

# Gardening Basics

## Understanding Sunlight Requirements

When deciding to start any gardening project, one of the most critical environmental factors for growing healthy plants and food is how much sunlight is required for their growth. Plant placement is one of the most important determining factors of whether they will thrive, survive, or die. Each plant has an ideal environment. When buying plants and seeds, always look for tags and labels that tell you the sunlight requirements for that specific plant.

Your landscape will likely have a mix of sunlight conditions. Some areas might be sunny for most of the day, and several trees might shade some areas. You may have a south-facing flower bed or a west-facing backyard. It is also important to note that the conditions in your landscape may change over time. For example, as trees grow, they will produce more shade. Or, as seasons change, so does sun exposure. The sun sits further north in the summertime than in the fall and winter. Consider all these factors when deciding what to plant and where.

It's always a good idea to track the changing sunlight exposure in your landscape before deciding what to plant. You can do this by purchasing a garden light meter or using a time-lapse camera. You can also track by graphing sunlight hourly. Start early in the morning, right after sunrise. Each hour track the area to see if it is exposed to full sun, part sun, part shade, full shade, or dappled sun, and write it down.

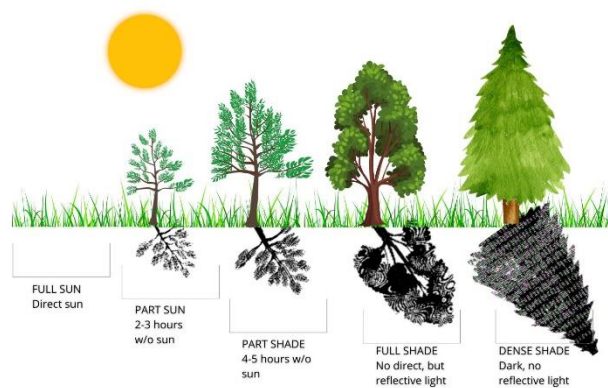
Of course, there are other requirements to consider for the success of your garden, such as soil type and pH, moisture needs, hardiness zones, and possible pests and diseases that they could be susceptible to. You can contact your county Extension office with any questions you may have about any of these factors. For now, we will look at the meaning of different sunlight requirements.

### Full Sun

If a plant requires full sun, it will need six hours or more of direct sunlight each day. It does not need to be six continuous hours. For example, the area might receive four hours of the morning sun, midday shade, and then three hours of the afternoon sun. Most fruits and vegetables require full sun.

### Part Sun

Plants requiring part sun will need three to six hours of sun per day. They can typically tolerate both morning and afternoon sun.



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## **Part Shade**

While part sun and part shade are similar requirements, there are some differences. Keep in mind afternoon sun is more intense than the morning sun. These plants may be sensitive to getting too much sun. They may fare better with the morning sun and need shade during the hottest part of the day. You may also see the terms dappled sun or dappled shade. They are similar to part shade in that the plant can withstand sun that filters through tree branches and foliage.

## **Full Shade**

Full shade requires two hours or less of sun each day. And ideally, that should be the morning sun. In full-shade conditions, very little direct sunlight reaches the ground during any part of the day. Plants receive only reflected indirect light.

## **Dense Shade**

Dense shade areas receive no direct sunlight and very little indirect sunlight.

It's important to know that some tags and labels include more than one term. You might see "Partial Shade to Full Shade" or "Full Sun to Partial Shade." This generally means you will have more flexibility on where you can successfully plant these species. However, there is still a preferred condition for each plant. The accurate indicator will be how well your plant is growing. If it's not thriving, don't be afraid to dig it up and replant it in a more suitable environment. Remember, there's nothing wrong with a little trial and error when figuring out optimal plant placement.