

Shade Gardening

Gardening in the shade can be a challenge, but it is not impossible. In fact, it can be fun and creative as long as a few facts are known and rules followed.

There are two kinds of shade. One kind is shade from trees, especially low hanging trees that leave an unsightly bare spot underneath. Another kind of shade is shade from buildings and fences. Large grasses, bushes, and plants can easily be planted by buildings and fences.

Trees have roots that need air. These roots do not want to be covered up and smothered. A tree protects itself and does not like competition, thus the bare spot. First, decide if the tree stays and will be a focal point. One option is to trim the branches allowing sunlight in for grasses and other plants to grow. Only one inch of soil should be added under a tree to grow shade tolerant grass and other plants. Any more soil will smother the tree roots and the tree will eventually die.

When grass is chosen to fill in the bare spot under a tree(s), there are options. First, know that the most popular lawn grass in our area is Bermuda. It does not tolerate shade of any kind. Tall fescue is a cool weather grass and is best suited for shade. Also, cool weather Kentucky Bluegrass is a good shade-tolerant grass. Next, but not as hardy, would be warm weather Zoysiagrass. If planting by seed, plant the cool weather grasses in the fall and buy a mixture of a blend of Fescues and Kentucky Bluegrass. Zoysiagrass is planted in the spring and does best if sod is planted. Know that all plants need about 4 hours

of sunlight to do well. If a dense tree canopy does not offer that, the grass will be thin and look pointed. Grass planted in the shade will dry out slowly due to limited sunlight. Thus, the prolonged time in moisture can cause grass disease.

A good option to plant in the bare spots around trees is ground cover. The roots will not compete with the tree and there are many choices of groundcover. On the back of OSU fact sheet [HLA-6608](#) (Managing Turf Grass in the Shade) is a long list of alternative plants that can be used under trees rather than grass. Just a few of the many shade ground covers are: Bishops weed, Vinca minor, Bugleweed, and Sedum. In general, drought tolerant shade plants such as Bugleweed do well in the shade.

Artificial Garden matter can also look attractive in bare spots. Gravel comes in many colors. Wood chips and artificial grass are also options.

As far as structure shade, there is a wide variety of shrubs, vines, and tall vegetation that can be planted beside buildings and fences. Be creative. It is attractive to have plants side by side that have different leaf shapes and shades of green. Some choices: climbing ivies, climbing hydrangeas, coleus , golden hostas, to name a few.

Although there are many shade plants, not all garden stores will carry a large variety of such. A specialty nursery, especially one that deals in shade plants, is the best place to shop.

For more information on Gardening In The Shade, please refer to OSU fact sheets [HLA-6608](#), [HLA-6419](#), [HLA-6418](#) or call the Tulsa Master Gardeners helpline at 918-746-3701.