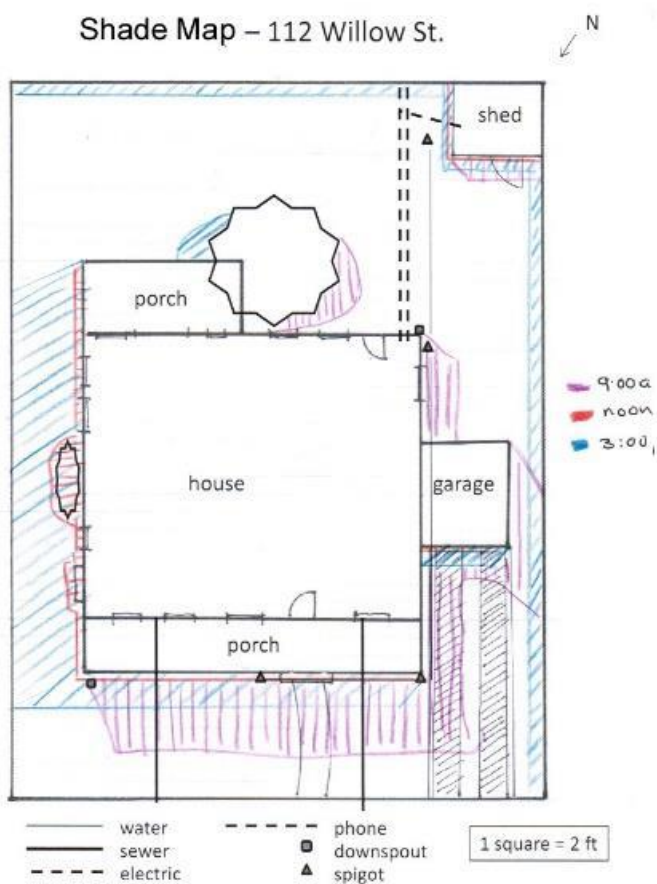


Making a Garden Sunlight Map

Why is this a good idea? There are several reasons; if you have recently moved house knowing which areas of your new garden get more or less sunlight is important. How the amount of light varies over the course of a day and over the seasons will allow you to plant the right plant in the right place. If you have lived in the same house for several years, or as I have for 25 years, the amount of sunlight available now will be different from when you first moved in.



In my case our house was new, when we moved in the potential garden was construction rubble and mud, the back yard faces south west and it was in full sun from about 11am till sunset. Now there are several trees that are large enough to create significant amounts of shade in some parts of the garden. Some of the original sun loving plants no longer get enough sun to thrive. When I realised how much shade there now is in one area it explained why my tree peony was no longer flowering. I didn't want to move it so we thinned the tree canopy. In some long established gardens the sudden death of or removal of a tree may change the amount of sunlight drastically requiring a new planting plan.

You may find some surprises such as more sun or shade than you anticipated in an area. On the

north-west side of my house I have a shade garden, with ferns and hostas, the shade is created by the house and also by 2 trees a serviceberry and a large amur maple. However in the spring before the trees leaf out there is plenty of sun for daffodils, crocuses, hyacinths, trilliums and Virginia bluebells. I also use the less shaded part of the space to grow romaine and arugula later in the summer when the vegetable bed is too hot for them.

To do this, you'll need to spend some time outside. Not such a bad task, is it? You can start this project at any time of the year and add information over time. Start by making a simple sketch of the yard. Make sure you include anything that might cast a shadow, everything including fences, trees, sheds both in your own yard and those of your neighbours. On the first day of spring, or the first day of fall the sun is directly south at noon, standard time or 1pm daylight savings time. Once you know where south is, you know where the strongest sun will come from during the growing season.

Now, sit somewhere comfortable, drink something hot or cold and watch the sun. Depending on how precise you want to be you can do this every half-hour, or at longer intervals, on your sketch put the time and draw a line to mark the area where the sunlight ends and the shade begins. At the next time draw another line, and so on.

You can also record this information with photographs. Make sure the date and time is set correctly on your camera and you will have a visual record of how the sunlight changes in your garden over a day. Programs such as Google Earth provide some information, they usually use only overhead imagery that could easily be several years old and don't provide the details you need. The reason you need to really observe this and not just guess is that unless you're really watching, you may not take into account an important factor, such as the shade cast from a neighbour's tree, hedge or gazebo.

If you repeat this at intervals over the growing season you will also have information about changes in available sunlight during the year. Remember that some factors affecting sunlight in the yard will change during the course of the year. In May a maple tree might not affect the amount of sunlight received, the leaves have not grown yet or are still small, but by mid to late summer it will shade a much larger patch of your garden. And as the angle of the sun changes during the season, so too will the amount of sun your garden gets in different parts. If you are consistent with this process you'll be able to make a complete sunlight map, with the total number of sunlight hours for each area of garden.

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If you have garden questions please contact us at streetsvillehort@hotmail.com check out our website at www.streetsvillehort.ca