

WHAT TO DO UNDER YOUR SHADE TREE?

Are you tired of looking at that bare patch under your shade tree where nothing seems to grow? Getting rid of the tree is not the answer.

Deciduous trees are a primary focal point in many urban gardens. These magnificent living organisms sustain cool micro-climates, produce oxygen, provide wildlife habitat and absorb the gases of airborne pollutants. They also provide relief from the summer heat and intense ultraviolet rays. Torontonians may love the amenities of urban living, however we all possess an instinctive relationship with nature and natural surroundings. If you do not have a native deciduous tree on your property, I would like to suggest a few of my favourites: Serviceberry (*Amelanchier canadensis*), Blue Beech (*Carpinus caroliniana*) and White Ash (*Fraxinus Americana*). Trees can provide a simple solution to fill an empty garden by dramatically adding height, width and mass. Remember to select a small tree for a small garden.

I would like to share some ideas as to what to place underneath your deciduous tree. Lounging furniture such as muskoka chairs, hammocks or a stone bench will enhance your leisure time outdoors. Try to incorporate a variety of natural elements such as wood, stone or metal into your seating arrangements. Strategically placed boulders on a bed of pea gravel can provide a seat or add visual interest during the winter.

A low maintenance suggestion is to use river rock or pea gravel underneath the base of the tree. Just make sure to place filter fabric underneath the rocks to prevent weed growth.

Garden art that is fun and funky may be placed in the lower tree branches, on the trunk

or around the base of the tree. Metallic, stone or wooden structures (for example a bird house) painted with vivid colours can be an attractive and unique garden centerpiece. It can also serve to attract young children and adults to share each other's company beneath the shade tree.

Planting perennial ground covers under the shade tree is an excellent idea. Keep in mind that the ground cover needs to be well watered in order to thrive. Perennial ground covers which are lighter in colour such as yellow or white, will brighten the shady area.

Uplighting your shade tree can provide warmth and interest year round. The beauty of the tree silhouette in winter can be an outstanding feature that transforms the garden every season.

Make space underneath your tree for a cool retreat this summer. Let me know what gardening projects you've experimented with underneath your shade tree by emailing me at greenescape@yahoo.com.

Marilyn Pomer is a landscape designer for Greenscape Designs in Toronto where she continues to search for innovative garden ideas to share with her clients. For more ideas about garden design please contact Marilyn at (416) 910-6273 or marilyn@greenscape.ca