



## Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article July 11, 2016

### Unusual Plants for Shade

by Lydia Holley

Azaleas, hydrangeas, and hostas are the go-to plants for shade in East Texas. These easy-care plants are dependable and colorful. However, a garden full of only these plants may eventually feel boring. To make your shady areas more interesting, consider adding an unusual plant or two. As with all good garden design, you need to determine what qualities you are looking for in a plant before adding it to your garden.



If you are interested in fragrance, you may want to try Carolina allspice (*Calycanthus floridus*). This shrub would be good to put at the back of the border, as it will grow to around 6 ft tall or more. This deciduous shrub sports unusual blooms, although they are not showy. Its scent is more sweet than spicy, and the fragrance varies from plant to plant.

Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*) is another tall shrub with blooms that are not showy but have a sweet scent, and which hummingbirds appreciate. There are dwarf forms as well as white and pink blooming cultivars available.

You may be more interested in finding a plant that will awe and surprise visitors. If that is the case, you will want to grow giant leopard plant (*Farfugium japonicum 'giganteum'*). This plant has leaves that are each one foot or more in width. It can also be a stunning container plant. Be aware, however, that it likes to be well watered whether it is planted in a container or in the ground.

Another good foliage plant for shade is 'Milky Way' cast iron plant, or Aspidistra. Although cast iron plants are common, Milky Way has white spots on its sword-shaped leaves, bringing a touch of light to a dark area. If you are very observant, you may notice its small, cup-shaped flowers that grow along the base of the plant in spring.

If your goal is to help the butterflies, try Dutchman's pipe, *Aristolocia macrophylla*, the host plant for the pipevine swallowtail butterfly. This vine can grow to 30 ft, so place it on a supporting structure. You will probably have to hunt to see the small flowers for which it is named.

These are just a few shade plants you can add to your garden for a touch of the unusual. If you are interested in learning more about plants for shade, attend Steven Chamblee's special two hour presentation on "Texas Shade Gardens", Thursday, July 21, 2016, Senior Citizens Center, 3344 Hwy 31 E, Athens, 5:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. hosted by the Henderson County Master Gardener Association. This presentation is free and open to the public.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email [hendersonCMGA@gmail.com](mailto:hendersonCMGA@gmail.com) or visit [www.henderson-co-tx-mg.org](http://www.henderson-co-tx-mg.org).