

Planning and Site Evaluation

Choosing the “right plant for the right place” is an important consideration for all types of landscaping. Ignoring this guideline can lead to increased maintenance and the failure of plants to thrive. Even the best planting practices will not help a plant to thrive if it is poorly suited for a particular site. Careful planning and site evaluation are the first steps in applying this concept.



Use plant varieties that resist pests and need less water

Many pest and disease resistant varieties are available now—ask at nurseries or Master Gardener clinics. Choose plants that are “low water use” or “drought tolerant.” After they’re established (2-5 years) many will thrive just on our limited summer rainfall most years, saving you time and money on watering.

Native Perennial	Right Environment
Columbine	Sun or shade, well-drained soil
Spiderwort	Sun or shade and moist, well-drained soil
Swamp Milkweed	Full sun, moist to average soils
Butterfly Weed	Full sun, well-drained soil
Little Bluestem	Full sun, well-drained soil
Purple Coneflower	Full sun, well-drained soil

Lawn to Lake is a collaborative program to protect water resources in the Great Lakes region by promoting healthy lawn and landscape practices. With funding from the U.S. EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, partners are coordinating a pollution prevention campaign addressing the needs of those responsible for lawn and landscape care in the Southern Lake Michigan basin. Collaborating partners include Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, Lake Champlain Sea Grant, Safer Pest Control Project, and University of Illinois Extension.



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LAWN TO LAKE

Right Plants for the Right Place

**Make smart plant choices
to save water and time for a
thriving garden.**

When the right plants are matched to the right environment, they grow stronger roots and are healthier. Healthy plants require less watering, reduce or eliminate the need for pesticides, and are more resilient to disease and harsh weather.

How to Match the Right Plant to the Right Place

Get to know your yard

Where is it sunny or shady at different seasons? Dig in a few places to see where your soil is sand or clay, soggy year 'round or bone dry. Look around – are there plants with problems?

Where do you want play areas, vegetables, color, views, or privacy? How much lawn do you need, or want to maintain? What kind of plantings would fit your yard?



Determine the exposure

Do you have primarily sun or shade? Light can vary greatly depending on the time of day, the season and whether it is filtered or completely blocked.

- ◆ Sunny areas get six or more hours of full sun, resulting in warm, dry soil. If plants are also exposed to wind, they will lose even more moisture.
- ◆ Shady areas are under trees or eaves or against north-facing walls.

Know your soil

Pick up a handful of moist soil and squeeze. Rub it between your fingers.



- ◆ Sandy soil has the largest particles and feels gritty. This soil is loose, drains easily, and dries out fast.
- ◆ Loamy soil is a mix of sand, silt, clay, and organic matter (decomposed plants, compost or manure). This soil is usually loose, drains well, and holds onto moisture and nutrients.
- ◆ Clay soil has the smallest particles. It feels smooth like flour and holds together like Silly Putty. When wet, this soil is heavy, sticky and often soggy. In winter, it can get waterlogged, causing some plants to rot. In summer, it can be hard to dig into. Clay soil holds onto nutrients and water better than sandy soil.

Test your drainage

Understanding how your soil drains is critical to choosing and placing the right plants.

- ◆ If water drains too quickly, plants may not have a chance to absorb enough moisture, so you will need to water more often.
- ◆ If water drains too slowly, plants may actually suffocate or rot.

Test your soil drainage by digging a 12-inch deep hole, fill to the top with water and let it drain. When the water has drained completely, fill the hole again. This time keep track of how long it takes for the water to drain completely from the hole.

- ◆ If the water drains within three hours or less, you probably have sandy soil.
- ◆ If water is still standing after eight hours, you probably have clay soil, the water table is high or there is ledge not far below. It will be important to choose plants that don't need good drainage.
- ◆ If the water drains within four to six hours, you have good drainage and can choose a variety of plants.