

Ten Plants for Your Winter Shade Garden

When your beloved and lovely hostas die down this fall and there is nothing but an empty void to look at in your shade garden, what's a gardener to do? Don't sulk – take heart. There are numerous satisfying fill-in plants to carry you through those drab days of winter. Here are ten good suggestions:

1. **Hellebores.** This perennial grows 1–3 feet tall, has basal clumps of substantial, long-stalked green leaves, divided fan-like into leaflets. For large late winter flowers, try the 'lenten rose' or the 'Christmas rose.' They are treasures to behold. These guys love to be under high-branching trees.
2. **Skimmia.** Slow-growing and compact, this evergreen shrub blends well with all shade plants. It has glossy, dark green leaves neatly arranged and sports tiny white flowers in spring. But fall and winter bring those bright red holly-like berries that add pizzazz. (You'll need both male and female plants to have berries.)
3. **Mountain Laurel.** Another slow-grower, and a cousin of the rhododendron. It reaches 4–6 feet with equal spread and has nice glossy, leathery, oval leaves with clusters of pink buds which open to apple blossom type flowers in late spring. This one loves partial shade and acid soil.
4. **Camellia.** Since there are over 3,000 named kinds of camellias to choose from, why not ask your local nursery for one to fit your needs. This evergreen shrub ranges in color, size, and form, and with its lovely variety of blooms, adds great interest to cold weather gardens.
5. **Leucothoe.** This plant loves woodsy, shady settings. A relative to the pieris, it too has leathery green leaves and clusters of urn-shaped white flowers. It is more attractive in masses than individually, and offers great bronze-tinged winter foliage.
6. **Sarcococca.** A Himalayan native, this evergreen maintains a slow growth and polished leaf appearance reaching 3–6 feet in height. However, if you wish low growth, the 'humilis', a local favorite, seldom grows taller than 1 1/2 feet. Dark green, glossy, narrow-oval pointed leaves, close set on the branches are characteristic. Fragrant white flowers arrive in late winter, followed by blue-black berries.
7. **Heuchera.** Otherwise known as 'coral bells', our beloved heuchera brings joy to any gardener. With its compact evergreen size, this perennial shows off round, scalloped leaves with slender wiry stems 15–30 inches high. Its open clusters of nodding bell-shaped flowers come in many colors lasting spring through summer. Try the burgundy-foliaged variety to cheer up those extra shady areas.

8. **Wintergreen.** Only 4–5 inches high, this small green-leaved lovely shows off petite white flowers in summer, followed up by red berries for fall and winter enjoyment.

9. **Ajuga.** What's not to love? This under appreciated ground cover is called the 'carpet bugle' for good reason. It spreads out by runners, taking on a bronze colored cast throughout the year. Come early spring we are rewarded once again with its bright blue upright blooms.

10. **Vinca.** This one is vigorous, so do keep it in check. But it requires no real care, and covers the ground with dark green vines with lots of pretty, shiny leaves. For a real contrast to winter blahs, try the variegated vinca, to lighten up that shade garden and fill the void.

There are many more plants available to fill in for those temporarily faded away perennials, but the ones listed above are hardy and reliable. Clark County gardens have it made in the shade.

References

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