

Solutions for poorly-drained areas



Linda Estep
Master Gardener

Question: On my property, I have one area that just doesn't drain well. This area is always spongy underfoot, and it is only in the sun a small part of the day. I love to grow beautiful flowers and am up for the challenge, but I don't really know what to consider when dealing with a poorly-drained, mostly shady area. What suggestions can you offer?

ANSWER: There are three possible solutions.

First, you could raise the soil level by bringing in top soil. Second, you could correct the drainage by installing a drainage system. And third, you could decide to create a garden area that thrives on a poorly-drained area. I am going to concentrate my suggestions on that third choice.

The key to success is carefully selecting plants that like a wet growing environment. Most plants in a typical garden do not like wet feet, so for your poorly-drained garden area, you will need to do your research and make the proper plant selections.

If you skip this important step, you will just be frustrated by poor results and wasted time and money. This is an opportunity for you to grow plants that won't grow anywhere else. If you purchase your plants from one of our local nurseries, the owner or person in charge should be able to give you suggestions on plant selection.

There are some colorful and readily available plants that



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The flowers of the cardinal flower are stunning spikes of vivid red flowers that rise 2-3 feet above the clump of foliage.

would do well in the environment that you have described. The first one is great blue lobelia (*Lobelia siphilitica*). This plant, an herbaceous perennial, grows well in zones 4-9. It grows 2-3 feet tall and spreads about 1-1½ feet wide. The beautiful blue blooms cover the plant from July through September.

Once the long bloom period is over, cut back spent flower spikes. The blooms entice bees, hummingbirds and butterflies. Deer generally leave this plant alone. This plant grows well in many environments, and this time of year it blooms all over the Roseburg area. It does grow quite well in wet garden soil.

If you prefer red flowers, then plant cardinal flower

(*Lobelia cardinalis*). This plant has the same growing habits and preferred growing conditions as the great blue lobelia, but the flowers are stunning spikes of vivid red flowers that rise 2-3 feet above the clump of foliage. Both varieties will self-seed, but will not become invasive.

Marsh marigolds (*Caltha palustris*) are a good companion flower to grow with the choices mentioned above. They are not related to marigolds, and do not resemble marigolds at all. They are related to the buttercup family, and the flowers look very much like buttercups. They are low-growing, mat-forming plants with glossy, round leaves and gleaming, butter

yellow flowers. They bloom from early to mid-spring. They are an herbaceous perennial which grow to about 1-1½ feet tall and have a spread of about 1-1½ feet. Deer usually leave this plant alone.

If you want a showy variety for this area, consider cinnamon ferns (*Osmundastrum cinnamomeum*). These grow 2-3 feet tall and spread 2-3 feet wide. They are non-flowering but love the medium to wet, shady garden areas. They grow well in zones 2-10.

Other ferns that you might consider are Maidenhair ferns (*Adiantum* spp). These are delicate-looking ferns with lacy texture, from 8-30 inches tall depending on the species. Also consider royal ferns (*Osmunda*

regalis) and the silvery glade fern (*Athyrium thelypteroides*). These ferns are all easy to grow and are very attractive additions to the garden.

There are many more choices available. Exploring the possibilities is part of the fun when it comes to planning your garden. Because you have a challenging area, you will want to research each possible choice that grabs your attention and ask the local experts when needed.

Do you have a gardening question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at ask.extension.org/ask. Presently, the plant clinic is closed until further notice due to public safety orders.