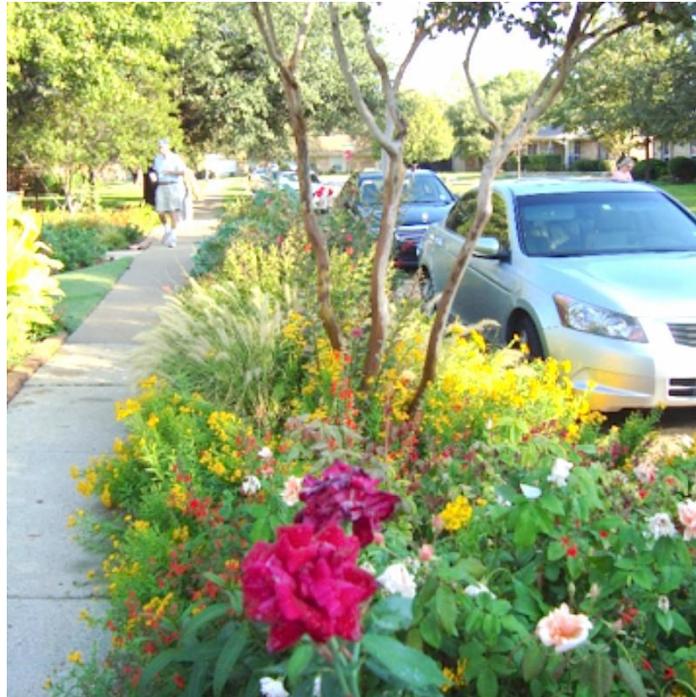


HELL STRIP GARDENING GROWING PLANTS WHERE PLANTS DON'T WANT TO GROW

by Gaye Hammond
[Houston Rose Society](#)



Let's face it. All landscapes have at least one spot where plants just don't want to grow. Whether that spot is the narrow strip of grass between the curb and the sidewalk, a utility easement at the back of your property, or a spot adjacent to a structure or fence where plants just don't thrive....it's a hell strip.

In my experience, ninety-nine percent of the time the factors creating a hell strip are environmental. This means geographical, physical or mechanical conditions are at play that negatively impact the physiology of plants. These factors include an increased heat load, heated wind caused by passing vehicles, poor soils,



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ineffective irrigation, soil compaction, too much water or rainwater runoff, inadequate sized root zone, too much or not enough sunlight for the plants selected and poor drainage.

And then there's the 'mystery' cause - lying underground where you can't see it that prevents any plant you try from growing in that specific spot.

Identifying the factor(s) that cause your hell strip is the first step in solving your landscape woes. Many times the factors causing the hell strip can be identified using things you probably have in your kitchen, garage or even the closet.

For example, an empty tuna fish can is perfect to gauge the amount of water being applied to a landscape planting. A strip of butcher paper or parchment paper can help determine the amount of direct sunlight a spot in the landscape receives.

To test the amount of sunlight, lay a roll of butcher paper out across the yard (or a section of the yard) and draw lines across the shadows with a sharpie marker, noting the time when you drew the line, at the end of the day you will be able to calculate how much direct sunlight each section receives and what time of day that occurs.

Most people do not realize the impact that fences, eaves, trees and the house next door or trees along the perimeter of their property have on the amount of direct sunlight their plants really receive. They think that because they look out in the back yard and it is sunny that means there is enough sunlight to grow plants anywhere in the yard.

This exercise would be most appropriate when landscape plans are being done, or when new beds are anticipated. This helps the homeowner know where the best place for those planting beds might be. Unfortunately, most of the time we end up doing this exercise because a homeowner is having trouble with plants that should be full and lush be tall and whimpy and plagued with pests or disease because the plants chosen are not getting enough sunlight.



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Once the cause is identified, corrective measures can be implemented to tame the hell strip and make it a productive part of the landscape. According to Gaye, "As with any landscaping project the right plant for the right spot is a must and we will look at locally adapted plants that are perfect additions for these really tough growing conditions."

Send questions to Gaye at gayeh@LPM-triallaw.com