pink flowers on stalks above the foliage. Coral bells brighten shade gardens with varieties of colored foliage: reds, oranges, and lime greens.



Bloom Season	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Color Options			

**11. *Hosta* spp. / Hosta**



Photo credit: Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder

Hostas are herbaceous perennials that come in many varieties, ranging from 6 inches to 3 feet tall and wide and they are hardy to zone 4. Hostas are primarily grown for foliage which range in size, shape, and variegated colors of green, white, and lime. They also produce fragrant flowers on tall stalks in late summer.



Bloom Season	SPRING			SUMMER			FALL		
Color Options									

**12. *Hypericum calycinum* / St. John's wort**



Photo credit: Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder

*Hypericum calycinum*, commonly called St. John's wort, is a small spreading groundcover that grows to about 1 foot tall and is hardy to zone 4. St. John's wort has medium green oval foliage and produces 5-petaled, rose-like bright yellow flowers in summer.



Bloom Season	SPRING			SUMMER			FALL		
Color Options									

**13. *Lamiaeum galeobdolon* / Yellow archangel**



Photo credit: Missouri Botanical Garden Plant Finder

*Lamiaeum galeobdolon*, commonly called yellow archangel, is a mounding herbaceous perennial that grows to 1 to 1 1/2 feet tall and wide and is hardy to zone 4. Yellow archangel has green and silver variegated foliage and produces small yellow flowers on stalks in June, with secondary blooms in fall if dead-headed.



Bloom Season	SPRING			SUMMER			FALL		
Color Options									

**14. *Rhus aromatica* / 'Gro-Low' fragrant sumac**



*Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-Low', commonly called Gro-Low fragrant sumac, is a low-growing shrub reaching 2 to 3 feet tall and 3 to 6 feet wide and is hardy to zone 3. Fragrant sumac has medium green leaves that turn vibrant red in fall and produces insignificant white-yellow flowers in spring.



Bloom Season	SPRING			SUMMER			FALL		
Color Options									

## 15. *Tiarella cordifolia* / Foamflower



*Tiarella cordifolia*, commonly called foamflower, is a clumping herbaceous perennial that grows to 1 foot tall by 1 to 2 feet wide and is hardy to zone 4. Foamflower has sharply lobed foliage available in several variegated colors such as greens and reds. Foamflower produces showy, airy white or pink flower stalks.



Bloom Season	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
Color			
Options			

## References

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