

Growing Indiana Vegetables in the Shade



Most vegetables require six or more hours of direct sunlight for optimum growth. However, there are vegetables that grow, even thrive, in shaded conditions. In general, vegetables that do not fruit, like arugula and beets, can tolerate more shady conditions. Vegetables that produce a fruit, like peppers and tomato, require more sunlight.

Shade-Tolerant Vegetables

Crop	Sunlight Needed
<i>Arugula</i>	≥ 4 hrs.
<i>Asian Greens</i>	≥ 2 hrs.
<i>Chard (stalks)</i>	≥ 5 hrs.
<i>Chard (leaves)</i>	≥ 4 hrs.
<i>Culinary Herbs</i>	≥ 3 hrs.

<i>Kale</i>	≥ 4 hrs.
<i>Lettuce</i>	≥ 4 hrs.
<i>Mesclun</i>	≥ 2 hrs.
<i>Mustard Greens (for baby greens)</i>	≥ 3 hrs.
<i>Peas and Beans</i>	≥ 5 hrs.
<i>Root Vegetables (e.g. Carrots, beets, etc.)</i>	≥ 5 hrs.
<i>Scallions</i>	≥ 3 hrs.
<i>Spinach</i>	≥ 4 hrs.

Considerations

Soil

With less sunlight, it is more important that the soil perform to meet the needs of your vegetables. A healthier soil will have nutrients that are more available. A soil test will establish a basis for knowledge on how to enhance your soil for best results. Below are principle guidelines toward best management for soil health:

1. Grow cover crops to improve soil tilth, structure, and nutrient profile. Cover crops also protect against erosion and add organic matter as topsoil.
2. Make your own compost to add organic matter or add organic matter by using leaves as mulch.
3. Add amendments based on soil test to adjust nutrient levels and/or pH.
4. Minimize tilling to only the top two inches or stop tilling all together.
5. Rotate crops each season to limit pest and soil issues from developing.
6. Irrigate with rainwater whenever possible by installing rain barrels. Plants prefer and benefit most from rainwater as opposed to ground water or from a utility.
7. Use mulch to limit soil water evaporation and add organic matter. Limit use of wood mulch.

[Learn more about getting a soil test from the HCSWCD.](#)

Pest and Disease

Shadier gardens receive less light, are more damp, and are often protected from the breeze. Because of this, pest and disease pressure (i.e. fungal disease, slugs, snails) may increase. Investigating your garden daily and removing snails, slugs, and caterpillars by hand may be helpful.

Reflective Mulch

The use of a reflective mulch, which brings more light into the shade garden, can also deter many pests like aphids. Reflective mulch is a synthetic material that is “shiny.” Simply search for “reflective mulch” in your favorite search engine to learn more.



References

Vanderlinden, Colleen. 2011. “Best Vegetables to Grow in the Shade.” *Mother Earth news*, F/Mr: 54-57.