

# Designing Your Own Garden

## Laying The Foundation

**Jackie Sledge,**

**Kathy Turner**

**Big Country Master  
Gardeners**

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# Conduct a Site Assessment

- Document the measurements of property boundaries and structures.
- Monitor and record sun exposure and shading patterns.
- Analyze prevailing wind directions.
- Inspect drainage routes, particularly around building foundations.
- Assess soil characteristics and composition.

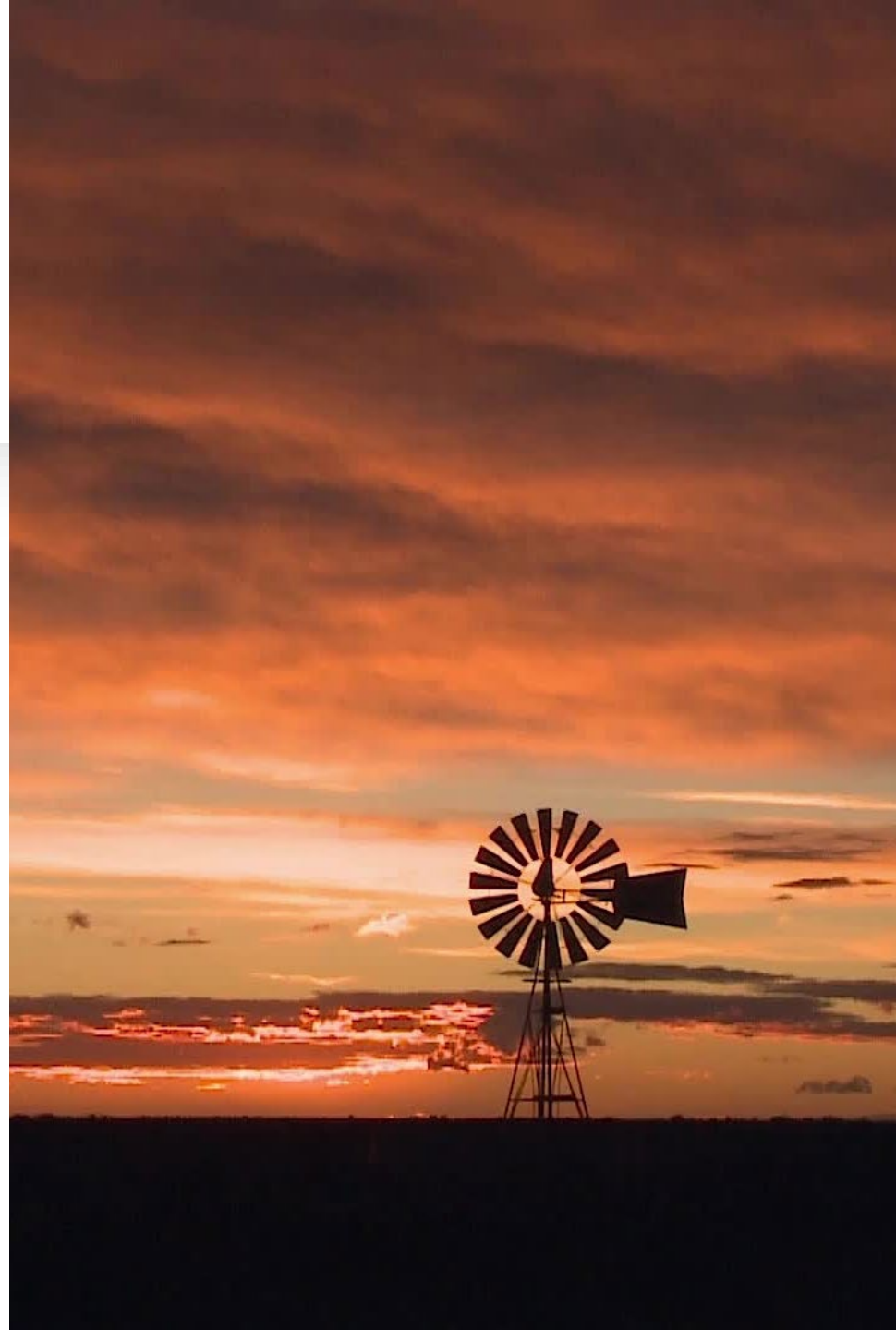
# Document the Measurements of Property Boundaries and Structures

- Utilize survey included in your home purchase
- Measure each boundary and create a rough draft of your property lines using graph paper
- Add into the drawing any structures including house, patios, walkways, additional buildings, pools, playground, etc.



## Monitor and record sun exposure and shading patterns

- Monitoring **sun and wind** in your yard (especially in West Texas conditions like Abilene) is one of the smartest things you can do before designing or planting. It doesn't require fancy tools—just a little observation and consistency.



# Create a “Sun Map” (Most Important)

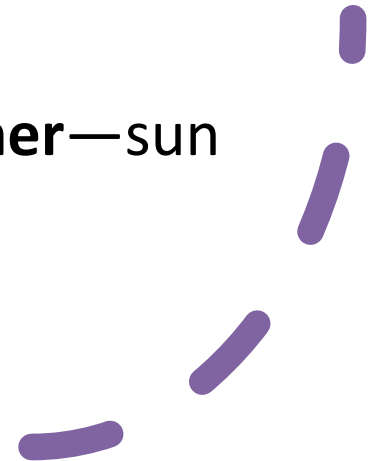
Pick a clear day and check your yard at:

- **8–9 AM**
- **12–1 PM**
- **4–5 PM**
- **7–8 PM (summer especially)**

👉 Using your yard sketch, mark:

- Full sun areas 🌞
- Partial shade ☀️🌥️
- Full shade 🌳

Do this in **spring AND summer**—sun angles shift a lot.



# Understand Sun Categories

**Full sun** = 6–8+ hours (most of Abilene yards)

**Part sun/shade** = 3–6 hours

**Full shade** = less than 3 hours

⚠ In West Texas, *afternoon sun is much harsher than morning sun*—treat west-facing exposure as “extreme sun.”

# 1. Identify Wind Direction

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In Abilene, prevailing winds are usually:

- **South / Southwest (summer)**
- **North (cold fronts)**

Try:

- Tie **ribbon or survey tape** to stakes
- Watch which way it blows at different times of day

# 2. Track Wind Intensity Zones

Walk your yard during windy days and note:

- Where plants bend or struggle
- Where soil dries out fastest
- Where structures block wind

👉 Mark areas:

- **High wind zones** (corners, open exposures)
- **Protected zones** (near house, fences)

### 3. Look for Natural Clues



Leaning trees or shrubs = prevailing wind direction



Dry, crusty soil = wind + sun combo



Damaged leaves = exposure hotspots

Wind acts like a **moisture thief**—it dries soil faster than heat alone  
Even “full sun plants” may struggle without wind protection  
A **windbreak (shrubs, fence, or trees)** can change your whole yard

### Area Type

### What It Means

### What To Do

Full sun + high wind

Harshest zone

Use tough, drought + wind-tolerant plants

Full sun + protected

Ideal growing zone

Best for most landscape plants

Shade + wind

Tricky

Use hardy understory plants

Shade + protected

Premium zone

Great for seating, delicate plants

**Inspect  
drainage  
routes,  
particularly  
around  
building  
foundations**



## **What You're Looking For**

**You want water to:**

- **Move away from the house**
- **Drain evenly across the yard**
- **Avoid pooling near the foundation**

# Step 1: Walk the Perimeter After Rain (Best Method)

Right after a rain (or irrigation run), walk your home and look for  **Red Flags:**

- Standing water within **5–10 feet of foundation**
- Mud splashing on siding or brick
- Erosion channels (little “rivers” in soil)
- Water collecting near downspouts
- Soil pulling away from foundation

 If you see any of these, water is not moving correctly.



## **Step 2: Check the Slope (Critical Rule)**

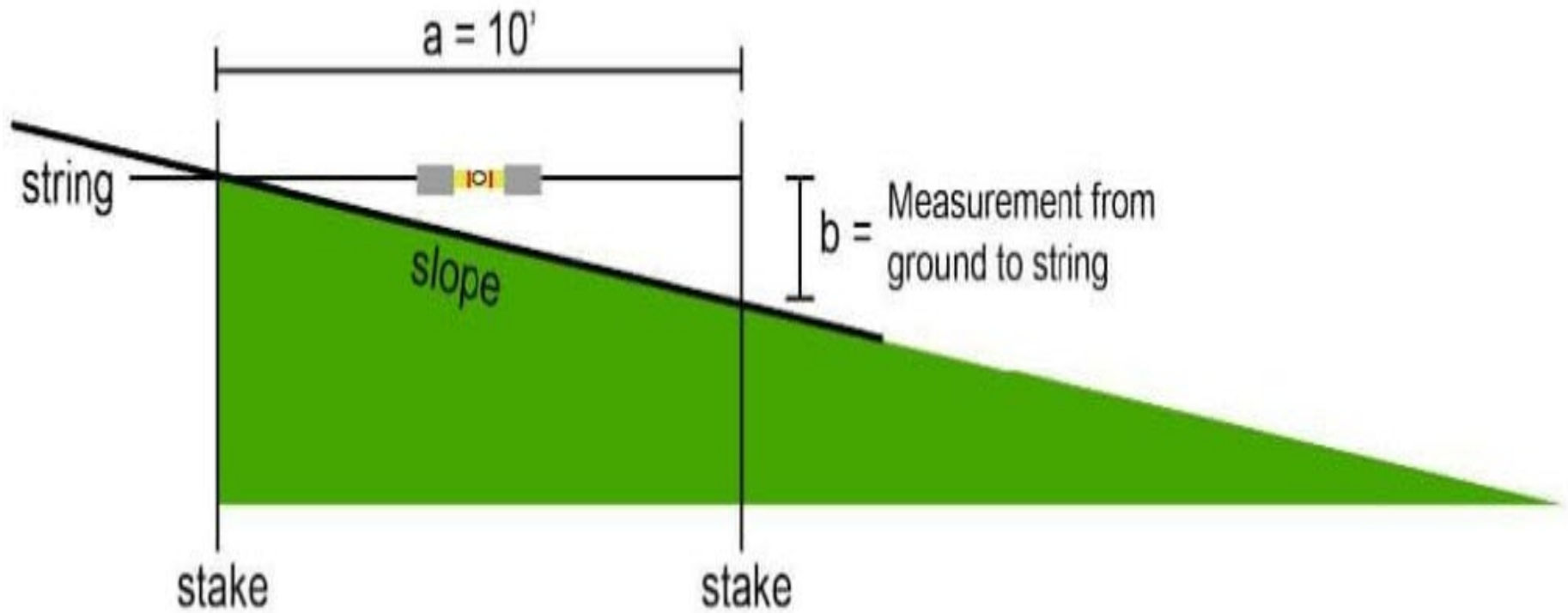
### **Rule of thumb:**

- Soil should drop **6 inches over the first 10 feet** away from your house

### **Easy DIY test:**

- Put a stake near foundation
- Put another 10 ft away
- Run a string level between them
- Measure the drop
- ✓ If flat or sloping toward house = problem

# Simple String Measure





## Step 3: Track Water Flow Paths



During rain or irrigation:

- Watch **where water starts**
- Follow **where it travels**

Note **where it stops**



Sketch arrows on a simple yard map:

-  Good flow = away from house
-  Problem = toward house or pooling







# Quick Fix Options (Based on What You Find)

## Problem

## Likely Fix

- |                                |                                  |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Water near foundation -----  | • Regrade soil / add slope       |
| • Downspout dumping water----- | • Extensions or buried pipe      |
| • Standing water in yard-----  | • French drain or dry creek      |
| • Erosion channels-----        | • Mulch, rock, or groundcover    |
| • Heavy runoff-----            | • Swale (shallow drainage ditch) |

# Assess soil characteristics and composition

-  1. Start with Texture (What is your soil made of?)
-  2. Test Drainage (Percolation Test)
-  3. Check Soil Structure (How it behaves)
-  4. Evaluate Organic Matter

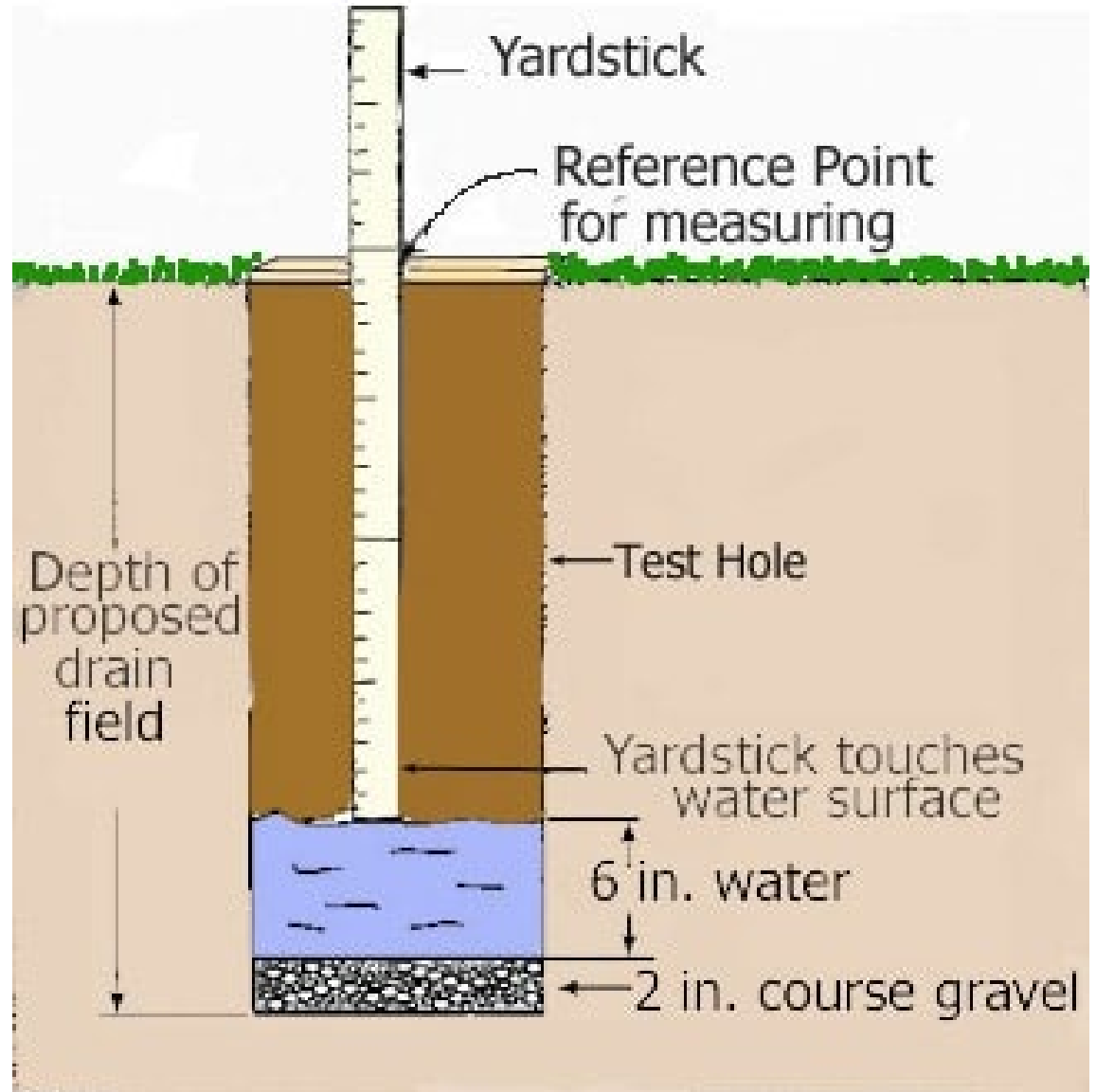
# Texture – What is Your Soil Made Of?



Jar of water test

# Perc Test Procedure

Test  
Drainage



# Check Soil Structure

Good soil isn't just what it's made of—it's how it's arranged.

- **Look for:**
  - **Crumbly, loose soil** = healthy
  - **Hard, compacted layers** = problem
  - **Cracks (common in West TX clay)** = shrinking soil
- 👉 Use a shovel or screwdriver:
- Easy to push in = good structure
  - Hard as concrete = compaction

# Evaluate Organic Matter

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Healthy soil should be:

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Darker in color

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Smell earthy (not sour)

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Full of roots, maybe worms

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Low organic matter = very common in  
West Texas

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 This is usually the **#1 thing to improve**

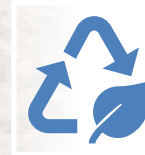
# Know Your Soil by Testing It!



Test soil (pH & nutrients)



Identify type: sand or clay



Add compost & organic matter



Build soil over time



# West Texas Tips

1

Use mulch  
generously

2

Plan for  
shade early

3

Protect  
from wind

4

Work with  
the climate

# Questions?



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