

Ask Cynthia Brian – How Much Light

Reader's Request

Dear Cynthia:

As I sit here planning my spring edible garden, I'm wondering if all vegetables need lots of sunshine to bear fruit. I have sun and shade but probably not enough sunshine for everything I want to grow. Any suggestions?



Radishes do not need as much sunlight to produce great crops.

Photo Cynthia Brian

Dana, Orinda

Dear Dana:

This is a great question and one that every gardener grapples with during the planning stages. Here's my unscientific rule of thumb that seems to work well. When determining where to position a plant, ask yourself what part of the plant you will eventually eat.

If you are eating the fruit such as tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, cucumbers, zucchinis, beans, apples, corn, etc., you will want to plant these specimens in an area that receives a minimum of eight hours of bright sunlight. Root vegetables like carrots, beets, potatoes, and radishes can be planted in shadier areas or as understory plants because they don't need as much light as the plants that bear fruit on the branch. If what you eat is the leaf or stem such as Swiss chard, lettuce, kale, sorrel, arugula, spinach, you can plant in semi-shade with dappled sunlight. Any fruiting vegetable planted in shade can survive but usually bears smaller fruit because these plants need sunlight to create the energy to thrive.

Keep in mind, anything planted in shade will be less colorful, but you may enjoy a longer growing season and slower bolting. Experiment with your site and the answers will be obvious.

Happy Gardening to you!

Cynthia Brian

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The Goddess Gardener

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I am available as a speaker, designer, and consultant.

Cynthia will answer one or more questions every other issue as space allows. Email your comments or questions to

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