Top 20 Shrubs for Shade

This is a list of the some of the best shrubs that will accept varying degrees of shade. See a Garden Advisor for help in determining the best plants for your situation.

Aucuba
Aucuba japonica ('Gold Dust' is a popular variety) - Evergreen. Very tolerant of full shade and dry soils. Excellent choice for those dark corners where little else will grow. 'Gold Dust' has glossy green leaves splashed with yellow variegation and red berries on female plants. Well drained soil. Grows to approximately 6 feet and 3-6 ft. wide.

American Beauty Berry
Callicarpa americana - Deciduous. Native. Attractive purple fruit clusters in fall. Small pinkish flowers mid to late summer. A desirable native, it attracts wildlife. Good in partial shade. Moist, well drained soil. Grows to 6 feet tall and wide.

Aralia
Fatsia japonica – Evergreen, Large fan-shaped leaves add a tropical look to the landscape. Mature plants may bloom with a white flower cluster that is followed by black berries. Needs light protection during extreme cold. Requires moist, very well drained soil. Grows to 6'-8' tall and 4' wide.

Azalea
Azalea spp. (many hybrids and varieties)- Semi-Evergreen. Flowering shrub for use as hedge, borders or massed planting for impressive display. Must have moist, well-drained acid soil. 'Encore' varieties will bloom sporadically through summer and fall. Habits vary.

Boxwood
Buxus spp. (many hybrids and varieties)- Evergreen. Small, dark green oval shaped leaves hold their color well in winter. New growth is a yellowish green. Foliage is very dense. Needs some protection from hot afternoon sun. Can be easily pruned and shaped. Assorted types and varieties available with varied growth habits.

Chinese Fringe Flower
Loropetalum chinensis (many hybrids and varieties)- Semi-Evergreen. Colorful shrub or even small tree with graceful, arching branches. New growth is plum colored maturing to a deep burgundy. Hot pink blooms in spring. Chinese Fringe Flower 'Plum Delight' grows to 6 feet, 'Purple Diamond' grows to 3'-4' high and 4' wide. 'Purple Pixie' is most compact, growing 2-3 ft.

Coralberry
Symphoricarpos orbiculatus- Deciduous. Native. A mounding shrub to 4'-6', and best in groups. Blooms tiny white flowers attractive to bees in late spring to early summer, forming attractive pinkish berries that feed birds. Adaptable to many soil types and moisture levels, and can be treated as a groundcover.

Gardenia
Gardenia spp.- Evergreen. Multiple species and cultivars, grown for their attractive foliage and showy white fragrant flowers that bloom from summer to fall. Must have moist, well-drained acid soil. Will tolerate some morning sun. Size and winter hardiness varies with variety.

Hydrangea
Hydrangea spp.- Deciduous. Showy blooms start in spring and some last into autumn. Blooms are soil ph-specific (clear pink in alkaline soil and blue in acidic soil). Must have consistently moist, well-drained acidic soil. Height, width, and flower colors vary with variety. Oakleaf hydrangeas are native to the southern states and are one of the best species for North Texas.

Holly
Ilex spp. - Evergreen. Dense, mostly dark green, shiny leaves with red berries in the winter. Many varieties, including some native, with multiple habits and differing leaf shapes and spines, with some varieties fruiting better than others. Moist, well-drained soil, and many are drought tolerant when established.

Mahonia
Mahonia spp. (many species and varieties)- Evergreen. Compact, upright growth with elongated compound leaves are somewhat fern-like and tropical-looking. Blooms in fall or early spring with yellow flowers to the top. Slightly spiny foliage is common on some while other hybrids have softer foliage. Moist, well-drained soil. Mostly 4'-6' tall and 3'-4' wide.

Nandina
Nandina domestica - Evergreen. Attractive, dense compact evergreen shrub with bright yellow-green foliage. Displays brilliant burgundy foliage in fall and winter in sunlight. Fall clusters of bright red berries. Effective as ground cover, specimen plant or border. Needs well-drained soil. A wide range of cultivars display different traits and habits, and heights 2'- 8'.

Pittosporum
Pittosporum tobira - Evergreen. Mounding, compactly branched glossy, gray-green leaves. Needs a protected site from extreme cold in North Texas. 'Wheelers Dwarf' is smaller variety at 3'-4' tall and wide. There are variegated varieties that bring welcome color to shade gardens. Best in moist, well-drained soil, but drought tolerant when established.

Podocarpus
Podocarpus macrophyllus - Evergreen. Sometimes referred to as 'Japanese Yew'. Attractive lawn or patio tree. Pyramidal form takes to shearing well to become an effective accent, screen or clipped hedge. Will also thrive in tubs or as a topiary. Slow grower kept to 15-20 feet tall, 6-8 feet wide or smaller when trimmed, larger with age. Several improved dwarf varieties are available.

Spiraea
Spiraea spp. – Deciduous. Primarily for sunnier areas, the classic varieties known as 'bridal wreath' are durable shrubs and can be successful in areas with ½ day of sun. Dense, fountain shaped shrub to 4-5' and as wide, with a spectacular show of tight clusters of white blooms in mid spring, attractive to pollinators. Many dwarf varieties exist, but are less adaptable to shadier conditions.

Sweet Myrtle
Myrtus communis - Evergreen. Compact, tightly branched shrub with creamy-white flowers and fragrant foliage when crushed. Extremely useful and dependable as a low, formal hedge and foundation planting. Plant in small container to enjoy indoors. Slow grower to 2'-3' tall and wide. Drought tolerant.

Sweet Olive
Osmanthus fragrans- Evergreen. Large shrub or small tree. Broad, upright form is densely branched and covered with dark green, finely toothed foliage. Tiny, butter yellow flower clusters have a delightful apricot-like fragrance. Slow-growing. 10' tall and 6'-8' wide.

Viburnum
Viburnum spp. - Evergreen. A wide variety of hybrids with dark, glossy foliage and noteworthy clusters of flowers, followed by dark blue to black berries mid-summer. Attracts roosting birds. Wide array of sizes.

Virginia Sweetspire
Itea virginica- Deciduous. Native. Slender-branched, mounding shrub to 8', best in groups. Attractive, 4" long drooping white long-lasting blooms in late spring. Bright, multi-colored fall leaves best with some sun. Adaptable to a wide range of soils, but they must be moist. Dwarf varieties exist. 3'-5' tall x 4'-6' wide and spreading.

Yew
Taxus spp. (Many species and hybrids)- Evergreen. Some are very upright while others are spreading. Takes very well to shearing, but can be very slow growing. Needs very good drainage, plenty of water in hot weather, and afternoon shade. May be sheared into formal shapes. Moist, well-drained soil.