Do you have shade in your landscape? Use it! Shade gardening can be a pleasant activity in the summer. Besides giving you a cool area to garden, creating a shade garden in your landscape will add other benefits to your home.

If you're gardening or playing outside, a shade garden can be a place to get out of the hot sun and relax. A shade garden creates nooks and crannies in your landscape, sort of like an outdoor room, where you can hide from the everyday hassle. Not only do shade gardens create privacy, they can also save you money.

By shading the house with trees or the air-conditioner unit with shrubs, you can reduce energy costs.

But, like with all good things, there are negatives. Not everything will grow in the shade. Plants such as vegetables, fruit, hibiscus and roses won't grow in shade. Lawns like sun, too. Attempting to grow turf in shaded environments may be time-consuming, frustrating, costly and damaging to the environment and should be replaced with shade-loving plants, ground covers or mulch. Even shade-tolerant turf requires at least four hours of sun per day.

Shady areas usually are moister than full-sun areas. This is a benefit since the plants require less irrigation. However, it may cause an increase in some insects such as shade-loving slugs, snails and mosquitoes. With proper maintenance and control, you can reduce their numbers. Fungi and algae may also grow on some paths or decks in the shade. But once again, products are available to eliminate them.

There are different types of shade:

- Full sun is defined as an area that receives a minimum of six to eight hours of direct sunlight per day. This is where you grow the roses, vegetables and fruit trees.
- Partial shade has sun for a few hours per day. However, the sun may come and go throughout the day. Areas along the edges of shade trees are a good example of partial shade.
- Light shade has a few to no hours of direct sunlight but may have dappled, sunlight through the branches of trees. Such an area would be under palm trees, pine trees and other open-canopied trees such as elms and crape myrtles.
- Full-shade areas have constant shade throughout the day and the year. This would be in a woodland area where there are many shade trees grouped together.
- Dense shade, also known as problem shade, has constant shade throughout the day, plus other problems such as tree roots. These are difficult areas where plants compete with the tree for nutrients and water. Tough plants such as bromeliads need to be planted in these areas or mulch can be used.

It is important to remember that shade patterns differ throughout the day and year. Knowing where morning sun is versus afternoon sun is also important because afternoon sun is much stronger and certain plants may not like the intensity. Visit your landscape at different, times of the day and year to note what type of shade you have in which areas.

Planting the right plant in the light place is essential. Plants that like part shade may not like full or dense shade, so you need to know what type of shade you have.

It's always best to research and plan before planting a new landscape. Know the environmental characteristics of the site and match it to the plant. Visit other landscapes and see what does well in the shade in your area. Don't forget to move or dispose of those plants in the shade that are not looking well. They may have been put in shade but prefer sun.
For a list of shade-loving plants, call the Osceola County Extension Office at 321-697-3000. Osceola County Master Gardeners are available to answer plant questions, Monday to Friday from 10am to 2pm.

Jennifer Welshans
Horticulture Agent
Osceola County Extension Service
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane
Kissimmee, FL 34744
321-697-3000
jwel2@osceola.org
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu
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