

PERENNIALS FOR THE SHADE GARDEN

Beate Popkin

NATIVE PLANTS

Short (less than 1' tall) – can be used for ground covers

Allegheny spurge (*Pachysandra procumbens*) spreads slowly to form evergreen mound

Appalachian sedge (*Carex appalachica*) tolerates drier conditions

Bellwort or merrybells (*Uvularia grandiflora*) blooms early spring; needs moisture

Bishop's cap (*Mitella diphylla*) similar to foam flower; white spring blooms

Bleeding heart (*Dicentra eximia*) pink spring to early summer flowering

Celandine poppy (*Stylophorum diphyllum*) needs moisture; goes dormant in summer

Coral bells (*Heuchera americana*) shade/part sun; white flower stalks; grown for foliage

Creeping phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*) spreads by stolons; flowers early summer

Dittany (*Cunila origanoides*) tolerates dry conditions but likes some sun

Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*) unique white to cream flowers

Dwarf iris (*Iris cristata*) early spring blooms; dies back in summer

Foam flower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) pinkish flowers in May, tolerates deep shade

Green 'n gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*) yellow flowers thru summer; medium to wet

Golden ragwort (*Packera aurea*) needs moisture, spreads fast when happy

Jacob's ladder (*Polemonium reptans*) light blue flowers in spring, clumping, self-seeds

Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*) grass-like plant, medium moisture

Purple phacelia (*Phacelia bipinnatifida*) bi-annual, tolerates dry conditions, self-seeds

Round leaf ragwort (*Packera obovata*) similar to golden ragwort

Squirrel corn (*Dicentra canadensis*) similar to Dutchman's breeches

Stonecrop (*Sedum ternatum*) dry sites, pavement edges; only native sedum

Wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) benefits from some sun; lilac flowers in spring

Wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*) spreads, flowers are early and hidden

Woodland phlox (*Phlox divaricata*) blue flowers in spring, medium moisture

True ephemerals with an early short flowering time that die back in summer

Bloodroot (*Sanguinea americana*) showy white flowers; leaves persist through summer

Dwarf larkspur (*Delphinium tricornes*) spikes of blue, spurred flowers; moist, part sun

Jack-in-the Pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) unique arum flower; medium to wet, deep shade

Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*) one white flower under leaf; spreads by rhizomes

Rue anemone (*Thalictrum thalictroides*) small white flower; best in groups

Toothwort (*Cardamine concatenata*) small white flowers; leaves persist

Trillium (*Trillium* sp.) many Eastern native species; yellow, white, red; medium moisture

Trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*) showy yellow flowers

Twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*) leaves may persist through summer

Virginia bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*) showy blue/pink flowers

Medium height (to 2 feet)

Bluestem goldenrod (*Solidago caesia*) tolerates part shade, tolerates clay
Blue wood aster (*Symphiotrichum cordifolium*) flowers late summer, full sun/part shade
Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) long blooming red/yellow flowers, part shade
False Solomon's seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*) terminal cluster of white flowers
Indian pink (*Spigelia marilandica*) striking red/yellow flowers late summer
Short-toothed mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum muticum*) tolerates sun, aromatic
Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*) twin white flowers in axils; spreads by rhizomes
Spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohioensis*) sun/part shade, spreads easily; sprawling
White snakeroot (*Eupatorium rugosum*) full sun to part shade, spreads easily

Tall (2+ feet)

American spikenard (*Aralia racemosa*) shrub like;
Black cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*) part to full shade; spikes of white flowers
Garden phlox (*Phlox paniculata*), blooms best in sun
Goat's beard (*Aruncus dioicus*) part shade; moist to wet, showy white flower cluster
Sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*) bright yellow flowers; more drought tolerant
Tall bellflower (*Campanella americana*) striking spike of blue flowers; prefers more sun

Native ferns excellent for shade gardens

Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*)
Cinnamon fern (*Osmundastrum cinnamomea*)
Eastern wood fern (*Dryopteris marginalis*)
Hay-scented fern (*Dennstaedtia punctiloba*)
Ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*)
Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*)
Sensitive fern (*Osmunda claytonia*)

NON NATIVE PLANTS THAT ARE NOT INVASIVE

These plants are found in shade gardens; most are available at garden centers.

Bishop's hat/barrenwort (*Epimedium* hybrids) 'Sulphureum' is a yellow cultivar
European bleeding heart (*Dicentra spectabilis*) more showy than our native
False spirea (*Astilbe* sp.) similar to foam flower; showy spikes of long-blooming flowers
Leopard plant (*Ligularia dentata*) can grow to 3 feet; prefers more moisture
Lenten rose (*Helleborus orientalis*) white, pink, maroon blooms very early spring
Lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis*) low growing; pink-blue flowers in spring
Siberian bugloss (*Brunnera macrophylla*) low growing plant with showy blue flowers
Winter begonia (*Bergenian ciliata*) low growing plant with pink spring flowers

See KY Native Plant Finder: <https://www.kynativeplants.com/native-plant-finder>

Updated 03-2025, Ann Witherington, M.S. Botany