

Sun and Shade



Most Plants Need Part To Full Day Sun

The majority of plants grown by home gardeners need at least a half day of sun to thrive. This means full, direct sun. The half day can be in any part of the day, but they need to spend a good chunk of the day soaking up the sun. If your garden spot only gets two hours or less of good sun, particularly if those hours are early in the morning, then your choices for suitable plants will be much more limited. So if at all possible, choose a location for your garden that gets as many hours of sun every day as possible.

A Half Day Of Good Sun Is Sufficient For Most Flowers

Most flowers will be happy with a half day of sun. This includes classic flowers such as Geraniums, Petunias, Marigolds, Allysum, Lobelia, Million Bells, Daisies, Dahlias, Snapdragons, Verbena, Zinnias, and many more. They will also thrive in a full day of sun, but a half day is sufficient. You will know your flowers aren't getting enough sun if they bloom sparsely or not at all, or if they grow pale and spindly.

A Few Flowers Cannot Tolerate Hot Afternoon Sun

There are a few flowers that cannot tolerate hot afternoon sun. These can generally tolerate dappled shade in the afternoon, but not clear direct sun for several hours in the heat of the day. The symptom for most plants when they get too much sun is first they wilt, and then they develop brown "burn marks" on the leaves, particularly the edges and tips of the leaves.

The "hot sun averse" flowers are the same ones you can plant in areas that get limited or no direct sun every day. See the next paragraph for a list.

A Few Choices For Shady Places

If you have a shady garden, or one that gets only dappled sunlight, then your planting choices are limited. A few of the better known options are Fuchsias, Begonias, Impatiens, New Guinea Impatiens, and for foliage, Ferns, and Coleus. There are other lesser known options, particularly shade loving perennials, but for showy displays of flowers that last all summer your choices are limited. If your spot gets no direct sun at all then you will have very little luck getting flowers to bloom. Many people choose to focus on growing attractive foliage in shady areas instead of masses of colorful flowers. If your spot is somewhere in the middle between sun and shade, the best choice is to just plant several things and see what happens. Every plant has slightly different light needs, and your results will tell you what works best in that spot. Also, the amount of shade a particular spot gets changes with the time of year, and even from year to year as trees grow or are cut down, fences are built or taken down, etc.

The More Sun the Better For Most Vegetables

The general rule for vegetables, particularly warm season fruiting vegetables like Tomatoes, Peppers, Cucumbers, Squash and Melons, is the more sun the better. 6 to 8 hours per day of good sun is the realistic minimum. You can grow many of them in a long half day of sun, but the more sun they get the better your yield will be. Leafy green veggies like Lettuce, Spinach, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Kale and Peas like full sun in spring and early summer, and they may need a little protection from the sun in the hottest part of the day during the hottest part of summer, but not full day shade.

South Facing Exposures Dry Out and Warm Up Faster

The other thing to keep in mind about sun exposure is how it affects air and soil temperature. A south facing slope will warm up faster than any other exposure, particularly a garden bed or pots planted to the south of a light colored or rock wall or fence. This in turn means the area will dry out faster than other areas, and you may even be able to plant it earlier in the spring because the soil temperature will be higher. Particularly if the area is on a slope, so it drains better.

Growing Houseplants Outside

It is possible to grow many houseplants outside in the summer, but treat them like shade loving flowers. And wait until the weather really warms up – they generally won't like cold spring or fall nights.

Read Signs And Plant Sticks In Pots

While the above information gives a lot of general guidance, when it comes to specific plants always check the signs we put in the flats and the small variety sticks the growers place in the pots. Both will have information about the sun or shade needs of that specific plant, so you don't have to rely on generalities.