



Stephen &amp; Kristin Pategas

in the garden by Stephen and Kristin Pategas

## Transition Plants – Bridging Light Levels

Our garden designs are created to flow across the landscape without abrupt starts and stops. When using masses of plants within bed lines we weave them together to create a unified look. In order to create a coherent and seamless garden design in gardens with sun and shade we look to what we call the “transition plants.” These plants will take full sun and part shade.

Our calculations for where these plants are needed are determined by where and when sun or shade will fall on the plants. These are shifting areas as the sun tracks lower (cool months) or higher (warm months) in the sky. The winter solstice around December 21st has the fewest daylight hours with the sun at its furthest south. The summer solstice around June 21 has the most daylight hours. The sun is so high in the sky its rays kiss the north side of structures. The tricky part is at the edge of roof overhangs or tree canopies. As the sun angle in the sky changes from low to high during the year, plants once in shade get sun, or vice versa. Plantings required on the north side of the house will experience months of total shade (winter), with months of full sun (summer), unless there is also shade from tree canopy. Note that tree canopies may grow wider as the tree matures or less dense as it declines - sun or shade creep.

If there are evergreen trees, they provide continuous shade. But if they are deciduous and lose their leaves, the plants underneath must be able to take full sun until new shade-producing foliage emerges. When it comes to plants, all sunny areas are not cre-

ated equal. Afternoon sun is hotter than morning sun, walls and stone mulch reflect heat onto plants, and the summer sun is more intense and lasts longer.

When trees come down suddenly without the typical aging process of slowly losing limbs and foliage, plants underneath will get scorched, but transition plants will adjust to the change in light levels and rebound. While transition plants will grow well in different light levels, they may look slightly different. In shady locations: they may bloom less, grow more slowly, have leggy growth, and not be as dense.

When we design within and between the light and the dark spaces, transition plants are valuable tools in our plant palette.

A partial list of full sun (six to eight hours) to part shade (typically not mid-day sun) transition plants (please determine water and soil needs and growth characteristics):

### Small trees:

*Ilex vomitoria* - Yaupon holly cultivars  
*Magnolia grandiflora* ‘Little Gem’ - Little Gem magnolia  
*Viburnum obovatum* - Walter’s viburnum

### Hedge/screening:

*Illicium parviflorum* - yellow anise  
*Justicia spicigera* - Orange plume  
*Myricanthes fragrans* - Simpson’s stopper  
*Podocarpus macrophyllus* - Japanese plum yew  
*Viburnum obovatum* ‘Select’ - Select Walter’s viburnum  
*Viburnum odoratissimum* - Sweet viburnum

### Shrubs/shrublike/groundcover/vines:

*Camellia hiemalis* ‘Shishigashira’ - Shishigashira camellia  
*Gelsemium sempervirens* - Carolina jessamine  
*Hamelia patens* - Firebush  
*Ilex vomitoria* ‘Schellings’ - Schillings dwarf yaupon holly  
*Liriope* ‘Emerald Goddess’ - Emerald Goddess liriope  
*Lomandra longifolia* ‘Breeze’ - Breeze spiny mat rush  
*Sabal minor* - Dwarf palmetto  
*Serenoa repens* - Saw palmetto  
*Trachelospermum asiaticum* - Dwarf Asian jasmine  
*Trachelospermum jasminoides* - Confederate jasmine  
*Viburnum obovatum* (dwarf cultivars) - Whorled Class, Mrs. Schillers Delight  
*Zamia pumila* - Coontie  
*Zephyranthes atamasco* - Rain lily



Above, Firebush is a wildlife friendly native.



From left to right: Orange plume blossoms throughout the year; Coontie is a durable native cycad; Breezy spiny mat rush is drought tolerant and very low maintenance.