

Lesser-known Native Shade Plants

By Gregg Tepper

1. *Cardamine douglassii* (purple cress) – blooms in late April, moist, rich organic soil, with leaf litter, ephemeral.
2. *Enemion biternatum* (eastern false rue-anemone) – blooms mid to late April, average to high-organic alkaline soil moist in spring, second flush of leaves emerges in fall.
3. *Streptopus lanceolatus* var. *roseus* (rose twisted-stalk) – blooms in May, well-drained, moisture retentive, acid soil.
4. *Erythronium albidum* (white trout lily)* – blooms in early to mid April, rich, alluvial soil, ephemeral. Easier to bloom than *E. americanum*.
5. *Diphylleia cymosa* (umbrella leaf) – blooms in late April to early May, rich, moisture-retentive alluvial soil, leaves last all summer, bright red berries.
6. *Dodecatheon amethystinum* (amethyst shooting star)* – early to mid April, rich, well-drained alkaline soil, ephemeral soil can be dry in summer.
7. *Carex eburnea* (bristle-leaf sedge)* - insignificant bloom, evergreen, finely-leaved grass relative, average to alkaline soil with little competition from other plants. Fine looking plant all year.
8. *Carex amphibola* (eastern narrow-leaf sedge)* – insignificant bloom, semi-evergreen, narrow, medium-green leaves form 12-18” wide masses. Performs well in all but heavy, wet soil. An excellent native alternative to *Liriope*.
9. *Cypripedium kentuckiense* (Kentucky lady’s slipper)* – gorgeous blooms in May last up to 3 weeks, easiest of the native terrestrial orchids to grow. Soil must drain well and be friable with high organic matter content, neutral to slightly acidic. Flowers face to the highest light source so site accordingly in the garden.
10. *Chamaelirium luteum* (fairy wand) – lovely, cream-colored blooms in early May that show for weeks, plant is dioecious and female stalks form seedpods that remain attractive into the autumn. Basal leaf rosettes are evergreen and do best with just a light leaf mulch. Moisture-retentive, rich, acid soil.
11. *Adiantum capillus-veneris* (southern maidenhair)* - fronds emerge in early to mid-May, form airy clumps and are uniquely-shaped. Excel in organic matter soils that are slightly acidic, neutral or slightly alkaline. Fronds persist well into the autumn. Keep leaf mulches light and do not smother.
12. *Pleopeltis polypodioides* (resurrection fern) – fronds are evergreen and we are in the upper most range of hardiness for this fern. Grows as an epiphyte on oaks in the south, not a soil dweller. Give it a spot on a shady log, loves humidity. More of a collector’s plant for the garden.

(*) notates plants that are available from vendors on the source list.

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13. *Polypodium virginianum* (rock polypody) – fronds are evergreen and very durable. Grows in a thin layer of leaf litter that gathers on large rocks and cliff edges, not a soil dweller by nature but will grow in well-drained, acid soil in the garden. Extremely drought tolerant once established.
14. *Cystopteris fragilis* (fragile fern)* - earliest of the ferns to emerge in early to mid April. Pale green fronds remain nice until hot, dry weather where the fern will die back and then will re-flush when sufficient moisture returns. Excellent fern to “refresh” by cutting back and allowing new growth to appear. Likes high shade and competes well with other plants.
15. *Shortia galacifolia* (Oconee bells)* – evergreen leaves tinged with red produce white, campanulate blooms in mid-April. Grows in almost pure organic matter soils that are very acidic (4.0 to 5.5 pH) and moisture-retentive, cannot dry out.
16. *Hexastylis speciosa* (Alabama ginger)* – blooms in May very close to the ground, showiest of the native gingers, with leaves mottled and evergreen. Moist, acid, organic soil that drains well, drought tolerant once established.
17. *Geum fragarioides* (syn. *Waldsteinia*) (barren strawberry) – yellow five-petaled flowers in early May, excellent evergreen groundcover that spreads gently, prefers moist to average garden soil. Easy to establish and no maintenance.
18. *Delphinium tricornes* (dwarf larkspur)* – Gorgeous blue/purple blooms in late April, ephemeral, requires well-drained, alkaline soil, will reseed gently when happy. Benefits from applications of leaf mulch to keep soil organic. Can be raised from seed.
19. *Trillium pusillum* (little trillium) – Earliest of the *Trillium* species to bloom in mid-April. Only about 4-6” tall and its darkly-pigmented leaves are attractive against the pale blossoms. Moisture-retentive, rich, organic soil that is acidic.
20. *Phacelia purshii* (Miami mist) – Lovely, fringed pale-blue blossoms in May, a biennial that reseeds easily when sited properly. Average, organic soil.
21. *Phacelia bipinnatifida* (purple phacelia) – A hardy annual that reseeds very freely yet is easy to control. Seeds germinate in late summer and early autumn, persist through the winter and bloom in late April. Will grow in all soils except very wet and very dry.
22. *Synandra hispidula* (Guyandotte beauty)* – An excellent, rare biennial that reseeds freely when happy. Excels in rich, moisture-retentive, acid soil. Very showy blossoms persist for up to three weeks. Available from *Enchanter’s Garden* in West Virginia.

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