



Woodland Plantings

by Vern Esser (*Landscape Techniques*)

Over the years I have done quite a few woodland plantings or advised different people on plants to use. The last few years have seen an increase in people requesting that perennial plants be used with greater numbers and more variety. I find this to be desirable because it does indicate more involvement by the homeowner in his/her own landscape. Ultimately greater involvement by the home gardener leads to more success in the garden.

I say this because I need to encourage more effort in establishing these woodland plantings. A native woodland implies older established trees. It is more difficult for young herbaceous plants to become established in the face of the awesome competition presented by such mature trees. These young plants have the capability of really setting off a woodland landscape but the first few years of establishment are extremely important.

The first step in a woodland planting is to add peat moss or composted leaves that you've been saving for the last few years just for such a special occasion. Most of us will have to use peat moss. I believe more and more that in improving the soil you are planting gives you a greater edge when it comes to increasing your success ratio, which is important when investing your dollars in higher risk landscape efforts. Most of these plants naturally grow in richer soils with heavy mulch. So after installing plants I will mulch heavily with a finely shredded bark, being careful to keep caustic, rough textured bark mulches off the leaves of new plantings.

The second most important effort is to keep your planting adequately watered. The biggest problem facing these types of plantings is lack of timely watering. These planting situations are unforgiving when you forget to water. My biggest problem is to convince the would be woodland gardener that light rains do not help their young plantings. You need to get out and physically check the soil around your plantings for the cool, damp feeling so important for most of these plants.

The last problem facing woodland gardeners is woodland gourmets. The critters of the woods find our plantings so delectable. It's hard to convince the deer that your new, exotic Hosta bed is not a new variety of cabbage. The rabbits have to be reminded that some of your woodland plants have to survive the first couple of years if they are to chew upon them in the future. In other words, screen these plantings where you can as long as you can to become established. Once established, they should be able to tolerate the gourmet harvest..