

Six Shady Spreaders

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Some rare plants are actually becoming common as gardeners look for more unusual groundcovers for shade than the overused ivy, ajuga, etc. Indeed, some are already in the market mainstream – epimediums, heucheras, tiarellas, the lillyturfs, certain ferns, and of course hostas.

Now quite a few more are being praised by good gardeners as exceptionally worthy groundcovers for shade. Here are half a dozen that get frequent mention:

- Mat forming *Lysimachia japonica* 'Minutissima' has tiny curved evergreen jade leaves and bears yellow flowers in early summer. Discovered by great plantsman Harold Epstein in Japan, it is hardy to at least -10 degrees F and stands high winds and blazing temperatures.
- A taller and autumn flowering treasure is *Salvia koyame*. Barely 12" high, it has large leaves and in the fall produces golden flowers that brighten woodlands.
- Barren strawberry, *Waldsteinia fragarioides* (zones 3 to 9), is considered a charmer by all who grow it. Just 4" tall, it quickly makes a wide dense mat of 2" three-lobed evergreen leaves and bears bright gold flowers over many weeks in spring.
- A creeping sedum notable for thriving mightily in dry shade is the crowsfoot sedum, *S. ternatum*, with succulent blue-green leaves and starry white flowers in may, hardy to Zone 4.
- The Western native vancouverias (*V. hexandra*, *V. planipetala*) have proved to be good performers in the East (Zones 4 to 9), making elegant and tight 12" high masses of green leaflets topped with small white flowers in summer.
- Hardy in Zones 6 to 9, *Saxifraga stolonifera* is a prodigious producer of round silver-veined leaves plus white flowers on 2' stems in spring; best in acid soils, and standing hottest summers.