

# Gardening in the shade

By Deryn Thorpe

There are a myriad of factors to consider when choosing plants for your garden, including the degree of light and shade in your back yard.

While plant labels provide information on suitability for sun or shade, they do not address the level of shade.

Before planting note where the sun reaches at different times of the day and how it changes with the seasons.

Planting conditions change as adjoining plants grow and new buildings or fences are erected.

Sun loving plants will weaken and yellow in the shade, attracting diseases and pest insects. Shade plants wilt and burn in direct sunlight, so it is important to choose the right plant for your position.



Arthropodium 'Te Puna', (also known as New Zealand rock lily and renga renga lily) is a beautiful flowering plant for shady areas beneath trees.

## Shade degrees

**Deep shade or full shade** is an area that receives no direct sun and has low light intensity through most of the day. Areas are often narrow spaces with high walls and overhanging buildings. Indoor plants often do well in these conditions.

**Plant:** Liriope, star jasmine (*Trachelospermum asiaticum*), *Hosta*, *Aucuba japonica*, cast iron plant (*Aspidistra elatior*)

**Dry shade** is found beneath trees with aggressive roots. If plants are evergreen or the canopy dense the area may also have deep shade. These sites are challenging as tree roots take most of the nutrients and water from the soil. Roots make it difficult to dig planting holes and plants have difficulty establishing before tree roots invade their root zone.

**Plant:** Lomandra, Clivia, Dianella, Mother-in-law's Tongue (*Sansevieria*), *Thomasia purpurea*, butcher's broom (*Ruscus sp*)



Dianella 'Lime Splice', just one of the many varieties of Dianellas which grow well in dry shade.

**Light shade/open shade** has no direct sun but plenty of bright, reflected light. It is often open to the sky but walls, hedges and structures block direct sunlight.

**Plant:** Ivy, kangaroo vine (*Cissus antarctica*), Boston ivy and Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata* and *P quinquefolia*)

**Moist shade** suits plants that require constantly damp soil. These plants also do well in pots.

**Plant:** Maidenhair ferns, native violet, ajuga,



Brunnera 'Sea Heart' and Ajuga 'Black Scallop'.

**Filtered shade/dappled shade** is cast by trees and sunlight is filtered through a light canopy.

**Plant:** *Plectranthus argentifolium*, *Thomasia solanaceae*, bears' breaches (*Acanthus mollis*), renga renga lily (*Arthropodium cirratum*), Clivia, Ajuga, many succulents



Echeveria imbricata grows best in filtered light or afternoon shade.

**Morning sun/ afternoon shade:** Plants for filtered sun will also grow well in these conditions

**Plant:** Sacred bamboo (Nandina), camellia, hydrangea, azalea and leafy vegetables, NZ Rock lily (Arthropodium), impatiens, Monstera, Philodendron 'Xanadu', aspidistra, Fatsia japonica, Jacobinia (Brazilian plume flowers), begonia, hydrangea, star jasmine, Pseuderanthemum atropurpurea

## Solutions

- Reduce deep shade beneath trees and shrubs by thinning out branches to open the canopy so more light reaches the ground.
- Paint walls a light colour or use mirrors to reflect available light
- Use potted plants beneath trees in dry shade, or choose shallow rooted plants like bromeliads or the tough varieties listed
- Install physical root barriers to aid plant establishment in rooty areas
- In dry shade areas apply wetting agents to the root zones and spray the foliage of plants with liquid fertiliser and seaweed solutions to feed the plants and limit fertiliser access to invasive roots.