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Main article

Caution! Not all sun plant labels are created equal!

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Colorado's climate is extremely unique; due to our elevation, and the intensity of the sunlight we receive, plants labeled for full sun might tolerate 'full sun' at sea level, but not at our altitude. This makes gardening at our elevation very challenging and rewarding. Plants, which thrive in part or full sun in other regions of the country, prefer shade in Colorado. Some examples of this would be Impatiens, Lobelia, and Hydrangea. Luckily, your independent garden center is a priceless source for information.

Your plants will tell you when they do not like their new homes. When they are planted in areas that are too sunny for them, you can almost hear them yelling at you. Their leaves will wilt before your eyes, turn yellow or just dry up and turn crunchy. Eventually the leaves fall off and you wonder why the treasure you brought home is not living up to its label. When you read the tag on Rhododendron, you would be lead to believe that it will thrive in our full south or western sun. However, during the hottest part of our day, Rhododendron will appreciate some shade. This is the case for many plants labeled 'full sun'.

At our altitude, the definition of full sun is four to six hours of direct sunlight. The varieties of plants that not only thrive, but also require this amount of sun is extensive. Russian Sage with its beautiful blue spires is just one example of a true sun loving plant. Many of the ornamental grasses flourish in full sun. Other examples include Daylilies, Penstemon, Petunias, or even some vegetables, and herbs. Many garden vegetables love the sun, preferring at least six or more hours of full Colorado sunshine. These include Tomatoes, Peppers, Squash, Cucumbers, Pumpkins, and Gourds. On the other hand, Lettuce, which prefers full sun elsewhere, does better with part shade here. Herbs such as Lavender, Sage, Thyme, and Oregano love Colorado's intense sun. Ask your local nursery professional which plants will do best in your garden. They would love to add to these suggestions.

Another unique aspect to gardening in Colorado sun is our Eastern exposure: it breaks all the rules. This is the land where the lines of the plant labels bleed together. Most plants will love basking in our eastern light. It is the one place where sun and shade meet. It is where you can have a sun-loving geranium growing right next to a shady character like begonia. Eastern sun offers virtually uninhibited planting bliss.

Just remember how our temperature rises throughout the day. In the cool of the morning, we along with our plants can bask in the sun. However, as the heat rises in the afternoon and we seek shelter, some plants also want to escape. No matter what the label tells us, we know there is an extreme difference in our temperature and sun exposure at this altitude. Considering this, be



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aware that full sun in an eastern location is vastly different from four to six hours of sun on a south or west exposure. Again, this would be a prime time to tap into your local nursery for assistance.

Do not let the labels prevent you from experiencing the unabashed beauty of Colorado gardening. While labels can have great information, our altitude is uniquely ours, and not to be confused with sea level. We have a unique and wonderful elevation that can push up color with an abundance that rivals gardens anywhere else in the country!



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