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Light Requirements of Various Vegetables

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As the Northern Hemisphere creeps ever closer to the shortest day of the year, it seems like a fine time to talk about the importance of light in the garden and in our lives We've all read the garden books, blogs and seed packets that tell us that our plants need "full sun" where full means six to 12 hours per day. So, you might be wondering if the emphasis on "full" is in fact just a bunch a bull.

The answer is yes and no. Yes, full sun is often over emphasized. There are many crops, for example, that grow just fine with six hours of direct sun or less including root vegetables, leafy greens and cabbage family crops.

The reason that full sun tends to get the garden world's full attention is because the "stars" of the summer garden require it. Here, I'm referring to the fruiting vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants and vine crops like cucumbers, melons and squash. Just like movie stars who have chosen to settle in the sun-drenched Hollywood Hills, these vegetable stars need extended amounts of time in the sun's powerful spotlight to convert carbon dioxide in the air and nutrients in the soil into leaves and ultimately fruit.

As you're planning next year's garden and are trying to decide what will do best where, keep these light requirements in mind. If a neighbor's tree is casting shade on part of your garden, don't fret. Instead use that shady area for crops that will do well in those condition while keeping the sunniest parts for those that will thrive there.

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