

Bell County Master Gardener
Tip of the Week
By Mary Lew Quesinberry
Color in the Shady Flowerbed

Q. We have a small flowerbed at the front of the house that is in almost complete shade from the large tree in our front yard. I want to plant flowers and or shrubs in this area. Please advise me as to what plants both flowering and small shrub type swill grow in our hot summers in almost complete shade.

A. You can have a beautiful shady planting bed using the dwarf forms of shrubs- nandina, yaupon holly, pittosporum, Indian Hawthorne, or mahonia. In front of the shrubs plant a mix of perennial and annuals that do well in shade- evergreen perennials such as cast iron plant, sedum, lirioppe and monkey grass. Other shade loving perennials are columbine, coreopsis, all ferns (including asparagus fern), Cedar Sage, Texas Betany, purple oxalis, Turk's Cap, and Inland Sea Oats. To add stunning pops of color try wax begonias, fibrous begonias, and New Guinea impatiens. Coleus, caladiums and celosia have many stunning leaf forms and colors. For cool seasons-dianthus, pansies and petunias.

Enlarge your planting bed and plant shrubs and/or evergreen perennials at least 3 to 4 feet away from the house and leave 3 feet between plants. Plants placed too near the house limit airflow and encourage disease. Place shorter plants in front and then add pockets of brightly colored annuals. Although annuals only last one season, they are worth the constant color they bring to the flowerbed. Before you plant amend the soil with compost and bark mulch and after planting apply 3-4 inches of native mulch. Water well at least one inch per week. Monitor the plants water needs closely, plants in shady areas sometimes require more water because of the competition of tree roots.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com Bell County master gardeners are taking applications for the next class starting January 2013. Applications can be downloaded from the website or picked up at the AgriLife Extension Office, 1605 North Main, Belton, Texas. [254-933-5305](tel:254-933-5305). The all-inclusive fee is \$250.

In the photo: Make a shady garden interesting with a mix of plants that offer leaf color (caladium and coleus) and add texture with ferns. Use perennials like Turk's Cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus*) and many shade loving annuals for bright pops of color.

