

Can You Dig It

Newsletter of the Piney Hills Master Gardeners of Louisiana

Editor: Lynn Ritchie

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*All Shade is **Not** Created Equal*

Assessing the light in your landscape is an ongoing process. Light levels in a garden change with the time of day, the season, and from one year to the next as your trees mature and cast increasingly broad shadows.

It is high time that I do some serious *assessing* of the plantings on the west side of my house. I have struggled with Mother Nature and she has won! This year I vowed **not** to try to grow grass under my oaks, but rather create a tapestry of beautiful shade plants that could thrive under the ever growing canopy of shade. I'll think of this garden project as an opportunity to play with the color, shapes, and textures of foliage that will create a cool, lush view from my kitchen window.

Plants that grow best in shade tend to have large, flat leaves with thin "skin". This allows minimum resistance for absorbing light needed for photosynthesis and growth. Most plants that grow in shady conditions tend to produce fewer flowers than those that grow in sun. All the energy can then be directed toward vegetative growth.

My game plan for my new shade garden then, is to look for plants with distinctive leaf shapes and colors and to combine smaller-leaved linear plants with the bigger, bolder forms.

So, let's set the record straight... all shade is not created equal.

The term shade is used to describe some degree of relief from the sun. There are basically four classes: light shade, partial shade, full shade, and deep shade. These are based on both the duration of time without sun and shade density.

Light Shade: Little or no sun, but is bathed in reflected light throughout the day.

Part Shade: Dappled shade throughout the day. Or, a garden that is densely shaded for most of the day but receives bright sun for 2-3 hours a day.

Full Shade: No direct sunlight throughout the day but with a small amount of reflected light for a portion of the day.

Deep Shade: No direct sunlight and no reflected light.

It's easy to read the plant tags and see which plants require sun and which plants need varying degrees of shade. However, it is more difficult to match them to a location in your garden. Hopefully, the guidelines above will help you in correct selection and placement of plants in your garden, ending costly plant-choice mistakes.

Because...Mother Nature always wins!!!

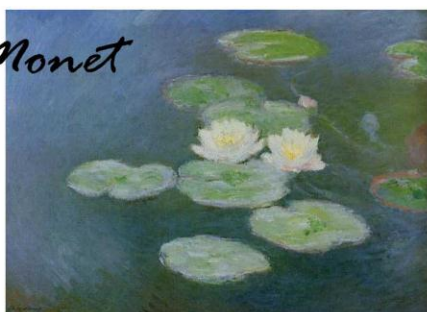


Flower Power:

Growing Your Garden Photography Skills

Flowers have long been a favorite subject for paintings and photographs. One of my favorite projects when I taught art to children was painting flowers. The three main floral artists we focused on were Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, and Georgia O'Keeffe. Each of these artists has a unique style and perspective when capturing their subjects. By studying their work, one could train their eye to see and recreate their interesting compositions.

Monet



One year my art students were invited to draw jonquils to be displayed at the Jonquil Jubilee in Gibsland, LA. It was so interesting how each child's picture uniquely captured the flower. Some children painted the whole flower while others zoomed in.

Today, with a simple digital camera, you can express your style by taking pictures with the eye of an artist. Below are some tips that will help you take a photos of your garden that are so beautiful you will want to hang them on your wall.

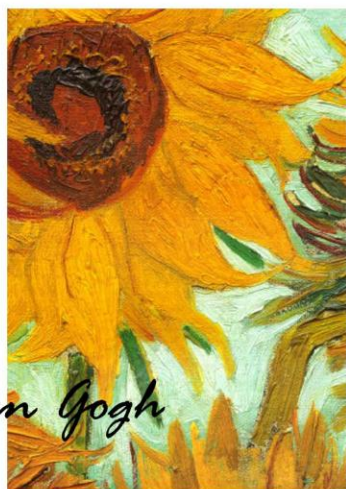
1. **Pick the right time-** It is best to take pictures on a bright overcast day, with high cloud cover. The harsh sun casts deep shadows and makes your garden look washed out. Early mornings are also good because the light is soft and as a bonus you have dew drops to accent your flowers.

2. **Find the right angle-** Don't be afraid to get down on your knees or stomach for that matter. You'll find interesting angles and if you're really low, you can include the blue sky in your photograph. On the other hand, climb up on a step ladder and shoot down on your subject.

3. **Composition-** This is an important element in achieving the exceptional photograph. Zero in and fill the frame for a dramatic effect. Never put your subject exactly in the middle of the frame but rather offset it for a more pleasing look. Always check what will be visible or distracting in the background.

4. **Focus...or don't-** Use a short depth of field setting on your camera that will keep your subject sharp but will blur the background. You might also try the reverse of this by leaving a row of flowers in the foreground that are blurred while focusing on the subject just beyond them.

van Gogh



O'Keeffe



Pets in the Garden

As I was organizing the house after the Christmas holiday, I came across a stack of letters that my children had written when they were young- *priceless!* The one that caught my attention was a letter my oldest son had written to Santa:

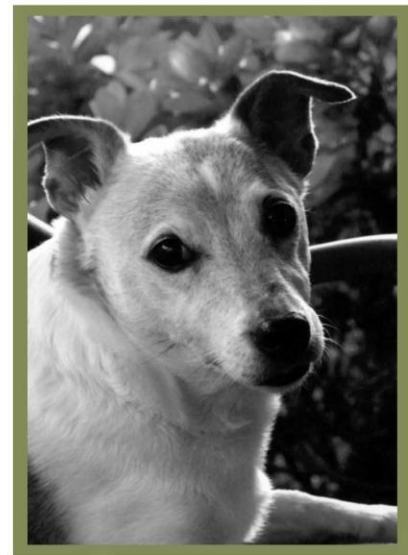
Dear Santa,
I love dogs because they are nice and easy to keep. They are fun to play with. I could go rabbit hunting with my dog. He could sleep with me and help me catch the Tooth Fairy. When we go to the beach he could wear sunglasses.
I am going to call him HANK.

And so... that's how it all started. Santa left a tiny Jack Russell puppy under the tree. Our lives would be forever changed. The next year my son wrote this follow-up letter to Santa:

Dear Santa,
Thank you for my dog Hank. If you would like to pet him you can...

These letters were written over seventeen years ago- *time surely flies!* My son is now a man and Hank...well, Hank is now chasing rabbits in heaven. A few days before Thanksgiving his long, happy life ended. I buried him in a corner of my knot garden. In the days that followed, I received messages from friends and family-- everyone had a "Hank Story". It was amazing how many lives he had taken a bite out of!! I still catch myself looking for him to run and greet me when I walk in the back door. Had I taken this pleasure for granted? Were there other lessons to be learned from my canine friend's love and loyalty?

My thoughts were confirmed when shortly after Hank died, a dear friend sent me this email:



A Dog's Purpose (from a 6 year old)

Being a veterinarian, I had been called to examine a ten year old Irish Wolfhound named Belker. The dog's owners and their little boy were all very attached to Belker, and they were hoping for a miracle.

I examined the dog and found he was dying of cancer. I told the family we couldn't do anything for him and offered to perform the euthanasia procedure for the old dog in their home.

As we made arrangements, the parents told me they thought it would be good for their six year old son to observe the procedure. They felt as though he might learn something from the experience.

The next day, I felt the familiar catch in my throat as Belker's family surrounded him. The little boy seemed so calm, petting the old dog for the last time, that I wondered if he understood what was going on. Within a few minutes, Belker slipped peacefully away.

The little boy seemed to accept Belker's transition without any difficulty or confusion. We sat together for a while after Belker's death, wondering aloud about the sad fact that animal lives are shorter than human lives.

The little boy, who had been listening quietly, piped up, "I know why". What came out of his mouth next stunned me. I'd never heard a more comforting explanation. It has changed the way I try to live.

He said, "People are born so that they can learn how to live a good life-- like loving everybody all the time and being nice, right?"
"Well, dogs already know how to do that, so they don't have to stay as long."

Remember, if a dog was the teacher you would learn things like:

When loved ones come home, always run to greet them.

Never pass up the opportunity to go for a joyride.

Allow the experience of fresh air and the wind in your face to be pure ecstasy.

Take naps.

Stretch before rising.

Run, romp and play daily.

Avoid biting when a simple growl will do.

Delight in the simple joy of a long walk.

Be loyal.

Never pretend to be something you're not.

If what you want lies buried, dig until you find it.

When someone is having a bad day, be silent, sit close by, and nuzzle gently.

ENJOY EVERY MOMENT OF EVERY DAY!