Planting Under Trees
Mary H. Meyer, Extension Horticulturist, and
Kelsey Sparks, Environmental Horticulture student
University of Minnesota

Trees: the Good, Bad and Ugly

**Few surface roots:** oak and ash

**Surface root:** maple, spruce, poplar, willow

**Black walnut and butternut trees:** produces substance that can injure or kill some plants, see references below

**Site:** What to do and What NOT to do.

**DON’T…..**

**Add soil:** It sounds good and may make YOU feel good, but it could kill the trees.

**Cut large roots:** Avoid cutting into roots > 2” diameter.

**Native Plants:** Take a walk in the woods near your home. Find which ones will look good under the trees, and actually grow!

**Botanical Name** | **Common Name** | **Comments**
--- | --- | ---
*Aquilegia Canadensis* | wild columbine | shade
*Anemone Canadensis* | canada anemone | sun/shade/moist
*Asarum canadense* | wild ginger | shade/moist
*Aster macrophyllus* | large-leafed aster | shade/moist
*Carex spp.* | sedges | shade/moist
*Cornus canadensis* | bunchberry | requires acidic soil, shade/moist
*Deschampsia caespitosa* | tufted hairgrass | shade/part to full sun
*Erythronium spp.* | trout lily | shade/moist soil
*Geum triflorum* | prairie smoke | sun/light shade
*Geranium maculatum* | wild geranium | shade/moist
*Hydrophyllum virginianum* | water leaf | shade
*Phlox divaricata* | woods phlox | shade
*Podophyllum peltatum* | mayapple | shade/moist

**DO…..**

**Mulch:** organic, 2-4 " no more; inorganic (plastic ☹);

**Increase light if needed:** prune or thin limbs.

**Plant perennials and annuals:**

Eliminate existing sod/plants (cover up, Round-Up, remove it); put in plants; light mulch; water well.
Polygonatum biflorum 'Variegatum'  variegated Solomon's seal  shade

Thalictrum spp.     meadow rue     shade

Tiarella cordifolia     foam flower     shade

Tradescantia ohiensis     spiderwort     shade/sun/dry

Trillium grandiflorum     large-flowered trillium     shade

Viola spp.     violets     shade

Ferns:
Adiantum pedatum     maidenhair fern     shade/moist
Osmunda claytoniana     interrupted fern     shade/moist or dry
Pteridium aquilinum     bracken     sun/shade

**Non-Native Plants**

Ajuga reptans     bugleweed     sun

Brunnera macrophylla     Siberian bugloss     shade

Convallaria majalis     lily-of-the-valley     shade

Chasmanthium latifolium     northern seaoats     shade

Dianthus barbatus     sweet William     light shade/sun; self-seeds

Epimedium x rubrum     barrenwort     shade

Galium odoratum     sweet woodruff     shade

Glechoma hederacea     ground ivy     shade

Hosta spp.     plaintain lily     shade

Lamiastrum galeobdolon     yellow archangel     shade to part sun

Lamium maculatum     dead nettle, lamium     shade/part sun

Narcissus spp.     daffodils     sun/light shade/dry soils

Pachysandra terminalis     pachysandra     shade/winter protection

Phalaris arundinacea 'Feesey’s Form'     ribbon grass     very aggressive

Vinca minor     periwinkle     shade/winter protection

**Shade tolerant grasses:**

Festuca spp.     hard, chewing, red, sheep’s fescue     sun/dry soil

References:


