

## The Magic of Dark Foliage

Brandy Cowley-Gilbert is co-owner of Just Fruits and Exotics Nurseries south of Crawfordville and a member of the UF-IFAS Leon County Extension Advisory Committee. <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>

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**W**hen it comes to color, gardeners tend to adopt one of several styles. There are those enamored of big, bold, brightly colored flowers; the prom-dress style. Others enjoy a softer palette of muted blues and whites; the evening gown style of gardening. Some appreciate the shadings of natural greens, and use variations in texture and form to create the desired effect in their gardens; that's the jeans and t-shirt school of garden fashion. And then there are those who embrace the subtle, sophisticated look of dark foliage, the landscaping equivalent of the classic basic black dress.

The magic of black foliage is that it's the perfect foil for other colors. Used as a backdrop in gardens viewed from a distance, dark plants enhance the colors of other plants in the foreground. There are endless possible combinations. For a hot tropical look, try a backdrop of black-leaved cannas such as 'Intrigue' or 'Black Knight' behind a planting of deep orange marigolds and dwarf yellow sunflowers. An elegant mix for winter color combines bronze fennel with pastel pink snapdragons and China blue pansies.

Black liriope used as edging for a white flagstone pathway makes an interesting variation on the classic theme of black-and-white. And for a bizarre but fun twist, how about a checkerboard combination of black mondo grass (*Ophiopogon planiscarpus* 'Nigrescens') and silver mondo grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus*).

These both grow well in a shaded site and make a fantastic groundcover combination.

Luckily, over time the availability of dark foliated plants that do well in our area has increased as their popularity has grown. Think of black-leaved plants as being as essential to, and versatile in, your landscape as your 'basic black dress' is to your wardrobe!

Here's a list of great dark foliated plants, for different areas in the landscape:

### Shade lovers:

Persian Shield (*Strobilanthes dyerianus*)

Purple Queen (*Tradescantia pallida*)

Oxalis (*regnelli* var. *triangularis*)

Coleus Darkstar (*Xanthosoma violacea*)

### Partial sun lovers:

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Loropetalum, so many to choose from! Plum Delight is outstanding.

Alternanthera – Black Knight

Black liriopse – Ebony Knight (*Ophiopogon planiscarpus* ‘Nigrescens’)

Heuchera (somewhat short-lived, but beautiful)

Red Japanese Maple (*Acer palmatum*)

Full sun:

### **Canna, Intrigue and Black Knight**

*Colocasia esculenta* ‘Black Magic’ Elephant ear

Loropetalum (many varieties)

### **Cordyline australis ‘Red Sensation’**

*Eucomis* ‘Sparkling Burgundy’

*Ipomoea batatas* ‘Blackie’ sweet potato vine

Purple fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum* ‘Rubrum’)

*Tradescantia pallida* ‘Purple Queen’ spiderwort

### **Crinum augusta ‘Queen Emma’**

Dahlia Bishop

Alternanthera – Black Knight

Bronze Fennel

Ebony Knight Black Mondo

‘Purple Majesty’ ornamental millet

‘Abyssinian Banana’, *Ensete ventricosum* *Maurelii*

Don't be afraid to let your garden take a walk on the dark side. Remember that basic black is usually a backdrop. Nobody looks at the dress, they look at the jewelry. Using the beauty and mystery of dark-foliage to highlight your landscape will allow your prom-queen, evening-gown, and even your blue-jean plants to really stand-out.

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