



# Grass in shade

## **NO GRASS LIKES SHADE**

Certain ornamentals like hostas or impatient flowers need shade to look their best, *but no grass likes shade*. As a result, everyone trying to maintain good quality grass in shady areas is fighting an uphill battle. Sometimes, grass can be improved in shade if you understand the problems grass faces.

There are two problems grass faces in shade. First is the lack of quantity and quality of sunlight. If the grass is under trees or an overhang, there is simply less light striking it. If the light is reflected or filtered, the quality of light is diminished. Grass plants respond by producing long spindly leaves. These leaves are not as hardy as leaves grown in direct sunlight and are more easily damaged and breached by leaf diseases. Less sunlight for the leaves also means a weaker root system because there are fewer carbohydrates available. The root system is shallower and less able to recuperate from wear. This is doubly bad when dogs are confined in a small area under a tree. The grass soon disappears due to increased wear and decreased ability to grow.

The second problem for grass in shade is reduced air movement. At night, dew settles on the grass. If the dew stays on the grass into mid-day, this extends the length of time the leaf blades are wet. Foliar diseases need “free water” like dew to spread. Long periods of wet leaves are perfect for disease development. Wise people who want to minimize disease development do what they can to shorten the amount of time the leaves are wet by not watering in the late afternoon or evening. The grass plant has extra disease pressure and is weakened by reduced light levels – no wonder it has a tough time surviving!

## **Things you can do to improve grasses performance in shade:**

- Do what you can to improve airflow so the dew dries sooner. Trim some lower tree branches. Consider reducing the size and amount of less desirable trees and shrubs. (This is a nice way of saying cut down some trees!) Look at your landscape with a critical eye. If you want some grass, you need some light. Consider replacing old, damaged and overgrown trees with new smaller ones.
- Don't over-water grass in shade. If the shady area is watered by the same zone as a sunny area, the shady area is getting too much water. [Click here for more information on over-watering lawns.](#)
- Take a moderate approach to fertilization. Don't over-fertilize grass in shade or neglect it altogether.
- Select grass species that do better in shade. Kentucky bluegrass has less shade tolerance than other grasses, like fine leaf fescue. Therefore, Kentucky bluegrass is not a first choice in shade, but it will be a component in shady mix of grass seed. The best advice is to go to your local garden center and purchase the best shady mix of grass seed. Follow the center's advice on establishing the grass. Avoid seed mixes that have annual ryegrass. Early spring is the preferred time to seed in shady mixes.
- Minimize wear traffic. Find another place for the dog, if you want grass to grow in shade.



- Give it up, especially around maple trees. Shallow-rooted maple trees are just about a hopeless case. Consider planting some impatiens in a bed of mulch.

Sometimes, grass in shade will last a few years and then die, requiring reseeding. That may be the best you can do. If you want to be a millionaire, invent a grass that holds up in shade. To be a multimillionaire, invent one that also withstands dog traffic in shade!