Put the right plant in the right place to help ensure success

There are several factors that make gardening a success: nutrient-rich soil, good drainage, proper sunlight and sometimes, just plain good luck. Another factor that helps ensure success is placing the right plant in the right place.

Many plant health problems can be avoided if the plants are matched to their environments. Putting the right plants in the right place not only will help gardeners avoid disappointment, but it can also save them a little money.

Every landscape is characterized by the amount and type of sunlight, soil conditions, moisture, and hardiness zone. The specific conditions will vary as you move across the landscape. Selecting plants well suited to the combination of these factors present in different areas of the yard will help ensure long-term success. Take time to study the drainage patterns, light intensities and soil types of your landscape. This will help you match plants to the most ideal location in the landscape.

No landscape will be 100% perfect, and some steps can be taken to alter the landscape, but it’s best and easiest to simply choose plants that are suited to the existing conditions. Plants placed in a location that meets their needs usually thrive without requiring a lot of attention. Plants in a location that does not suit their needs are usually stressed, vulnerable to attack from pests and diseases, and may require more care.

When selecting plants for the landscape, learn the specific needs of each plant to determine if it is a good match for your landscape. Plant labels and catalog listings typically list a Hardiness Rating which corresponds to the Hardiness Zone map developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This number corresponds to the average minimum winter temperatures for an area. Much of Oklahoma lies within zone 7, with an average winter minimum temperature between 0 and 10 degrees Fahrenheit.

In addition to their cold tolerance, plants differ in the amount and intensity of light needed to prosper. Plants are identified as suited to full sun, part sun and shade. Full sun means a minimum of 6 hours of direct light found in open areas. Most plants requiring part sun do well in filtered light for most of the day or in direct sun for morning or afternoon. Keep in mind that several hours of afternoon sun are more intense and create more heat than morning sun.

Shade plants may require anything from the indirect light found on the north side of the house to the deep shade found under evergreens. True shade plants, such as many ferns, can perish in too much sun. Some plants labeled part sun/part shade will perform well under a wide range of conditions.
Moisture requirement are something else to consider. Group plants together than have similar water needs. Some plants thrive in wet conditions while others require well-drained soil. Slope of the land also plays a role.

Oklahoma State University Extension offers plenty of research-based gardening information online.