



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

Shade Challenges

Trees. They cool and refresh us, clean the air, provide privacy and deliver free leaf mulch. Trees also challenge us when we try to grow grass. Their roots share the same 12-18" space below the surface and out-compete for the same moisture and nutrients. Trees and grasses are not comfortable companions and ultimately, the spreading canopies win out over even shade "tolerant" cultivars of grass. This dappled light is an opportunity to use a distinctive and surprisingly colorful plant palette.

Numerous shrubs and groundcovers rise to the occasion in these seemingly difficult conditions. Look to leaf color, texture, and shape to create a shade-loving garden to rival any sunny bed of blooms. No-mow turf substitutes such as mondo and dwarf mondo grass create the look of a lawn without the fuss. Holly fern with its coarsely textured glossy green fronds is a perfect companion when joined with autumn fern's fine textured reddish tinged fall foliage.

The Victorian era's cast iron plant is aptly named with its drought tolerance and need for low light. Milky Way cast iron is a dwarf with variegation resembling a galaxy on a leaf. Multicolored leaves are also found on caladiums, variegated shell ginger, bromeliads and the creeping aluminum plant.

Combine all of this fabulous foliage with shade-loving bloomers and you'll want shade everywhere. Try jacobinea (in pink, white, or yellow), camellias (including the smaller sized Shishigashira), oak leaf hydrangea, exotic

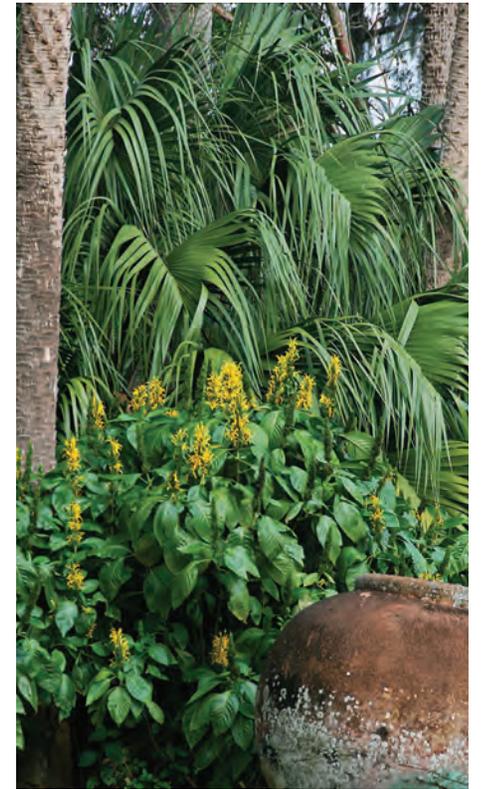
looking nun's orchid and the native Piedmont and flame azaleas. Blooming gingers which range in height from ankle to eye level include: the ground hugging peacock, the taller scented white butterfly, yellow Kahili, and cool blue.

Expect seasonal treats when you include the highly fragrant tea olive with its minuscule autumn into winter white flowers and the native rain/atamasco lily which blooms after the first summer rain. At eye level and overhead, tree branches provide the framework for hanging orchids, tillandsias/air plants, staghorn ferns, and baskets of impatiens or foliage plants.

In areas where dense roots make

planting difficult, place containers on top of the ground and use low volume irrigation tubes to deliver regular moisture. For those tight spaces between roots, install groundcovers such as mondo grass, ivy or dwarf Asian jasmine purchased in small two and one-half to four-inch diameter pots. Remember to irrigate and fertilize in what is called "dry shade" to keep your shade loving garden lush. Allow the leaves to mulch the plants and enrich the soil but don't let them smother the low-to-the-ground plantings.

Now, stroll into your lovely colorful shade and notice how the air is cooler. Oh, did we forget to suggest to add a bench amongst this beauty?



Top right: *Justicia aurea* - yellow jacobinea at Bok Tower Gardens. At right: *Aspidistra elatior* - cast iron plant. Above: *Alpinia zerumbet* 'Variegata' - variegated shell ginger. At left: *Ophiopogon japonicus* - mondo grass at Stetson University.

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis.

