

Creating a Tropical Shade Garden

Keri Leymaster, Extension Faculty, Residential Horticulture

Choosing plants for shady areas of your landscape can be a daunting task, but taking the time to find the right plants will reward you with a beautiful, thriving garden. Selecting the right plants for the right place will help your garden to need less maintenance and be more successful. The plants listed in this publication are not all-inclusive, but they will give you a strong palette of plants to work with in Central Florida.



Figure 1. *Stromanthe 'Triostar'*

Shade in the landscape can change throughout the year and each day, so determine the type of shade (partial, dappled or full shade) and where you will need to select shade loving plants. Consider the shifting angles of the sun's rays since parts of your lawn may receive much more sun during the summer months when the sun is at its most intense. Plants grown in shade will do best avoiding mid-day sun from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., but will grow well with early morning or late day light.



Figure 2. *Golden Shrimp Plant*

To create a landscape with strong visual interest, use plants to create layers that will combine different textures and colors that will create depth and stand out well in shaded areas. For instance, plants with white in their leaves or flowers will almost seem to glow in a dark setting (Figures 1 and 2). Even lighter shades of green or chartreuse, such as those in foxtail ferns, will stand out against darker green leaves and complement the textures and forms of each plant. Consider trying plants traditionally used as houseplants in your landscape since they are well adapted to low light levels and there are many choices of colors and shapes that will add a tropical feel to your garden.




To create a landscape with strong visual interest, use plants to create layers that will combine different textures and colors that will create depth and stand out well in shaded areas. For instance, plants with white in their leaves or flowers will almost seem to glow in a dark setting (Figures 1 and 2). Even lighter shades of





green or chartreuse, such as those in foxtail ferns, will






Figure 3. *Foxtail Ferns*

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M. University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.

Annuals & Bedding Plants	Height	Season	Typical Color	Shade tolerance
Begonias	2'	Spring-Fall	Reds, Pinks, White	Up to Full Shade
Caladiums	1-2'	Spring-Fall	White, Red, Pink	Up to Full Shade
Coleus	3'	Spring-Fall	Red, Orange, Yellow leaves	Light Shade
Crossandra	2'	Spring-Fall	Orange or Yellow 	Up to Full Shade
Impatiens	2'	Spring-Fall	All colors	Up to Full Shade
Pansy	1'	Fall-Spring	All colors	Partial Shade
Violas	1'	Fall-Spring	All colors	Partial Shade
Groundcovers	Height	Growth Rate	Habit	Shade tolerance
Algerian Ivy (<i>Hedera canariensis</i>)	6"	Medium	White-green leaves	Partial to Full Shade
Asiatic jasmine (<i>Trachelospermum asiaticum</i>)	6-12"	Medium	Non-climbing; Green and variegated forms	Partial to Full Shade
Bromeliads (<i>Neoregelia sp.</i>)	1'	Slow 	Many bright colors available	Partial to Full Shade
Cast Iron Plant (<i>Aspidistra elatior</i>)	1-2'	Slow	Upright leaves	Partial to Full Shade
Liriope (<i>Liriope sp</i>)	12"	Slow	Grass-like; green and variegated form	Partial
Mondo Grass (<i>Ophiopogon japonicus</i>)	3"-1'	Slow	Dwarf and regular forms	Light to Full Shade
Perennials	Height	Habit	Color	Shade tolerance
Asparagus Fern (<i>Asparagus densiflorus</i>)	1-2'	Bushy	Bright green	Up to Full Shade
Elephant Ears (<i>Alocasia, Colocasia</i>)	2-4'	Upright	Large, tropical leaves	Light Shade
Golden Shrimp Plant (<i>Pachystachys lutea</i>)	3-4'	Upright	Yellow flowers on deep green plants	Light to Deep Shade
Holly Fern (<i>Cyrtomium falcatum</i>)	1-2'	Bushy	Deep green leaves	Full Shade to Partial Shade
Jacobinia (<i>Justicia carnea</i>)	2-4'	Upright, bush-like	Pink, yellow, or orange plumes of flowers 	Light to Full Shade

Leopard Plant (<i>Farfugium sp.</i>)	2-3'	Slow	Large, tropical leaves 	Partial to Full Shade
Kaffir Lily – Clivia (<i>Clivia miniata</i>)	2'	Evergreen bulb	Orange flowers with large strap leaves	Partial Shade
Peacock Ginger (<i>Kaempferia sp.</i>)	6"-3'	Spreading, low	Low, mottled leaves with small purple flowers	Light to Full Shade
Persian Shield (<i>Strobilanthes dyerianus</i>) 	Up to 4'	Rounded, upright	Beautiful purple foliage	Light to Full Shade
Sanchezia (<i>Sanchezia nobilis</i>)	3-4'	Upright	Yellow and green foliage	Light to Full Shade
Stromanthe (<i>Stromanthe sanguinea</i> 'Triostar')	2-3'	Upright	White and green leaves with pink undersides	Partial to Full Shade
Walking Iris (<i>Neomarica sp.</i>)	2-3'	Upright	Thin leaves with white, blue, or yellow flowers	Light to Full Shade
Shrubs	Height	Habit	Color	Shade tolerance
Aucuba (<i>Aucuba japonica</i>)	5-6'	Upright	Green and yellow leaves 	Full Shade
Azalea hybrids (<i>Rhodendron sp.</i>)	2-6'	Broad, spreading	Flower color depends on variety	Partial Shade
Beauty Berry (<i>Callicarpa Americana</i>)	3-4'	Spreading	Purple berries in autumn	Partial Shade
Fatsia (<i>Fatsia japonica</i>)	3-4'	Upright	Large green glossy leaves	Partial Shade
Gardenia (<i>Gardenia augusta</i>)	5-6'	Spreading	Showy spring color and sweet scent	Partial Shade
Hydrangea (<i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i>)	3-5'	Spreading	Blue, pink, or white flowers 	Full Shade

Japanese Boxwood (<i>Buxus microphylla</i>)	3-4'	Globose, compact	Tight shapes with small green leaves	Partial to Full Shade 
Japanese Cleystera (<i>Ternstroemia gymnanthera</i>)	12-15'	Upright	White flowers	Partial to Full Shade
Palms and Small Trees	Height	Growth Rate	Habit	Shade tolerance
Chinese Fan Palm (<i>Livistonia chinensis</i>)	25'	Slow	Slow to form trunk	Partial Shade
Dwarf Palmetto (<i>Sabal minor</i>)	6'	Slow	Low growing, no trunk formed	Partial Shade to Full Shade
Lady Palm (<i>Rhapis excelsa</i>)	7'	Moderate	Shiny, palmate leaves	Partial Shade to Full Shade
Parlor Palm (<i>Chamaedorea elegans</i>)	3-5'	Slow 	Often see several planted together	Partial Shade to Full Shade
Podocarpus (<i>Podocarpus sp.</i>)	10-20'	Moderate	Evergreen, easily pruned for size	Partial Shade
Slender Lady Palm (<i>Rhapis humilis</i>)	13'	Slow	Palmate leaves, thin trunks 	Partial Shade to Full Shade
Windmill Palm (<i>Trachycarpus fortunei</i>)	Up to 20'	Slow	Palmate leaves, fiber covered trunk	Partial Shade

Plants compiled from the following publications:

1. "Selected Shrubs for Central Florida." Circular 499, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida.
2. "Bulbs for Florida." Circular 552, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Available at the EDIS website <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg029>
3. "Gardening with Annuals in Florida." Circular 1134, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Available at the EDIS website at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/mg319>