



Exercises to Determine Site Conditions

These are tips for determining the site conditions of a planting area. To view the grading scale or for a quick reference, visit [Quick Start - Choosing Plants](#).

“Right plant for the right place” is frequently repeated throughout gardening or landscaping principles because it is crucial for having a successful planting. Florida has a wide variety of ecosystems from beaches to bogs, and we strive to grow a wide selection of plants for every condition.

Each of our plants are graded based on the same scale that reflects the growing conditions they will perform best in. The amount of sunlight and soil moisture an area has is also referred to as the site conditions.

Once you have assessed the area you would like to plant in, plug this data into the [Plant Selector Tool](#) to show native plants that match your site conditions.

Determining the Amount of Sunlight an Area Receives:

Considerations for Determining Sunlight:

- **Directional Orientation:** Determine which direction the area is facing. Keep in mind the sun rises in the east, peaks over the south, and can be low and hot in the west. Areas facing north may receive less sunlight in the winter months when the sun is lower. East and West facing will have more consistent sunlight year round. South will normally get sun year round without structures or trees blocking it, North areas may get summer sun and winter shade. When selecting plants for North facing areas, make sure they can handle the summer sun.
- **Structures that may block the sun:** Trees, fences, or buildings can significantly shade an area. Remember to look up and around when thinking about sunlight.
- **Canopy:** Are there trees around? Are they evergreen and add shade all year, or are they deciduous trees that drop their leaves in the winter?

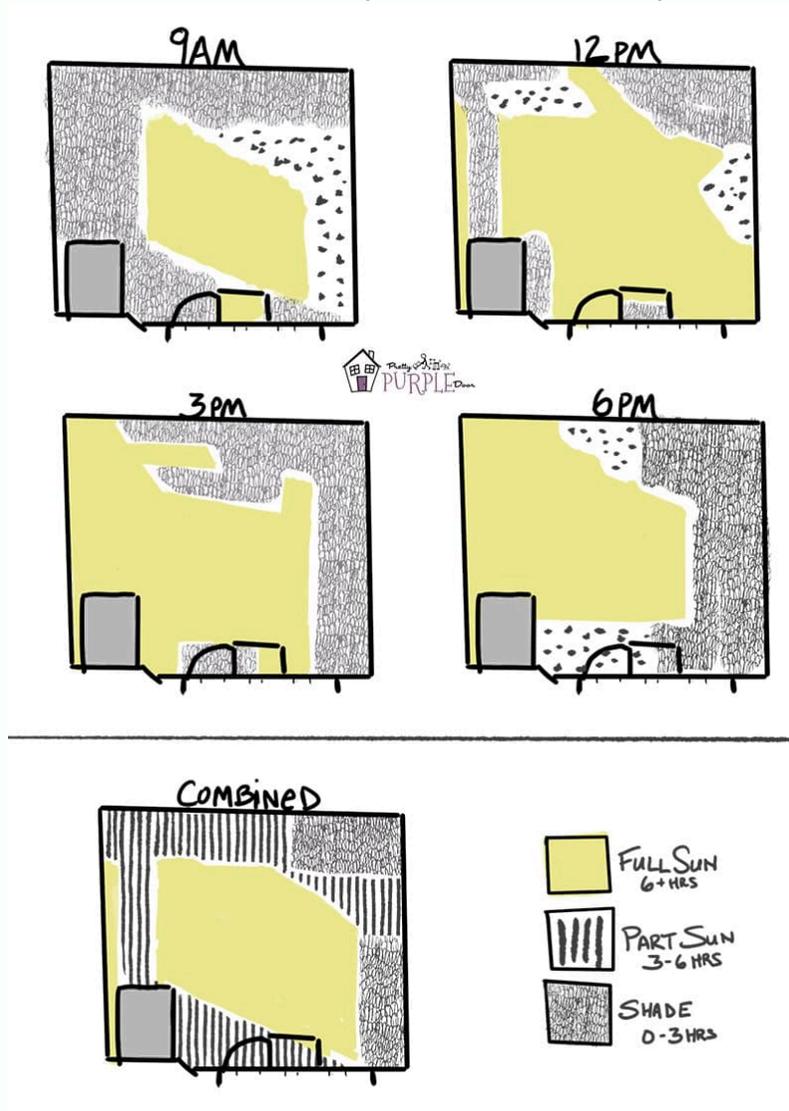
Exercise for Determining Sunlight:

Draw a map of the area that you would like to plant in. This could be one landscaping bed or the yard as a whole. Keep the shape basic as you'll repeat this drawing multiple times.

Over the course of a few days, observe the area at different times of the day. Color in your map at the different times to represent the sun, shade, and partial sun locations. Take a note of any objects like trees or sheds that cast shadows on areas.

Add up the amount of hours of light that each area receives.

Here's an example of a DIY Sun Map



Extra Resource:

Suncalc.org is a free website where you can enter your address to see visually how the sun moves over your property at different times of the year.

Exercise for Determining Soil Moisture:

To determine soil moisture, start with observing soil composition. Sand holds less moisture compared to clay.

Call 811 or schedule a service online to have the utility lines marked around the property to verify you won't hit them when digging.

Dig a 1-2 foot hole in each planting area and heavily soak a handful of soil from the bottom of the hole.

Observe how long it feels wet and if you are able to clump it together into a ball. If the soil falls apart, it is lower on the moisture scale. If you make a ball of soil in your hand and it holds together it is higher on the moisture scale.

Fill the hole with water a few times and note how long it takes for the water to completely drain.

Does the water quickly drain? It is lower on the moisture scale. Does the water slowly drain, stay wet, or appear muddy? It is higher on the moisture scale.

Note roof runoff locations, gutter downspouts, slopes, and low spots. Observe the planting areas during a rainstorm to see if water is pooling anywhere. Try to slow and sink stormwater where it falls to avoid water running off into streets where it picks up pollutants and into our waterways.

Extra Resources for Determining Soil Composition and Moisture:

[Web Soil Survey](#) is a free website that will show soil composition of an area. The app version is more user friendly and allows you to quickly get this data based on your location.

[SoilWeb for Android](#)

[SoilWeb for iPhone](#)

You can also perform a **mason jar soil test** to see the different components of your soil. Instructions for this can be found online. This can be a fun activity to do with kids!

Tips:

If you have existing irrigation on your property, note the coverage, how often it runs, and how saturated the soil becomes. If you're unsure how to do this, ask your lawn care provider to walk you through understanding your irrigation control system.

Look at what vegetation is growing well in your yard or neighborhood. By identifying those plants and the conditions they thrive in, you can potentially infer that your yard has similar conditions. There may even be wild native plants in your neighborhood that can show you what native plants will work in your yard!