

Perennials to Brighten Shady Spots

To brighten up shady spots in our yards, we often think of ferns, hostas, or maybe spring ephemerals (plants that live a short time, such as Dutchman's breeches or trilliums). However, there are some flowering perennials that can be grown in part shade where they receive 4-6 hours of sun, such as under a deciduous tree or under a shrub.

The following examples are native perennials that grow best in semi-shaded conditions with well-drained neutral to acidic soil. Frequent watering or irrigation is necessary since all of these plants require moist to wet soil. They are hardy in zones 3-8, which includes Ocean County.

Packera aurea (golden ragwort) is a groundcover that grows 12-18 in. tall. It has heart-shaped leaves and produces yellow flowers April to July. Do not allow the soil to dry out. It is a butterfly host, attracts native bees and small pollinating flies, and is deer resistant.

Lobelia cardinalis (cardinal flower) grows 2-4 ft tall. It has lance-shaped leaves and racemes of red flowers that attract hummingbirds. Cardinal flower blooms from July to September. It can be used in a pond garden. *Lobelia siphilitica* (great blue lobelia) has blue flowers and attracts butterflies.

Veronicastrum virginicum (Culver's root) grows 4-6 ft tall. Its serrated leaves circle around the stem. Its small white or pinkish-purple flowers bloom in the summer on bottlebrush-like stems that can be 8 in. long. They are a nectar source for butterflies, especially the giant swallowtail. Deadhead to prolong bloom time. Culver's root makes a good cut flower.

Chelone glabra (white turtlehead) grows 2-3 ft tall and 1.5 ft wide. It is named after its tubular, two-lipped flowers that appear at the top of the stems in late summer into early fall. It has lance-shaped leaves on square stems. Pinch back in spring to keep it shorter and fuller. It is deer and rabbit resistant. Turtlehead is a host plant for the Baltimore checkerspot butterfly. *Chelone lyonii* (pink turtlehead) has pink flowers.

Mertensia virginica (Virginia bluebell) grows 1-2 ft tall. Pink flower buds open to clusters of pendulous blue-purple flowers for a few weeks in early spring. It has some deer resistance and is beneficial for many pollinators. This ephemeral goes dormant in summer, so plant with other shade-loving plants.

See Rutgers Fact Sheet FS1140 "Incorporating Native Plants in Your Residential Landscape" or jerseyyards.org for additional information.

Checklist for May

Flower and Vegetable Garden

- ✓ Be aware that the last frost date in Ocean County will vary from May 15th to 30th, depending on your location.
- ✓ Plant summer-blooming annuals and tender vegetable plants after the last frost date. Cover tender plants if frost is expected.
- ✓ Water direct seeded beds daily until seeds sprout.
- ✓ Plant dahlias, gladiolas, lilies, cannas and other summer flowering bulbs this month.
- ✓ Start spreading mulch around plants to reduce weeds.
- ✓ Work to eliminate weeds before they go to seed. Otherwise, you will be fighting them for years to come!

Lawn

- ✓ Eliminate lawn weeds. Pull by hand or spot-treat with herbicide.
- ✓ Mow lawn as needed to keep grass height at 2.5-3 in.

Ticks

- ✓ *Be aware that the risk of being bitten by an infected deer tick is greatest in May and June, when the nymph stage is active. [Rutgers Fact Sheet FS443](#) "Prevent Tick Bites."*

The Master Gardener Plant Sale is May 2nd. If inclement weather is expected, go to mgocinc.org for an update on the plant sale rain date.