

Helping
Carolinians
Increase Their
Knowledge of
Gardening,
Manage Their
Landscape
Investment &
Protect the
Environment

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JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

Perennial Hibiscus Provides Showstopping Appeal

Children play “hide and seek” behind it. People leave their cars in the middle of the road to get a closer look. And the first time you see the extremely large flower of the perennial hibiscus, your mouth will drop open and you’ll want to attend the party for which Mother Nature created this lovely beauty!

Hibiscus moscheutos, commonly called perennial hibiscus, rose mallow or swamp rose, is hardy in zones 5 to 9. Though the plant thrives in full sun to partial shade and moist soil that is high in organic matter, it will tolerate wetlands and creek edges and is useful in poorly drained areas. Depending upon the variety, it can grow to a height of 18 inches to 8 feet and grows in shrub form.

The most amazing part of the perennial hibiscus is its saucer-shaped flowers. A single flower can be 6- to 12-inches wide in shades of red, white, pink or bicolor from summer to frost. Little effort with this plant usually reaps big rewards. It grows quickly and is easy to start from seed or to propagate by division. Japanese beetles are its major pest problem.

Use hibiscus as a single plant or massed around a water garden or lake. But be warned, if you plant it in your front yard this showstopper compels people to get a closer look at its remarkable flowers! Some common cultivars are ‘Disco Belle Mix’ (white, pink, red flowers), ‘Southern Belle’ (red, pink, white flowers), ‘Sweet Caroline’ (pink flowers with darker center), ‘Anne Arundel’ (pink flowers), ‘Blue River II’ (white flowers), ‘Lady Baltimore’ (pink flowers with red centers) and ‘Lord Baltimore’ (red flowers).

This North American native hibiscus also works wonders in a perennial border. At the JC Raulston Arboretum, these magnificent specimens punctuate the 300-foot-long border with bold beauty in midsummer. Check out ‘Plum Crazy’, with its somewhat dusty rose flowers, and ‘Kopper King’, which has most unusual and complementary purple foliage. Learn more at www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum. *Emily Revels*



‘Disco Belle’
Robert E. Lyons ©



‘Disco Belle Red’
Robert E. Lyons ©



‘Plum Crazy’
Robert E. Lyons ©



H. moscheutos
Robert E. Lyons ©



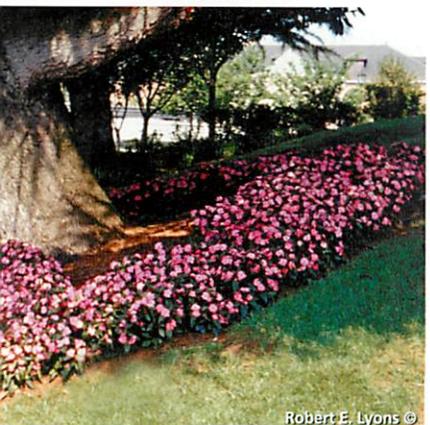
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A Landscape Made in the Shade

Those wonderful trees that offer shady relief from harsh summer sun also create a challenge for gardeners. Keeping other ornamental plants alive in areas where thirsty trees and shrubs compete for moisture and nutrients, as well as block sunlight necessary for photosynthesis, can be difficult. Follow these simple steps to increase your plants' chances for survival.

Defining Shade

Dappled, dense and partial shade describe shade in terms of the relative amount of sunlight available for plant growth. Other adjectives such as damp or dry may further define shady areas. While it is difficult to define or quantify shade, it is important to attempt to grasp the basic differences in order to make appropriate plant selections.

Pruning to Increase Available Light

Where shade is too dense, remove the lower limbs of trees to let in more sunlight. By "raising the canopy," there will be additional morning and afternoon sunlight for plant growth. Most evergreens and deciduous trees will tolerate removal of as much as one-third of their foliage, if done properly. Shade density will vary depending on the species of tree. Consider choosing trees such as Heritage river birch or honey locust, which offer all-day dappled shade.

Preparing Soil and Beds

Remove weeds prior to planting to reduce competition with your ornamentals. Hand digging or pulling the offensive weeds may be necessary to lessen damage to tree roots. This also will give you a better feel for locations where root competition will be minimized, resulting in better plant survival. In dry weather, irrigate the area a day or so in advance to facilitate the digging process. As a last resort, apply a non-selective herbicide with a wick or sponge applicator but use extreme caution. Trees may be susceptible to the herbicide and could be damaged if the herbicide is not applied according to the label.

Avoid large-scale mechanical tillage to minimize root damage to the existing shade tree.

Watering New Plants

Water new plants until established. All plants will benefit from supplemental irrigation during extended dry periods. Root competition is intense beneath shade trees and the smaller understory plants are at a disadvantage when competing with large shade trees for water. Use mini-sprinklers

and drip irrigation to direct water where it is needed most and to minimize water waste and potential disease problems. Add a 3- to 4-inch layer of an organic mulch such as pine needles or bark to help hold moisture.

Selecting Plants for Shade

Choose plants that perform well in the shade. Because of a limited palette of summer-blooming plants, successful shade gardeners tend to rely on plants that bloom in the spring prior to full development of the shady canopy. Plants that have interesting and persistent foliage are also good choices.

Consider your personal goals for your shade garden when choosing plant materials. If your goal is to "lighten up" a shady area, many shade-tolerant plants from shrubs such as privet and azalea to herbaceous perennials and annuals come with foliage variegated with whites and yellows that provide visual interest. Keep in mind that some shrubs tend to lose their variegation in all but light shade so check with your local garden center.

The hosta is the undisputed star of the shade garden with its variety of greens and golds and many variegated patterns. Impatiens, another old favorite, add a splash of bright color among hostas and other perennials.

If you are shooting for a low-maintenance landscape, consider the variegated groundcovers. When well established, the lower-growing evergreen varieties of periwinkle, *Vinca minor*, offer a reliable year-round foliage carpet. Among the most popular is the white-margined 'Ralph Shugert'. This plant has small-leaved foliage and large, blue blossoms in the spring. If care is taken with the sometimes invasive ajugas, the lighter variegated silver ajugas and the tri-colored 'Burgundy Glow' cultivar offer beautiful year-round color.

Letting Mother Nature Do It

Natural areas can be the perfect solution for problem areas under trees where soil is depleted and tilling is dangerous to tree health. Mother Nature is the most economical mulcher and the most efficient builder of topsoil. Help her out by leaving evergreen needles and leaves where they fall. Over time they will decay and begin to form new topsoil. Natural wooded areas can have a surprising visual appeal of their own, but they also can be dressed up with woodland favorites such as hellebores and the spectacular Asian woodland lilies. *N. Fred Miller*

Q&A What kind of mulch should I use on my ornamental shrubs?

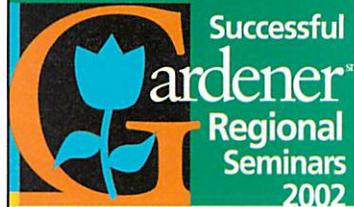
Your choice depends on your personal preference but avoid solid plastic film. Solid plastic mulches can harm plants because they do not let water or air exchange. Non-woven landscape fabrics are available but may allow weeds to germinate in the fabric. Woven plastic landscape fabrics do a better job of weed control while allowing water and air exchange. Most gardeners prefer to cover landscape fabrics with another mulch to reduce heat and improve looks. Pine bark, hardwood bark and pine needles are the premier landscape mulches readily available in North Carolina. Rock, gravel or brick nugget mulches look good and keep down weeds. They have their uses but removing fallen leaves from this mulch can be troublesome.

Tree care professionals sometimes provide free wood chips. This mulch works okay when used on top of the ground but care should be taken to keep it away from plants. Fresh wood chips tie up nitrogen as they decompose. If applied too thickly, the heat generated during decomposition can injure plants, particularly herbaceous plants. Chipped tires haven't been evaluated properly.

Use mulch after planting ornamentals and replenish as needed. After leaf fall in autumn is a good time to replenish mulch. Pine needles can be piled several inches thick with no problem. Most gardeners use no more than 4 inches of pine bark and even less right next to the bark of large trees. Deeper mulch may cause problems, although the research has been variable.

David Goforth

Announcing
Extension's



► **Saturday, September 28**

- 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., various times
- Southern Ideal Home Show, Greensboro Coliseum
- Fee: Show admission
- Details: (336) 375-5876

Other Learning Opportunities

► **Saturday, September 14 & Sunday, September 15**

- The Garden Conservancy Open Days Program, Charlotte
- Details: (704) 374-1650 or (704) 366-0954

ENVIRO-TIP

Soil Erosion Solutions

Soil erosion is a common problem in home landscapes. Not only do bare spots detract from the beauty of a landscape, the washing soil adds sediment to streams, rivers and lakes. Fortunately, these problems are fixable. The key is to determine the best steps for your site so that your investment will result in a long-term solution.

If the bare spot is in a relatively level location, then turf or some other groundcover is the simplest option. Consider turf if the site receives at least five hours of sunlight per day. In shadier spots, a better choice may be a living mulch such as pachysandra, ajuga, vinca or an organic mulch such as shredded hardwood, which tends to last longer than other mulches.

Slopes present more of a problem and will require a larger investment to do the job right. On a severe slope, turfgrass is usually not a good option, as mowing would be dangerous. An organic mulch will tend to wash away in a heavy rain. Terracing is quite

effective and attractive, but expensive and labor intensive. Groundcover plants such as juniper and liriopie are an option, but will require extensive hand weeding. Woody ornamentals, including small trees and shrubs, are quite effective due to their extensive root systems. Moreover, they will require the least amount of maintenance once established. Keep in mind that soil preparation, including soil sampling, fertilization and tillage will be challenging. These are necessary steps, however, if you want an effective, long-term solution.

Landscape fabrics, in combination with trees and shrubs, may be the only feasible solution on very severe slopes. Note, however, that this is not a "maintenance-free" solution. Regular weeding and mulching will be required to keep the area looking good. *Paul McKenzie*



Robert E. Lyons ©

Creeping Juniper

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gardentalk



"It would be worthwhile having a cultivated garden if only to see what Autumn does to it."

— Alfred Austin



Gardening in September

Lawns

- Seed cool-season grasses such as tall fescue and bluegrass.
- Fertilize cool-season grasses with 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.
- For those not planning on reseeding their lawn, now is an excellent time to put out a preemergent weed killer to help control winter annuals.

Ornamentals

- Do not fertilize or prune your trees and shrubs. This will disrupt plants' internal processes as they prepare for winter dormancy. Plants not properly acclimated for the colder weather will not be as cold hardy.
- Now is the time to place your spring bulb orders for planting later in the fall. If you wait too late in the season, you will find your selection greatly reduced. Store them in a well-ventilated bag in the vegetable bin of your refrigerator until you are ready to plant.
 - Celebrate the arrival of the fall season by purchasing a garden mum. These are great for replacing spent summer annuals.
 - Fall is the best time for planting trees and shrubs. Now is the time to assess your landscape, and begin planning for trees and shrubs you will want to plant later in the fall. Things to consider are bloom times, mature heights, fall color, deciduous or evergreen and sun exposure.

Edibles

- It's not too late to plant fall vegetables. Transplant cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, collards and lettuce. Sow radish, turnip, carrot, mustard and kale.
- Spray your plums, peaches, apricots and nectarines for the peachtree borer. Spray from the lowest set of branches and thoroughly wet the trunk down to the soil line. *Ben Dungan*

The JC Raulston

Arboretum (JCRA) at NC State University in Raleigh is a nationally acclaimed garden with over 5,000 species and cultivars of annuals, perennials, bulbs, vines, groundcovers, shrubs and trees. A working research and teaching garden that focuses on the evaluation, selection and display of plant material gathered from around the world, this is the place to visit to glean ideas on which plants to add to your garden.

The JCRA offers many educational opportunities. From plantsmen tours, lectures by noted horticulturists, to opportunities to travel to other gardens and nurseries in the U.S., the arboretum packs its calendar to both educate and delight anyone with an interest in plants. Look for even more opportunities when the Ruby C. McSwain Education Center officially opens this month at the JCRA. The Dedication Celebration will be at 9 a.m. on Sept. 21. Visit www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum to learn how you can take advantage of all the JCRA has to offer.

Garden Spot



Tune in to "Making It Grow!" – a gardening show featuring Extension agents from the Carolinas. Saturdays, noon, WTVI 42, Charlotte

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