

## Flying Through the Bermuda Triangle

Over the thirty plus years I worked at the garden centre I began to see patterns. One pattern was that all gardens have their own version of the “Bermuda triangle,” that place where plants go and never return. A second pattern was that gardeners keep trying to fly through the triangle, learning the same lesson over and over again.

One of the most common Bermuda triangles in a garden is the area under trees. Whether they are large deciduous trees or dense evergreens the ground underneath is notoriously difficult for sustaining healthy plants. Such an area is properly termed “dry shade.” Shady obviously as a result of the branches and foliage overhead and dry because the dense and thirsty tree roots are taking all of the moisture out of the soil.

There are two possible responses to this challenge. The first is to recognize that trees don’t necessarily play well with others. They may not want plants growing in competition with them, so respect their wishes and lay down a couple of inches of mulch instead over the roots and let them be.

The second option is to look for groundcovers that will tolerate dry shade. Even the worst soil will support these and other plants if you take the time and effort to work some organic matter into the planting holes and put a layer of moisture-retaining mulch around the plants.

Pay special attention to watering in the first season; these plants are battling it out with a much bigger opponent and will need extra moisture to help them establish roots. Using the root growth supplement Myke will give the plants a real boost in their quest to find their way amongst the tree roots.

There’s no easy solution-you will have to coddle these plants through their initial growing season but the result will be plants that successfully navigate their way through this Bermuda triangle. Here are some good choices for dry shade:

1. *Epimedium x rubrum* (Bishop’s Hat)-new foliage tinted with red, dainty blooms and deer resistant.
2. *Lamium maculatum* (Spotted Nettle)-one of the best for dry shade, with several forms available. Those with silver foliage really light up a shady area. Can be invasive in good soils.
3. *Pachysandra terminalis*-slow to spread but forms a thick carpet of glossy green evergreen foliage over time.

4. *Vinca minor* (Periwinkle)-very tough plant with an added bonus of a long blooming season of blue or white flowers.
5. *Convallaria majalis* (Lily-of-the-Valley)-how can such a dainty plant be of such iron will? Tough as nails with thick foliage and roots.
6. *Aegopodium podagraria* "Variegatum" (Goutweed)-if all else fails...perfect for dry, poor soils and it forms a very dense carpet of variegated green and white foliage.
7. *Hedera helix* (English Ivy)-becoming more difficult to source as it has been declared a noxious weed in some areas of the Pacific Northwest. Deep green evergreen foliage and very dense.
8. *Bergenia cordifolia*-slow to establish but a great combination of evergreen glossy green circular foliage with bright pink blooms. Forms solid clumps.

You can see mature examples of all of these plants at the Ornamental Gardens in various beds.