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This time of year when it's dry and hot the shady corners of our gardens beckon to us. Take a relaxing walk through one of your favorite local nurseries and pick up some shade loving plants to bring home. You'll still be able to commune with the earth, your new shade plants won't die of thirst from the scorching sun, and you'll be more comfortable communing in your garden's cooling spaces.

Hostas, hydrangeas, ferns and epimedium are the first shade lovers that come to mind. Local nurseries offer abundant choices. You'll still need to water these well-adapted plants in and water once a week while they're becoming established. Remember to dig a one hundred dollar hole for a one dollar plant. You won't need to add fertilizer or soil amendments but all plants love a one-inch overdressing layer of good garden compost or mulch if you have some available.

Hostas come in a wide range of sizes. You'll find teensy leaved varieties and massive pleated leaved varieties. Flowers are usually white, lavender or mauve. You'll find green leaves with both yellow or white edges and/or streaks; very deep green with chartreuse edges and/or streaks and white leaves with green edging. Leaves can be smooth, puckered or pleated. Hosta undulate even has twisted long leaves. Every garden should have at least one grouping of hostas. Be careful, though, collecting hostas can be addictive.

If you're looking for shady ground covers try periwinkle (*Vinca*). You'll find vinca in colors of periwinkle blue, magenta and violet. One variety is variegated with white edges. Dead Nettle (*Lamium*) is another great ground cover, as is *Ajuga reptans* (also known as bugle vine). *Ajuga* comes in variegated, dark green and purple leaved varieties. Some people are hesitant to plant *Lamium* because it spreads quite rapidly. *Vinca* and *Ajuga* are evergreen and *Lamium* is herbaceous. All three plants mentioned are good candidates for containers and hanging baskets.

Once you start planting ferns you'll want to discover more and more varieties. Look for Deer Fern (*Blechnum spicant*), Autumn Fern (*Dryopteris erythrosora*), Hart's Tongue Fern (*Asplenium scolopendrium*), Japanese Painted Fern (*Athyrium niponicum* 'Pictum') and Licorice Fern (*Polypodium glycyrrhiza*) for starters. Ferns come in evergreen and deciduous varieties. If you choose deciduous ferns make sure you leave a marker in your garden so you won't try to plant another plant in that spot in the spring.

Epimedium have orchid like flowers displayed on tall thin stems. The leaves change color all during their growth from light green in early spring to dark purple, red, gold and brown in the fall. Flower colors are white, yellow, lavender, mauve and red. You'll discover choices for dry shade, deep shade and even sun. Some epimedium are evergreen and others are deciduous. You'll find an epimedium for nearly every garden situation.

If you're looking for larger shrubs for shade, try Aucuba japonica 'Variegata.' This yellow dappled green bush has red berries and can grow quite large but survives on neglect. It's extremely shade and drought tolerant. Some varieties have smooth leaf edges and others are serrated. You will even find a few dwarf versions of this plant. Don't rule out Euonymus japonica or Skimmia either. Both of these plants have charm as shade loving shrubs. You'll often see all three of these shrubs in full sun so you can imagine how ironclad and adaptable these shrubs can be.

If you love long-flowering plants to give bloom from spring through late fall choose hardy Fuchsias. Hardy varieties abound. Isis has the tiniest blossoms scattered over every inch of the plant except where the stems are covered with the deepest green leaves. Most hardy Fuchsias will tolerate quite a bit of sun too but do very well in shade. Fuchsia magellanica grows to five or six feet in our Northwest and has red and violet flowers. Many hardy Fuchsias will die back to the ground in a cold winter or a hard frost, but they will usually bounce back and resprout in the spring when temperatures start warming up. Gartenmeister has coral flowers and purple-green and bronze leaves. Look for hardy Fuchsias with white flowers. White would be striking in the shade.

I hope this gives you a few ideas to get you out haunting your favorite nursery to pick up some shady plants for some cooling garden therapy during these hot days of summer. Happy gardening.

Contact Peg in care of this newspaper or via email at ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us or gardenmentor@yahoo.com