

# 10 Herbs to Grow in the Shade

By Tessa Zundel

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Shade is not a liability in the herb garden - it's an asset!

- We can use various degrees of shade
- A large variety of herbs can be planted
- Learn to stack functions with each herb plant
- Think about and record potential uses, including trade or sale
- Pitfalls: Understand light and plant connection, realistic plans for use, take notes!
- Side Note: Nearly all the herbs presented here have multiple varieties with differing flower and leaf color, as well as flavor and cultural requirements.

## Light Exposure

- The term “shade” is relative. Start with the nursery tag or the seed packet information.
- Reduced light can result in slower grow, little to no flowering and seed set.
- An abundance of light can result in heat or sun stroke, other stress factors, and little to no flowering and seed set.
- Learn to observe your herbs and adjust when needed!
- Some few herbs thrive in full shade and can be killed by direct or even partial exposure to sun. (These are woodland herbs.)



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## What is Shade?

There are various types of sunlight exposure that are pertinent to gardeners.

- **Full Sun** = 6-8 hours of direct sun exposure.
- **Partial Sun** = 4-6 hours of direct sun exposure.
- **Partial Shade** = 2-4 hours of sun, but probably morning sun exposure. Also called dappled shade, which indicates that the plant gets very little light directly from the sun. (All plants need the sun in some measure.) Usually, these plants are safe from heat and harsh winds under trees or around perennial bushes and plants.
- **Full Shade** = 2 hours or less of filtered sun per day with indirect ambient light. In hot summer areas, it's best if any sun exposure happens in the early morning. Often referred to as "woodland herbs", full shade requiring herbs usually do well under trees, like in a forest. These plants often prefer a slightly moist soil.

## Herbs for Light Shade

**Light shade** = herbs that tolerate shade but require some sun exposure throughout the day to perform at their best.

Often, this will mean they prefer morning sun but afternoon shade, especially if you live in hot summer areas.



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## Initial List of Light Shade Herbs

Here's a list of herbs that will grow in light shade. We'll go over three in more detail.

- Angelica
- Catnip/Catmint
- Chervil
- Chicory
- Cowslip/Primrose
- Hyssop
- Joe Pye Weed
- Nasturtium
- Oregano/Marjoram
- Parsley
- Sage
- Soapwort
- Sorrel
- Sweet Cecily
- Sweet Rocket
- Tansy
- Valerian
- Yarrow

## Learn to Observe Your Site

Ask yourself some questions as you research:

- What do I need to know to successfully grow herbs in full, part, and light shade?
- What assets do I already have?
- Which do I still need to cultivate?



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## Catnip/Catmint

Both catnip and catmint belong the perennial mint (*Nepeta*) family and have the typical square stems and spikes of tiny flowers of that family. They are very similar plants, both aromatic, easy to grow, and tolerant of dry conditions.

Both make a great tea, oxymel, or tincture for sore throat.

They are also favorites of pollinators, especially honeybees.

Catnip (and catmint to a degree) contain the chemical *nepetalactone* which is what attracts cats (depending on the cat) while repelling damaging insects.

## Nasturtium

Nasturtium is an annual herb that loves warmth and some sun but will wilt and even die off in late afternoon summer sun/heat.

To help mitigate this problem, grow nasturtiums under and to the side of tomato plants. Grouping plants together for mutual benefit is often called *companion planting*. In permaculture parlance, we call it *guild planting* or *combing plants for their functions (stacking functions)*.

Nasturtium flowers and leaves spice up a salad with their peppery flavor. The flowers can also be included in summer ice cubes, breads, herbal vinegars, and homemade pasta. The seed pods can be pickled like capers. The leaves make a helpful aphid spray.

Nasturtium flowers can be made into an antibacterial, anti-fungal, antiviral, and anti-inflammatory tincture.



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## Marjoram/Oregano

Both marjoram and oregano benefit from morning light and a little shade in the hot afternoon sun\*. Both are popular perennial culinary herbs, but each have wellness properties, too.

If you have clay soil, be sure to build a rocky mound for planting in since herbs like these require fantastic drainage.

While similar, these herbs have slight differences. In short, oregano is the stronger of the two in flavor, vigor, and antimicrobial power. Think of marjoram as the polite and citrusy/piney cousin of oregano.

\*It's interesting to note that most of my herb books say oregano can take full sun. I have planted it in many exposures and have taken note of how it performed. In my hot summer climate, oregano does better with a little shelter from afternoon sun. Books are essential guides, but always get your own experience, too!

## Challenge #1

Commit now to being flexible and observant, and to taking notes.  
Don't overthink it, trust your gut!

Get a notebook and start recording observations and experiences about your yard, shade amounts, herbs, etc. Write down what you still need to learn more about. Include assets and liabilities already in the garden.



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## Herbs for Part Shade

**Part shade** = 2-4 hours of sun, but probably morning sun exposure. Sometimes, called *dappled shade*, which indicates that the plant gets very little light directly from the sun. (All plants need the sun in some measure, though.)

Usually, these plants are safe from heat and harsh winds under trees or around perennial bushes and plants.

## Initial List of Part Shade Herbs

Here's a list of herbs that will grow in partial shade. We'll go over four in more detail.

- Ajuga
- Alliums (like chives)
- Alpine Strawberries (*Fragaria vesca*)
- Bee Balm
- Boneset
- Borage
- Calendula
- Chamomile
- Cilantro
- Daylily
- Dill/Fennel
- Horseradish
- Lamb's Ear
- Lemon Balm
- Nettle
- Parsley
- Sage
- Sweet Cicely
- Sweet Woodruff
- Stevia
- Tarragon
- Thyme
- Violet
- Wintergreen



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## Stack Functions

Begin to consider how many uses can one plant serve in its space in the garden? The more functions stacked on top of each other, the more useful the plant and the more worthy of consideration!

### Calendula

Calendula is a wonderful annual herb that produces seed readily for replanting the next year. It grows easily in even poorer soils and thrives on general neglect. Don't overwater and be sure to harvest blooms regularly for best production.

Give calendula the protection from heat that it needs in the partly shady spots of your garden to keep those blooms looking beautiful. Even so, it may take a break from blooming in the middle of summer to come back strong in the fall before the hard frost of winter comes.

Calendula petals are edible, as well as being used for food and textile dye. Calendula blooms are healing for basically anything having to do with your skin and is useful in sugar scrubs, salves, soaps, and lip balm.

### Lemon Balm

Ah, my favorite tea herb! Lemon balm is yet another member of the mint family and is a perennial herb. It will die back in cold winter areas but with heavy mulch will pop right back up in spring.

Remove the flowering spikes of lemon balm as they appear to control the spread of this hearty herb by reseeding. Another way to control them is to plant them in part shade to stem their vigor.



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Fragrant leaves of lemon balm can be used in a variety of cosmetics and are a popular herbal ingredient in baking and desserts. Lemon balm is also a classic potpourri herb because its fragrance is so pleasing.

It's also used to calm the nerves, soothe indigestion (like all mints), dress wounds, and is useful as an antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant.

## Violets

Growing wild in most of the Northern Hemisphere (and random places like the Andes!), violet is a reliable spring flowering herb. Once hot weather advances, violet blooms will retreat to come back in fall. The healthful leaves remain all growing season.

Considered weeds by most standard gardening metrics, these useful little plants are edible in both flower and leaf. (Watch for saponins in some leaves, depending on variety.)

Flowers can be used in sweet dishes like violet gelatin and cookies. You can also learn the traditional preservation method of making sugared violets.

Violet leaves and flowers are also useful in herbal preparations like salves, infusions, poultices, and syrup. Violet is very soothing and has long been used for coughs and other respiratory ailments.





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## Parsley

Parsley is grown as an annual herb most often (though it's a biennial) and it grows readily from seed. It is accommodating in that it will grow in full sun, as well as part shade.

Parsley produces so much biomass throughout the growing season that it is a worthy inclusion in your chop-and-drop green manure program or as a manure tea crop.

Parsley makes a great companion plant for veggies like corn, tomatoes, peppers, and even perennials like asparagus.

Add parsley to soups, sauces, dressings, salads, roasted veggies, meat dishes right before serving, and even smoothies.

It is a helpful digestive herb, which is why it's traditionally served up at dinner time. It also contains vitamins K, A, and C, as well as antioxidants. Parsley even helps with bad breath!

## Challenge #2

As you research herbal plants to consider for your space, keep a margin in your notes for recording how many functions each plant performs. If you're not sure, do more research!

Remember to consider the work a plant does in the garden; for the soil, the air, even for the water. What can it do for you and your family, and even your homestead livestock? What about other people in your community or congregation?



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## Herbs for Full Shade

**Full shade** = 2 hours of sun per day (or less) and none that is very direct, except maybe in the first part of the morning.

Full shade requiring plants usually do well under trees, as in a fruit tree guild. They are also typically plants that prefer a slightly moist soil which can be achieved in the garden with regular applications of mulch (like wood chips).

## Initial List of Full Shade Herbs

Here's a list of herbs that will grow in full shade. We'll go over three in more detail.

- Agrimony
- Black Cohosh
- Bloodroot
- Dandelion
- Dead Nettle
- Ginseng
- Goldenseal
- Jewelweed
- Lungwort
- Mayapple
- Oregon Grape
- Ramps
- Solomon's Seal
- Stinging Nettle
- Trillium
- Wild Ginger

\*Alkanet is notoriously hard to germinate but, when it does, it requires full shade to reach transplantable size. Then, oddly enough, it's planted in full sun!



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## Define Your Why

As you research and learn more about herbs, keep in mind why you'd like to grow herbs. How will you use them? What purpose will they serve in your garden, in your home, and in your family?

## Dandelion

Dandelion is probably the mostly widely recognized herb in the Northern world, though most people think of it as a weed. A perennial plant, dandelion is considered a forage crop for its flowers and young leaves.

I defy you not to grow dandelion as it isn't bothered by poor soil and would probably grow on the dark side of the moon. It may not flower quite as much in full or deep shade, but it will grow!

The young leaves of dandelion are a great bitter digestive green to add to salads. The flowers can be used to make everything from gelatin dessert to cookies to candy. The roots of dandelion are a powerful liver tonic and cleanser and, when roasted, a viable coffee substitute.

## Ginseng

Ginseng is a true woodland herb and must have shade since direct sunlight will damage or even kill it. For North American herb growers, ginseng could help you earn some cash on the side as a non-timber forest product (NTFP) that is quite popular.

Like its fellow shade herb, Goldenseal, Ginseng is in danger of being over-harvested in the wild. This makes it worthy to grow even if you don't sell it.



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Long used as a tonic for mental and physical health and vigor, ginseng can help with everything from stress to appetite. You can toss powdered ginseng into almost anything, including smoothies!

## Ramps

Ramps are one of the spring ephemeral plants, which means they appear early in the season and delicately fade once the summer begins. They need sun in the spring while they're maturing, so plant under deciduous trees because they'll like cool shade as they die back in summer.

Ramps can be grown from seed (especially for commercial production), but you can also divide and transplant bulbs in bunches. Like a green onion, they can also be regrown by cutting of the vegetative part and putting the root end in water to move to soil to grow out again.

Ramps are rich in vitamin A and C, as well as minerals like iron. They're also an anti-oxidant food. Ramp pesto is a particularly delicious recipe to make with this culinary herb.

There's a large market for ramps in many cities, so consider growing ramps as a side hustle if you have just the right spot. If you're blessed with woodland, go on a ramp hunt and see if you already have them growing.

## Challenge #3

In your herb journal, write down all the reasons you want to grow herbs regardless of where they are in your garden or their light exposure.

Figuring out your why when it comes to growing your own herbs will help you make smart decisions about varieties and give you determination when things don't grow the way you expect.



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<b>Title</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Note</b>
<a href="#"><u>Nasturtium Medicinal Uses</u></a>	Blog Post	Ashley Adamant	Helpful Site Overall
<a href="#"><u>50+ Herbs for Shade</u></a>	Blog Post	Tessa Zundel	My Website
<a href="#"><u>Woodland Herbs for Forest Farming</u></a>	Blog Post	Tessa Zundel	My Website
<a href="#"><u>70 Medicinal Herbs for Organic Gardens</u></a>	Blog Post	Chris Dalziel	Helpful Site Overall
<a href="#"><u>Cultivating Woodland Herbs</u></a>	Blog Post	Juliet Blankespoor	Chestnut School of Herbal Medicine



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<b>Title</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Note</b>
<b>The Potted Herb</b>	E-Book	Tessa Zundel	Container Herb Specific
<b><i>The Practical Herb Garden</i></b>	E-book	Tessa Zundel	Special Offer for You!
<b>Herbal Academy</b>	Online Courses	Multiple Teachers	I Take Their Classes!
<b><i>The Complete Book of Herbs</i></b>	Print Book	Lesley Bremness	Great for Beginners
<b><i>Farming the Woods</i></b>	Print Book	Mudge & Gabriel	Permaculture Approach
<b><i>Growing &amp; Marketing Ginseng, Goldenseal...</i></b>	Print Book	Davis & Persons	Specific to NTFPs



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## Final Tips & Takeaways

If you have any kind of shade, you can find an herb to grow inside its protection.

1. Begin an herb garden journal and record your observations and interactions with your garden space.
2. Consider the functions of each herb you're considering and which are of most value to you.
3. Brainstorm all the reasons you want to grow herbs and see if they match those herbs from step 3.
4. Make a plan and plant!
5. For fun, download your free bookmarks and prints!

## Contact Information

Thanks so much for being with me today!  
Feel free to reach out if you have questions.

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We only ask that you not share the link and send back your review within two weeks. (We'll send you one gentle reminder.) More about the book below...

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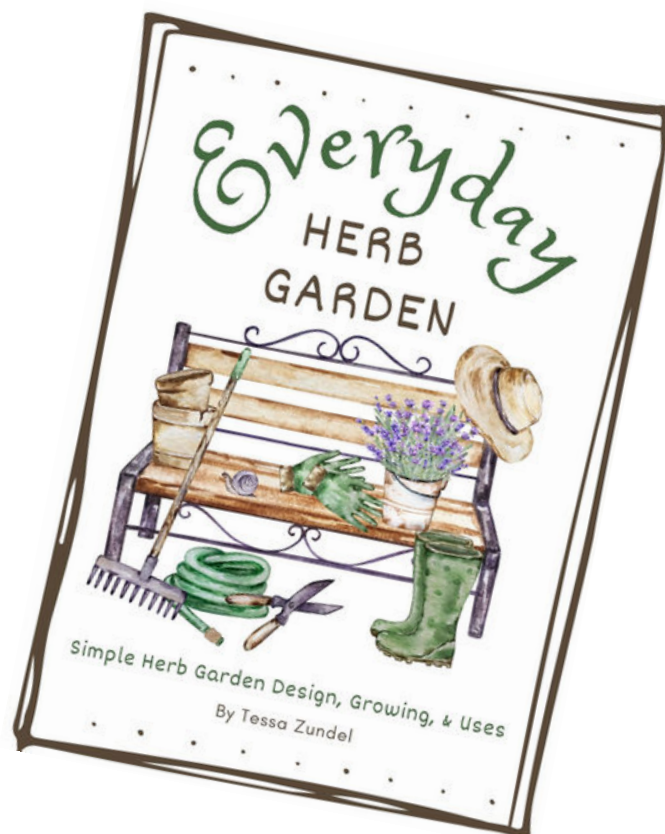
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