

Cooperative Extension

Delaware State University • College of Agriculture and Related Sciences

Reading Seed labels

Many of us will be going to our local Nursery and/or garden center to purchase vegetable, flower or herb transplants to plant in our garden and landscapes. Most transplants are sold in 4-pack, 6-pack or single pots and will have labels that provide us with growing information on the plant. ***How much time do you take to read that label? Do you really look at it, or only at the picture of the growing plant?*** Reading the label may make the difference between a failed or a successful growing season for the plant. The label provides the cultural (*sun exposure, site requirements, pH and water needs*) and specific information on the plants characteristics (*origin, common and species name, height and width at maturity, bloom color, size and shape, pruning needs*).

Here is a guide to reading a plant label:

Sun Exposure refers to the best conditions in which the plant will grow, whether it is grown in full sun (six hours or more of direct sunlight), partial sun, full shade (no direct sunlight), or half-day sun (four hours of sunlight - usually morning light is the best; afternoon sun is more intense). *These are just some of the ways sun needs are written.*

Site Requirements explains the soil needs for the plant to survive and thrive. Examples are: *dry, sandy, moist, wet, rich in organic material, compost incorporated at planting, how deep to plant and the space between plants.*

pH needs refers to plant acidity. If the plant is acid loving, it will need a soil pH of 6.9 or lower. Flowering plants that like a pH of 6.75 are Ageratum, Carnation, Foxglove, Iris, Marigold, Petunia, Salvia, Sunflower, and Verbena. A pH of 6.0 is ideal for growing Begonia, Coral Bells, Columbine, Roses and Zinnia. Some flowers that need more of an alkaline soil (pH of 7.1 and above) are Ageratum, Day lilies, and Dianthus. Note that some plants like a range of levels rather than a specific pH.

Water Needs refers to the moisture requirements. Some plants thrive with moist feet (roots), while others will not tolerate any moisture and need dryer soil conditions. American Holly and Bald Cypress trees love wet conditions, while pine trees will not tolerate wet feet. Check your site and see what the soil moisture conditions are before you start planting.





Origin tells where the plant was discovered or founded and describes the propagation methods used to achieve the desirable characteristics that consumers want (e.g. flower color, disease resistance, size and/or taste). For example, an origin notation that says, “native of Mexico or Mexico,” may accompany a plant label that reads, “tender perennial treated as an annual.” This type of plant may not survive Delaware winter temperatures.

Common and Species name is important to use to minimize confusion. The trade name under which you purchase a plant through one nursery or catalog may be different elsewhere. For example, Echinacea purpurea is also known as purple coneflower; Lablab purpureus is also known as Hyacinth Bean.

Height and width at maturity of a plant are important to know in order to judge the amount of space in which you will need to grow it. Knowing this information will help you choose a location large enough to support the plant at maturity and will help you decide how to fit the plant into your landscape with other plants

Before you select a plant to add to your landscape, decide what the growing conditions are. When you arrive at the nursery or garden center, be sure to read the label in the container before purchasing to ensure successful plant growth.

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