**Primetime News**

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**Options for the Shade**

In our climate, landscapes with shade are better than those with full sun, but shade does reduce landscape options.

Even the most shade-tolerant grass, St. Augustine, requires more than 50 percent sun. Some groundcovers can tolerate more shade than lawn grass. Asiatic jasmine, monkey grass, liriope and dwarf ruellia do well in deep shade. They make an attractive landscape that uses less water and requires less maintenance than grass.

Plant these selections in solid blocks or in layers, based on size, for a good result. Back up the groundcovers with shade-tolerant, taller perennials, shrubs and small trees. Turks cap, shrimp plant, blue plumbago, viburnum and redbud are in that category.

Viburnums are available in many sizes from the 3-foot Spring Bouquet and the 5-foot Sandankwa, to the 12-foot Viburnum tinus. All are evergreen, bloom in the spring, produce berries that are quickly eaten by the birds and are not eaten by deer.

If your shade is provided by deciduous trees, Texas Gold Columbine is also an option. It is now blooming with its golden, shooting-star blooms over attractive light-green foliage. The exceptional perennial shows its color in the spring and foliage in the fall and winter. It declines in the summer heat.

Shade-tolerant shrubs and groundcovers can produce an attractive landscape in deep shade, but they are not as functional as a lawn for a play area for children and pets. A landscape option for the shade that does provide an open area for youth and pets is a surface of decomposed granite or flagstone.

The materials are easy to put in and easy to maintain. Children can ride their tricycles and play ball on the area.

There are two Turk’s cap species. The native plant grows to about 4 feet tall. The red blooms are quarter size. The exotic Turks cap grows larger to 6 or 7 feet and has larger blooms. Both species attract hummingbirds as a nectar source. Most winters, Turks cap freezes back to the ground.

Shrimp plant only grows to about 2.5 feet on most sites. The unusual shaped flowers are rust red in color. As the name implies, the blooms look like shrimp on a skewer. It has light-green foliage. The bloom is persistent throughout the summer and fall. For a special shrimp plant, look for the golden version; the shrimps that form the blooms are yellow with a white cap. Whichever color you plant, shrimp plant is a favorite nectar source for hummingbirds.

Blue plumbago is a popular plant because of its shade tolerance, the light blue flowers and its sprawling light-green foliage. Like shrimp plant and Turks cap, plumbago is drought tolerant. Grow it as a tall ground cover at 18 to 24 inches tall, or as a plant that spills out of a planter.

Butterflies use the flat quarter-size blooms for nectar. In some neighborhoods, deer do not eat plumbago, or if they do eat it, it is not their favorite food and it survives the browsing.

Blue plumbago is evergreen most winters and will bloom through mild winters.

Redbuds have finished blooming for the year, but they will make a good show again next spring in February if you plant several under, or at the edge, of your shade trees. Choose the Mexican, Texas or Oklahoma selection over the Eastern variety. They are all more drought tolerant. Recognize them by their shiny small leaves. The Eastern redbud leaves are 3 to 4 inches across and have a soft-green texture.

**“Garden Tasks”**

Apply vine and stump killer to the fresh cut of hackberries, mulberries, greenbriar and other woody weeds and vines as you prune them from your fence line or shrub border. The herbicide will translocate to the roots and prevent resprouting.

Spray your developing peaches once per week with an insecticide and fungicide. Both organic and manufactured fruit spray mixes are available. Follow label instructions.

Reduce the inconvenience of drought restrictions by postponing planting large gardens until the rains start. Use a few containers with zinnias, pentas, moss roses, purslane and begonias for water-efficient summer planting.

Attract birds to the landscape with bird baths and other water sources. A simple recycling system with moving water is really effective in attracting the birds.