

## SEEING THE LIGHT OF DAY

By Denise Morrow, Landscape Gardening Committee, Frederick County Extension Master Gardeners

Local plant sales and the reopening of nurseries at the end of April have heralded the long-awaited planting season. If you were one of many whose temptation was to be first in line to start filling your 2022 gardening wish list and have sensibly sheltered your purchases to avoid the last danger of frost date in our zone, Mother's Day, the time has come to put trowel to soil. And if you are like me, you are far from finished visiting your favorite garden centers to see what's new for 2022. You may have a fairly good idea of the light conditions in your outdoor spaces and know what works, but a complete understanding of what conditions such as full sun, part sun, part shade and shade mean can help shape your decisions.

It's a good idea to take stock of the kind of sunlight to which your plants will be exposed before succumbing to the lure of those that might not be right for your garden. For us in the northern hemisphere, southern exposure is the harshest as the sun persists all day, while northern exposure is the kindest. Western exposure receives the intensity of afternoon sun, while eastern exposure gets the morning sun which, though bright, is not as hot. While you may have a southern or western exposure, you may also have trees that will afford your garden an escape from the harshness, offering you more options in selecting plants.

Labels will often indicate full sun, partial sun, partial shade and shade, or a combination. Full sun is defined as six or more hours of summer sun per day, including afternoon sun. Southern exposure or western exposure falls into this category. Full-sun perennials, drought-tolerant annuals, succulents, and vegetables are best suited for such conditions. Keep in mind, that climate change is clearly having an impact on temperatures and gardens. A full-sun annual in Maryland may not be as happy as one planted in Maine at the height of summer, so don't be surprised if it cries "uncle" in late July before returning to vibrancy in September. Watering more frequently on particularly intense days is vital. Annuals will be the biggest challenge. If you want those splashes of color throughout the season to accent your garden, some drought- and heat-tolerant choices are Bidens (*Bidens alba*), celosia (*Celosia plumosa*), portulaca (*Portulaca oleracea*), lantana (*Lantana camara*), salvia (*Salvia officinalis*), vinca (*Vinca rosea*), and marigolds (*Tagetes spp.*).

If you are lucky enough to have a garden that avoids those extreme conditions, there are many choices. Many full-sun annuals are also happy in partial sun and partial shade. Both can be defined as four to six hours of sun per day; however, there is a fine distinction. Your partial sun annuals will be able to better tolerate some of those hours in the afternoon and the partial shade plants will prefer those hours before midday. Fortunately, many annuals tolerate a range of light conditions from full sun to partial shade, such as calibrachoa (*Calibrachoa spp.*), begonia (*Begonia spp.*), alyssum (*Lobularia spp.*), lobelia (*Lobelia spp.*), pansies (*Viola spp.* and others. Keep in mind that if you are planting in containers, make sure the plants you combine have the same light requirements. In addition, annuals will need to be watered more frequently than perennials, so it is best to plant them separately.

Finally, you may have a shade garden at the other end of the spectrum. Shade plants are happiest if they receive no more than four hours of sun which is filtered or limited to the morning. Shade-lovers often have thinner foliage with more surface area and contain more chlorophyll in order to harvest the sunlight at lower levels. Coleus (*Coleus spp.*), fuchsia (*Fuchsia spp.*), caladium (*Caladium spp.*), impatiens (*Impatiens walleriana*), and torenia (*Torenia spp.*) are a few annuals that will provide wonderful color in your shade garden.

So, while you may need to revise your list before shopping for your annuals or rethink where you plant them, the good news is that every year brings new cultivars to meet ever-changing needs and there is never a shortage of new, unexpected plants to tempt us!



*Scaevola* or Fairy Fan Flower can be planted in full sun to partial shade.

*Calibrachoa* or Million Bells is happy in full to partial sun.





*Angelonia* or Summer Snapdragon likes full sun.

*Torenia* or Clown Flower is a partial shade to shade lover.



The University of Maryland Extension Frederick County's Home Gardening/Master Gardeners Office is now open to the public. You can also find gardening information and advice online at:

- University of MD Extension Home & Garden Information Center, <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/environmentnatural-resources/program-areas/home-and-garden-information-center>;
- Frederick County Master Gardeners Publications, <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening>;
- Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/mastergardenersfrederickcountymaryland>;
- or call us at [301-600-1596](tel:301-600-1596).

*For more information about the Frederick County Extension Master Gardener/Horticulture Program, visit: <http://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county/home-gardening> or call Susan Trice at the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County office, 301-600-1596.*

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