

Shade Gardening in South Texas – Part 2 of 2

Many of the plants which grow and provide bright color in sunny areas either stop blooming or die when the area becomes shady. Although many gardeners feel that shady areas limit them to growing only green foliage plants, such as ferns, and ivy there are a whole spectrum of exciting possibilities for adding color to a shady region in your garden. Here in the Valley many of the plants from cooler more northern climes actually need some shade to do well during our long hot summers.

Some of the best blooming plants for growing in shady areas, generally available at your local nursery are: ageratum, caladium, coleus, gerbera daisy, impatiens and lobelia.

This article and the last Sunday's article will have discussed these colorful shade loving plants.

Gerbera Daisy. Geberas are a favorite of many, and if you enjoy colorful, dependable blossoms in your garden and elegant, long-lasting cut flowers in your home, you'll probably find they are one of your favorites also.

The traditional gerbera daisy, a native of South Africa, forms a clump of 10-inch long leaves, which resemble dandelion leaves. But from the center of this clump there arises a number of 18-inch long, willowy stems, each bearing a flawless 4-inch diameter flower. It is the color of gerberas which really make them so wonderful. Ranging from electric reds, pinks, oranges and yellows, to pastel salmons and creams, there are gerberas in nearly every color for any garden color scheme. Besides the traditional long-stemmed gerberas, there are new strains, such as "Happy Pot" which have shorter stems and are just as hardy and elegant, but being short, tolerate windy conditions. Whatever color of gerbera you choose, be sure to select a spot in the garden with bright to moderate shade, or some morning sun. Also be sure to mix plenty of peat moss and well rotted manure (available at your nursery center) or compost, as it is difficult to get too much organic matter for gerberas.

Two precautions to avoid, first, never plant directly into the heavy soil of our Valley without adding organic matter first, and second, take care when planting to never plant so deeply that you cover the crown of the plant, as these are two sure ways to kill a gerbera daisy. Water gerberas deeply and regularly, but be sure to allow them to become almost dry between waterings. If you are in doubt, DO NOT WATER, since over-watering is another cause of gerbera death. To keep gerberas in an almost constant state of bloom, feed them regularly with BR-61 with Magic Green, since it contains plenty of super-phosphate as well as chelated iron gerberas need. Gerberas are quite cold hardy - most even survived the two freezes of 1983 and 1989.

Impatiens. Impatiens is one of the most colorful and versatile of all shade-loving plants. Impatiens, also know as 'Busy Lizzie', because it blooms so generously and because it has been a favorite of shade gardeners since the days of England's Queen Victoria. Impatiens are particularly well suited to be used under shrubs along walkways, tucked into entranceway corners, mixed with coleus, caladium or lobelia or in a mass planting. Impatiens is also excellent in

pots, window boxes or hanging baskets, although it is a good idea not to hang pots in very windy areas. Remember during the Valley summers, regardless of how you plant them, put impatiens where they get moderate to deep shade. There are many kinds of impatiens ranging from dwarfs which are 4 to 8 ½ inches-tall to tall varieties which are 2 feet in height. The succulent stems are densely covered in glossy, dark green leaves frequently tinged with bronze. Although the foliage is nice, it is the flowers which are impatiens' crowning glory. Impatiens come in an incredible profusion of showy, single and double inch-wide blossoms which completely cover the plant in shades of pink, magenta, rose, red, salmon, lavender or white.

Impatiens will tolerate a wide range of conditions, but they do best if they are planted in well-drained, sandy soil with plenty of organic matter. Usually mix 1 cubic foot of organic matter in to a 10 square-foot area of Valley soil prior to planting as this will greatly benefit impatiens.

Impatiens do need regular watering. Their ability to recover rapidly after wilting from the lack of water, sometimes causes gardeners to use this plant as a gauge of when to water. But this is not recommended as this practice will eventually cause the plant to become spindly and leggy. Water impatiens before they wilt, and they will reward you with a bright profusion of color that adds "something special" to gardens in the shade.

Lobelia. Lobelia is a short trailing plant that provides a rich flow of intense, vivid blue flowers. Lobelia has tiny dark green leaves which are covered with deep rich blue blossoms over a long period. Lobelia is exceptional as a border plant, which spreads rapidly and provides a stimulating counterpoint to caladium, impatiens, coleus or begonias. Lobelia has the same soil and watering requirements of impatiens. Lobelia is also an exceptional plant for hanging baskets, where it may trail a foot or more and it is particularly nice when planted around a pot of pure white impatiens.

(Information source: Cecile Waugh of Waugh's Nursery, McAllen, TX)

Article written by the Cameron County Horticulture Education Committee.

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