

Dry Soil: Shade or Under Trees

Dry shade locations are some of the most difficult sites to grow plants. Under trees, competition is keen for water, light and nutrients. This list represents tough plants that can survive under trees or in dry low light conditions. All are winter hardy in Zones 3 and 4, with the exception of *Epimedium*, which is not hardy in Zone 3. Spring flowering bulbs are often overlooked for the dry shade garden; they work well in deciduous shade areas.

Compiled by Theresa Rooney, Hennepin County Master Gardener. Theresa gardens under a 100-year-old elm tree and very sandy soil (with 2 large dogs).



Plan a path to enjoy wild geranium, hosta, wild ginger, and sweet woodruff.



Daffodils are a good choice under trees; they like dry summer conditions.

Botanical Name	Common Name	Height	Comments
<i>Ajuga reptans</i>	ajuga, bugleweed	6"-12"	Groundcover with purple flowers; various leaf colors; can be short-lived.
<i>Alchemilla mollis</i>	lady's mantle	1'	Pretty light green leaves; yellow/green flowers; good cut flower.
<i>Anthyrium angustum</i>	lady fern	2'	Graceful green fronds; wonderful with hosta, coral bells, or bergenia.
<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	columbine	1-3'	Short-lived but self-seeds; yellow/red flowers on native form; nice bluegreen foliage.
<i>Aruncus dioicus</i>	goatsbeard	4-6'	Foliage similar to astilbe; white flower adds light and coolness to the shade garden.
<i>Asarum canadense</i>	wild ginger	12"	Matte round leaves will hide tiny flowers; great groundcover.
<i>Bergenia cordifolia</i>	bergenia	12-18"	Thick glossy leaves similar to cabbage; pink flowers in spring; red/burgundy fall color.
<i>Brunnera macrophylla</i>	Siberian bugloss	1-2'	Light blue to pale purple flowers bloom in spring.
<i>Catharanthus rosea</i>	periwinkle, vinca	6-12"	Showy flowers and leathery leaves.
<i>Chionodoxa luciliae</i>	glory-of-the-snow	6"	Small early flowers with open petals and yellow centers; easy to grow.
<i>Clematis virginiana</i>	virgin's bower	5-10'	Tiny white flowers mid- to late summer; great native vine.
<i>Convallaria majalis</i>	lily-of-the-valley	12"	Spreading groundcover; fragrant white bell flowers in early summer.
<i>Dicentra eximia</i>	fringed bleeding heart	12-18"	Bluegreen foliage; white or pink flowers; flowers most of summer.
<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	foxglove	2-4'	Allow self-seeding for a perennial bed; poisonous.
<i>Epimedium</i> spp.	barrenwort	1'	Beautiful heart shaped leaves; tiny orchid-like flowers in spring.
<i>Galanthus nivalis</i>	snowdrops	4-8"	Small, nodding, white bell-shaped flowers often bloom while snow is on the ground.
<i>Galium odoratum</i>	sweet woodruff	4-12"	Pretty groundcover with white fragrant flowers.
<i>Geranium</i> spp.	geranium, cranesbill	12-18"	Many flower colors and leaf shapes; <i>Geranium maculatum</i> is native.
<i>Lamium</i> spp.	dead nettle	8-12"	White or pink flowers; leaves are streaked with white/silver; good groundcover.
<i>Leucojum aestivum</i>	summer snowflake	1-2'	Nodding white flowers similar to <i>Galanthus</i> , but much larger and later blooming.
<i>Narcissus</i> spp.	daffodil	6-24"	Wide variety of colors and bloom time; wildlife will not eat daffodils.
<i>Polygonatum biflorum</i>	giant Solomon's seal	1-3'	Arching branches; small white flowers in spring; blue berries in summer.
<i>Puschkinia scilloides</i>	striped squill	2-6"	Pale flowers with a wonderful fragrance, if you can get that close to the ground.
<i>Scilla sibirica</i>	Siberian squill	6"	Blue flowers that naturalize wonderfully, especially in wooded areas.
<i>Vinca minor</i>	periwinkle, myrtle	6-12"	Blue flowers in spring; evergreen; may need winter protection; groundcover.