Sun Studies

One of the first things we generally consider when deciding where a particular species of native plant will thrive, is the amount and type of sun it tends to prefer. The plant's preference is often expressed as full sun, part sun, part shade or shade. Below are guidelines for interpreting what is meant by these terms.

Full Sun	6-8 hours of sunlight or more
Part Sun	5-6 hours of sunlight
Part Shade	4-5 hours of dappled sunlight
Shade	Fewer than 4 hours of direct sunlight

To get a more precise idea of how much sun a particular location receives -- which of these terms applies – you can do a Sun Study, such as the one shown below.

Make a grid with a row for each potential garden location, and a column for each time when you'll be recording – every hour or half-hour.

Start early, just after sunrise.

Note the exposure at that time -- whether it's in full sun, partial shade, filtered/dappled sun, or full shade – for each location you're monitoring.

Check each location again each hour or half-hour and record the exposure. Continue to measure until sunset.

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When we visited Beith House in St. Charles to discuss what native plants would be good candidates for landscaping the front of this beautiful, restored house, Kelsey Shipton showed us the Sun Study she had done. We loved the idea and wanted to share it with you. You can do this manually with your phone's camera, or even install a time-lapse camera to automate the job.

This is the bare bones of considering how to categorize the planting locations you are considering when it comes to light. These shorthand terms leave out discussion of the intensity of the sunlight, which generally corresponds to the direction the sunlight is coming from.

Is it gentler, morning sun shining on the plant from the east?

Is it hot, late-afternoon sun hitting the plant from the west?

Is it dappled sunlight filtered through the leaves of other plants?

So of course you want to know how your land and its trees, buildings, fences, etc. are oriented – N, S, E, W.

In addition, the sun's arc changes from season to season. You might want to do a Sun Study at more than one time of the year. Using photographs, particularly from a time-lapse camera, could make this venture less daunting.

Finally, a couple of nerdy cool tools -- way beyond my level of understanding:

suncalc.org

findmyshadow.com