
Sun Stunts Plant Growth

by: Jim Blackburn

A PROVOCATIVE IDEA

When I was a student in high school biology my professor said that “the sun stunts the growth of plants.” That was hard to believe and contrary to everything I thought true. Plants need the sun to grow. True.

But he gave illustrations. A potato in a dark cellar sends out a fast growing sprout but if you bring it out in the sunlight its growth slows. He also noted that plants growing in the shade are fast growing and straggly while those in the sun grow slower.

He asked, “A plant tends to grow towards the sun – why?” Because the sun slows the growth on the sunny side and the shady side grows faster, causing the stem to bend towards the sun! He had me convinced. When you’re watching your plants develop, notice that the parts that get less sun grow more and those branches bend toward the sun.

A gross simplification.

Plants are controlled by their hormones. I wouldn’t go into the details here even if I could, but the net result is true. Plants’ growth is slowed by the sun though they need the sun to grow.

How’s that for a provocative idea? The sun stunts growth!

photo: Gretchen Mills



Compass Barrel Cactus

[the barrel cactus usually grows towards the south \(to prevent sunburn\), hence the name "compass cactus."](#)

