



**FRINGECUP**

With delicate leaves and tall stems, this semi-evergreen perennial is tolerant of a lot of shade.



**EVERGREEN HUCKLEBERRY**

Drought-tolerant once established, stems that look nice in flower arrangements and delicious berries.



**OREGON IRISES**

Come in varying shades of purple with a splash of yellow, prefer drier summer soil.

## ASK A MASTER GARDENER

# NATIVE PLANTS FOR A SHADE GARDEN

**QUESTION:** What native plants will thrive in a shady corner of my yard?

**ANSWER:** First, thanks for thinking of native plants. More and more evidence points to the importance of native plants that create understory (layers of plants shaded by the tree canopy), and how planting native plants in our gardens extends this critical habitat for diminishing local species.

Shady spaces are where the introverts of the plant world shine. Like all introverts, you might have to work a bit to get to know them. But once you do, they quietly find a way into your heart (and hopefully your garden).

In my yard, I have more shade than sun. Most is the result of structures — my house, my neighbor's house and board fences. Other shady nooks occur beneath trees and large bushes.

Once I lamented sun-compromised spaces for what I couldn't plant. Later, I filled these shady places with hostas. They thrived in their lush variety. But now I see my garden not simply as decorative, but as

a functioning habitat. I understand how plantings solely of exotics (hostas are native to Japan, China and Korea) create food deserts for our local native insects, pollinators and birds.

I still have a few hostas, but choose natives more often — plants that add to my garden aesthetics and also provide habitat.

Shady areas are opportunities for niche plantings. If you have ever spent time in the dappled shade of the woods, you know much grows there and how beautifully! Understory plants also quietly do critical work as hosts for many of our native moths and caterpillars, which then support birds and other animals.

We are just beginning to connect the loss of understory plants to the documented decline of songbirds. With our thoughtful, combined yard plantings, we just may help turn the tide.

An OSU Extension publication, "Recommended Native Plants for Home Gardens in Western Oregon," lists more than 50 native trees, shrubs, groundcovers, perennials and annuals. Most will grow in partial sun to shade, providing structure, color, bloom, and with a select few (like



**Julie Burchstead**  
Master Gardener

evergreen huckleberry), even edible fruit!

The extroverts of the plant world are easy to love. They boldly call our attention in the garden and at the nursery. Shade-tolerant native plants may be less showy, but they can create quietly beautiful spaces and rich habitat, too.

In the heat of a Douglas County summer afternoon, a shade garden, with some native choices in the mix, can be a wonderful refuge for all living beings.

With so many diverse choices, it is hard to choose favorites. You will need to consider your own needs for space, light, moisture and personal aesthetics, but here are four of the native plants I grow and particularly love in the shady spaces of my yard.

You can purchase these and others at Doak Creek Native Plant Nursery near Eugene, the Elkton Community Education Center and Plant Oregon near

Medford. Native plants are also becoming more widely available at local nurseries as well.

Because shade gardens are more sheltered, I often find I can successfully tuck in new plants there later into the spring than elsewhere in my yard. If you have shade, get to know some of these quiet plants. You will be glad you did.

**Fringecup (*Tellima grandiflora*).** With lovely delicate leaves and tall stems of fairy-bell-shaped flowers, this herbaceous semi-evergreen perennial makes a great addition in a shade border or along a path. Allow it a couple years to settle in, then it really sends out the blooms. This one can tolerate a lot of shade.

**Sword Fern (*Polystichum munitum*).** A structural workhorse, these sturdy ferns can cover a lot of real estate, much like a hosta. You can manage their size by trimming off old fronds the following spring, but be careful not to accidentally cut off the lovely curled fiddleheads that unfurl into new growth. Tolerates dry shade, but does best with some watering.

**Evergreen huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*).** With compact glossy evergreen leaves,

reddish new spring growth and clusters of small white blooms in early spring, this is just a great-looking plant. You can tuck them against a fence, or use them almost like a boxwood for structure. The stems look nice in flower arrangements. It tolerates sun or shade. The berries are purplish-black, tiny and delicious. Evergreen huckleberry is drought-tolerant once established.

**Oregon Iris (*Iris tenax*).** Unlike her relatives who adorn themselves in velvet ball gowns, this native Iris prefers more of a light summer dress. Ephemeral and sweet, lavender to purple with a shy splash of yellow, these wildflowers that populate the spring woods do well in a home garden in dappled sun. They prefer drier summer soil.

*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 S E Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the Oregon State University Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*