

Container Plants for Shade

People often assume that plant choices for shade containers are very limited and not as exciting or beautiful as those for sunny sites. This is not true! There are many choices of plants that are beautiful and striking and thrive in shady sites. Some plant choices include perennials (plants that live for 3 or more years) and annuals (plants that live only one year then are killed off by frost).

The most popular choices are annuals that bloom from spring through summer until a killing frost. Impatiens, New Guinea impatiens, torenia, fuschia, and many types of flowering begonias will brighten any shady container. However, there are many annuals that are grown specifically for their colorful foliage that looks great throughout the growing season. Many of them are also grown as houseplants such as coleus (*Plectranthus scutellaroides*), caladiums, Persian shield (*Strobilanthes dyeriana*), Rex begonias, and different varieties of spiderworts (*Tradescantia pallida*, *T. zebrina*, *Callisia*). All these plants can be incorporated with their long blooming counterparts or used with other foliage plants to complement or add contrast to nearby plants.

Coleus is just one example of plants grown for their foliage. There are many varieties with different leaf shapes and sizes, colors and textures. From browns to reds, vibrant pinks, greens, even gold and purple, they pretty much cover the color spectrum making the choices seem endless. The eye-dazzling coleus comes in three plant forms: upright, rounded and trailing, each easy to grow. They do require frequent pinching to encourage branching and denser growth and to discourage any flower formation (this also encourages leaf production).

If you'd like your plants to come back the next spring, use shade loving perennials that are hardy to zone 5 or lower to survive any harsh winter. Many are grown for their colorful or interesting foliage such as hostas, ferns, Japanese forest grass (*Hakonechloa macra*), tiarellas, brunneras, astilbes, ajugas, and creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*), which offer many different looks when planted together or with annuals. Rutgers Fact Sheet FS1215 "Outdoor Container Gardening with Flowering and Foliage Plants" contains additional plant suggestions. The options are endless to have gorgeous containers even in the shade!



Checklist for April

Flower Gardens

- ✓ Divide and transplant overcrowded perennials such as chrysanthemums, delphiniums and daylilies. [Click here for perennial care.](#)
- ✓ Plant hardy annual seeds in the ground. Thin out as they sprout.
- ✓ Plant pansies at the same depth that they were in their purchased pots.
- ✓ Deadhead wilting tulip or daffodil flowers. Leave green foliage until it turns brown. [Rutgers FS1220](#)

Vegetable Garden

- ✓ Clear and clean planting area of weeds 2 weeks before planting time.
- ✓ Plant lettuce, spinach, beets, radishes and carrots outdoors.
- ✓ Plant yarrow, dill or catnip to attract pollinators and beneficial insects. [Click here for article on beneficial insects.](#)

Indoor Plants

- ✓ Pinch back house plants to generate new and fuller growth as they react to the longer days and brighter light.

Trees, Shrubs and Lawn

- ✓ Plant large trees and shrubs by May 1st. Wait 1 year to fertilize new woody plantings.
- ✓ Sharpen lawnmower blade and set it at 2½-3 inches above grass. [Rutgers FS102](#)
- ✓ Mow after grass is 4 inches high. Leave clippings on lawn.
- ✓ Reseed bare spots on lawn. [Rutgers FS584](#)