

The Moonlight Garden

By Teresa Gaffner, Master Gardener

Have you ever heard of a moon garden also known as a night garden or moonlight garden? Moon gardens contain plants with white or light-colored flowers and foliage that bloom in the evening and give off scent at night. They glow under a full moon or landscape lighting and attract many night pollinators. Formal night gardens have been around for centuries and were built on a grand scale. They were used for meditation or a late-night escape from the day's heat. Today, they are usually a smaller part of a home garden, and some include water features to reflect moonlight.

I am planning a moonlight garden here in east Tennessee, so I have been researching what will work here in this four-season, 6b/7a hardiness zone. Here are a few of the plants I've decided to try.

Night-Scented Stock (*Matthiola longipetala*)

You can start these annuals from seed in early spring or wait until the soil warms up to 60' before sowing outside. These flowers come in a variety of pastel colors and white. They are a very hardy plant, and you will not need to do much beyond providing a sunny planting spot and regular watering as needed.

White Shooting Stars (*Nicotiana sylvestris*)

Treat flowering tobacco as an annual in planting zones 6 and 7. Seeds can easily be sown indoors in March to be planted after the last frost. If you would like to have a taller flowering tobacco, you can look for *Nicotiana Alata* which comes in white and a striking lime green.

Moonflower Vine (*Ipomoea alba*)

This is a night blooming morning glory vine with large white to pink flowers and dark green heart shaped leaves. Seeds can be started indoors during early spring and planted outside after the last frost. This plant will grow quickly and can top out at about 15 feet. Keep it trimmed or plan enough garden space for it.

Moonflower Bush (*Datura stramonium*)

This is recommended as an annual in this area, but I have neighbors with a well-established bush that returns each spring. Small plants are available at your local nurseries. Plant in full sun and keep moist but do not overwater. This is the plant that will bring the sphinx and luna moths. Please be aware that this plant is toxic to humans and animals if consumed. There is a link to an article from the University of Wisconsin about *Datura* at the end of this article.

Evening Primrose (*Oenothera biennis*)

This is a perennial that grows well in this area. Sow the seeds in early spring where they can get full sun. They have pretty yellow flowers that open at night and give off a sweet scent.

Unfortunately, the night-blooming jasmine is not recommended for this area as the roots will rot at soil temperatures under 25' F. However, some of the standards for this area would be striking in a night garden, such as hydrangeas, wisterias, shasta daisies, lilacs, autumn clematis, four o'clocks, sweet alyssum, white varieties of petunias, roses, dahlias, peonies and geraniums.

Fill in between the flowers with night glowing foliage. Plants to compliment your moon garden include Japanese painted ferns, spotted dead nettle, silver lamb ears, dusty miller, white caladiums, silver artemisia and hostas with variegated leaves. Plant in drifts or groups so you get the best visual impact. It's important in a night garden that individual plants don't get lost in the darkness.

When you have decided on what plants to put in the moon garden, it's time to add the hardscaping. Battery operated and solar powered small spotlights add illumination on the nights when there is no moon, or you can add candles or lanterns. Water features add a pleasant sound and a reflection of the moon and glowing plants. Garden paths can be laid with white rock or marble chips. Limestone statuary, birdbaths, paving stones, and white garden benches add to the all over ambience.

Now all you need is a comfortable chair, a cool drink, a full moon, and the stars.

All About Daturas

<https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/datura/>

Planning a Moon Garden

<https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/indianriverco/2023/04/21/planning-a-moonlight-garden/>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.

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