

Herbaceous Plants for Shady Conditions

Herbaceous perennials are plants which flourish year after year but whose foliage usually dies down in the winter months so there is no secondary, woody growth. The heart of a perennial is underground in a root ball or tuber and they can get congested with old growth if left to grow wild. To rejuvenate old plants and to create new ones, the perennial should be divided every 3rd or 4th winter when the plant is dormant. Division can normally be done with a fork or spade and will often require some force.

Herbaceous perennials are traditionally seen as cottage garden plants to be planted in mixed or herbaceous borders and some of the plants listed will work better in this setting. Others, however are spectacular plants in their own right and wouldn't look out of place in a container or on a modern roof garden - herbaceous perennials are becoming trendy once more!

Planting in the shade is often feared for its perceived difficulty and lack of interest. Many gardeners rely on old favourites that are well known and well loved, but are not right for the conditions. A sun loving plant will never thrive in the shade and your garden should only be stocked with plants that flourish. With the right plants in place, shady planting can be just as exciting as - and arguably more interesting than - the ubiquitous 'Mediterranean' style garden.

Most shade lovers prefer moist soil and very few plants will flourish in dry shade. Unfortunately, London gardens are often beset with thin, dry soil, but this can be transformed by adding plenty of bulky, organic matter in the form of well rotted manure, composted bark, leaf mold or home-made compost. This will aid water retention, add air and improve the nutrition of your soil.

This list highlights some of our favourites, but is meant only as an initial guide. For more advice, please contact the nursery and speak to our expert staff.



Ajuga reptans. A low, creeping, evergreen plant grown for its waxy leaves that range in colour from bottle green to pink. The spikes of blue to violet flower are a bright bonus in spring and its toleration of full shade and poor soil make it a London gardener's friend. H15cm

Alchemilla mollis. Attractive clouds of lime-green flowers sit above large, toothed, mid green leaves throughout the summer. 'Lady's Mantle' is great in a 'cottage' garden and ideal for use between paving and in other tight spaces where it softens hard



edges and fills in space. H. 30cm.



Astilbe sp. Striking plumes of flower range from greeny white to blood red and sway above the toothed foliage in summer. Astilbe's provide great colour and drama in damp conditions. Height 40 - 90cm

Astrantia major. Long-lasting white, pink or red spiky pom-poms of flowers rise above attractive leaves in June and July. The flowers last well, both on the plant and when cut and dried. Astrantia is a prolific self seeder and will naturalise well. H 60cm.



Bergenia cultivars. The broad rubbery leaves of Begenia can be mid green or deep bronze and provide and juxtaposition to the surprisingly delicate clusters of small, bright pink flowers in spring. Begenia will spread well in awkward areas. Height 30-40cm

Brunnera macrophylla. Sprays of pretty, blue, forget-me-not flowers rise above, heart-shaped, patterned leaves in May-June. Naturalises well in dappled shade and add shady interest to a cottage or woodland garden. Height 30-45cm.



Cimicifuga simplex. Large ternate leaves can be plum red or mid green and hold tall, arching spikes of foamy, pink to white flowers in autumn. Cimicifuga is a tall, striking plant that will dominate its surroundings and look good in a 'natural' planting scheme. H 1-2m

Convallaria majalis. '*Lily-of-the-Valley*' leaves are plain and unexciting, but the beautiful, heady scent of the subtle, short lived flowers make them a joy to grow. Great for under planting where the fragrant flowers will be surprise the unaware. Height 20cm



Corydalis flexuosa. Tubular blue, yellow or white flowers dance on top of feathery mid green occasionally red tinged foliage in late spring and summer. A delicate appearance belies a tough plant that spreads freely and will soon colonise a shady corner. H 30cm

Dicentra spectabilis. Red, pink or white heart shaped flowers arch gracefully over the deeply incised, feathery foliage in March and April. A beautiful cottage garden plant that perfectly sums up its common name – Bleeding Heart. Height 60cm.



Digitalis sp. Common Foxgloves produce tall spikes of pink/purple, bell shaped flowers every other year and are fixture

in many gardens for their longevity and absolute ease of use. But there are many other varieties and colours available. Height 1-2m

Epimedium sp. A clump forming perennial with toothed, mid green leaves that emerge red, before turning green and then red again in autumn. The delicate red and yellow, flowers perch above the foliage in spring. Delicate in appearance but tough in character. Height 15-60cm



Geranium sp. There are so many species to choose from this popular genus. All have dense foliage that provides effective groundcover and plenty of pretty flowers that are often produced all summer. Read the labels carefully, as some prefer full sun. Height 45-60cm.

Helleborus sp. The evergreen clumps of leathery leaves provide excellent groundcover and flowers appear from December to April. Colours range from apple green to mauve and may be spotted or speckled - all are beautiful. Height 60cm.



Heuchera cultivars. Some are grown for foliage and some for flowers, very few are grown for both, though one or the other is usually strikingly attractive. Large serrated leaves range from deep plum to bright yellow and hold aloft a spike of small, white to red, bell shaped flowers. This evergreen plant provides fantastic ground cover. Height 30-50cm.

Heucherella tiarelloides. An evergreen plant that resulted from a cross between Heuchera and Tiarella. Heucherella provides great, ground cover and has pretty sprays of flower all spring and autumn. Leaf and flower colours range through many colours. H 20-30cm



Hosta sp. Grown mainly for their large, fleshy, green or variegated leaves, Hostas also have tall spikes of nodding mauve flowers that are often overlooked but worth seeking out. Great as ground cover or slug food – take precautions! Height 30cm.

Ligularia dentate. A striking plant with beautiful, big, dark green leaves with a dark purple underside. Tall flower stems hold spikes of ragged, deep yellow flowers. Ligularia is an arresting plant for damp shade. Height 1m.



Primula The genus of Primula holds many useful species. They generally have large green leaves and umbels of flower on slender stems. Look for P. bulleyana, P. beesiana, P. denticulata, P. pulverulenta, P. veris, P vialii and P, vulgaris, all of which are beautiful. Av height 30cm

Pulmonaria sp. Tubular flowers rise above mid green, white spotted, rough textured leaves in late winter and early spring. Excellent, spreading, groundcover for dappled shade or. Height 20cm.



Thalictrum sp. A surprisingly sunny looking plant that thrives in partial shade and puts up small cottony balls of purple flower on tall, delicate stems. When planted in numbers, Thalictrum makes a soft purple mist in summer. Height 60-150cm

Tiarella sp. Similar to Heuchera, but with more pronounced flowers and less spectacular leaves. Tiarella provides fantastic ground cover, flowers freely and spreads well in difficult conditions. Height 30cm



Tricyrtis sp. Small, but perfectly formed, Orchid-like flowers are borne on arching stems from late summer to autumn. Flower colours range from white to purple to yellow and are borne on tall, upright stems. Tricyrtis is an unusual plant that should be grown more often. Height 80cm



Trillium sp. A low growing, clump forming, plant that has large mid green leaves and big, triangular flowers on short stems. This rare and often expensive plant is stunning woodland feature and comes with white, red, purple and sometimes yellow flowers. Height 20-60cm



Viola sp. Plants are often 'common' for a reason and Violets are a case in point. This native, woodland plant is small but perfectly formed and is a must for a shady corner where its pretty flowers can add scent and colour. Height 8-15cm

