



Right Plant, Right Place

All plants, including native species, have specific cultural requirements, and if planted in the wrong place will struggle to survive. Visit the garden center armed with knowledge of what your garden has to offer, and choose plants based not only on their looks, but also on their cultural needs. The goal is to place plants where they will require no supplemental irrigation after they get established (usually two to three years).

To understand what your garden has to offer, consider three essential factors:

Light

Conduct a simple light analysis by observing light and shadow at least three times throughout the day, for example, at 8 a.m., noon, and 4 p.m. Full sun means more than six hours of direct sunlight per day. Anything less than six hours is some variation of part shade to shade.

Soil Type and Moisture

Determine how well your site drains by conducting a percolation test: Dig a hole about eight inches deep, fill it with water, let the water drain, and then fill it again. If it takes longer than 24 hours for the water to drain, your site is poorly drained; less than 12 hours, and your site is very well drained. Contact your local cooperative extension to conduct a soil analysis to determine the percentage of organic matter, soil texture, and pH (acidity/alkalinity).

Space Availability in the Garden

Choose plants that at maturity will be the appropriate size for your garden. Avoid planting tall trees under power lines or planting aggressive spreading plants next to delicate, slow-growing specimens. These may seem obvious, but it is hard to picture a plant at maturity when buying it before it is fully developed.

No matter what a plant's cultural requirements are, newly establishing plants need lots of TLC. Treat them as if they are still in a container, providing ample water at least for the first growing season.

Knowing your own garden's growing conditions will give you a strong foundation from which to choose the right plants—plants that will establish well and thrive for years to come.