

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mg helpline@masshort.org.

What is Shade?

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Many gardeners think of shade as a problem to be overcome, but shade in the landscape offers many benefits. Shady areas are cooler and a better place in which to relax and work. They are easier to maintain than sunny gardens because fewer weeds grow there, and less watering is required.

However, there are many different types of shade, and it is important to match the plants to the amount of sunlight and water available. Full sun means 6 or more hours of direct sun a day. Shade is anything less than that, but it is a very broad term and can vary widely. Types of shade include:

Filtered (or dappled) shade occurs under trees that filter sunlight rather than completely blocking it. Sunlight reaches the ground in different patterns during the day. Many plants do well in this environment, even plants that prefer full sun, such as daylily and iris. Consider pruning trees by removing lower limbs or thinning the canopy to increase the amount of light available.

Partial shade changes as the day progresses, so the area receives sunlight for part of the day (2 to 6 hours). The east side of a house usually receives morning sun, and the west side receives sun in the afternoon. Fences and other structures and plantings can also create partial shade. Many sun-loving plants can be grown in this situation, especially if the area is bright or there is a lot of reflected light. Perennials and shrubs that do well in partial shade are ferns, astilbe, bleeding heart, heuchera, holly, rhododendron, and mountain laurel.

Open shade occurs when an area is open to the sky and is well lighted, but does not receive direct sunlight, such as

the north side of a house or where tall trees or fences cast shadows over the garden. Plants that do well in partial shade will also thrive in open shade.

Full shade is found in heavily wooded areas and in landscapes where large evergreens or tall buildings block most of the light. Plants such as hosta, tiarella, lady fern, Japanese painted fern, brunnera, red-vein enkianthus, euonymus, leucothoe, and mountain laurel can tolerate these conditions.

Deep shade describes areas where direct sunlight seldom, if ever, reaches the ground, such as dense coniferous forests or under decks. Very few plants do well in deep shade.

You should also consider when an area is shaded:

Morning shade affects plants differently than afternoon shade. Many sun lovers will tolerate morning shade if they receive full afternoon sun. Other plants, including hydrangea, prefer afternoon shade since it protects them from the hottest part of the day.

Seasonal shade occurs under deciduous trees where plants receive lots of sun when the leaves are gone. Plants that grow and bloom in the early spring, such as spring bulbs and many wildflowers do very well there.

Dry shade is very different from moist shade. Tree roots can use up most of the available moisture and nutrients under shallow-rooted trees like maple, beech, and birch. Most plants that tolerate shade are woodland plants that prefer to be evenly moist, so regular watering may be necessary. Some shade plants, such as hosta and epimedium, are more tolerant of drought.

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>