



# The Sun

## What It Can Tell Us

by Anita Sanchez

*That long Shadow—on the lawn—  
 Indicative that Suns go down—  
 The notice to the startled Grass  
 That Darkness—is about to pass—*  
 —Emily Dickinson

Sun. Hot, relentless rays beating down. A sultry, humid, sweaty, ninety-in-the-shade day. Well, it's August. There's nothing to do but love it.

Remember February's sleet and slush, the gray winter days that never seemed to end? That's when we'd really appreciate a day of August sun. Of course, sun is even nicer if there's a palm tree, hammock, and Caribbean beach nearby.

### 93 Million Miles

What is the sun? It's not a planet, or a moon. It's a ball of hot glowing gases, bubbling and seething like a pot of chili. You could fly a spaceship right through it—if you could invent a spaceship that wouldn't burn up long before it got there. The part of the sun that we can see is about 11,000 degrees Fahrenheit (F). (The hottest oven in your kitchen is about 500 degrees F.) The center of the sun is hotter yet. The sun is made up of hydrogen and helium, swirling, boiling, and often exploding like a monstrous bomb, sending clouds of searing gases into space.

Hold your hands up to the sun and you can feel the heat of those hydrogen explosions. That warm sunbeam has traveled to you through nearly 93 million miles of ice-cold outer space. The sun's rays move so fast, though, that it only takes eight minutes for the light from the sun to reach the earth.

### Me and My Shadow

Even when it's a scorching day, I like summer sun. I've learned to pay attention to my shadow, especially when I'm out on the trail. Like a helpful hiking partner, it can give me information about direction, or warn me of approaching darkness. And when my shadow disappears, it's time to look out for rain!

On all but the cloudiest days, the sun is a compass in the sky. One hot August afternoon, I was hiking on a not-very-well-marked trail, and came to a sunny clearing, striped with the shadows of trees. There



were two possible paths that could be the way home, but neither had signs. Which way to go? How soon would it be dark? I had no compass and the North Star wouldn't be visible for hours. Was there nothing to guide me? Sure enough—the sun.

The sun sets in the west, so face the sunset, and you're generally heading west. East is behind you, north on your right hand, south on your left. Assuming you're in the northern hemisphere, the sun will be due south at noon. In our latitude, the sun sets a bit to the north of west in the summer. Face your afternoon shadow, and you're facing southeast. In winter, the sun sets south of true west.

## Sun Time

It's easy to enjoy a sunny afternoon so much that you don't realize the day is drawing to a close. You don't want darkness to catch you too far from the parking lot. If your shadow is shorter than you are—relax—there's lots of daylight left! If your afternoon shadow is longer than you are, though, night is coming fast.



Tom Lindsey

Be sure to apply sun block about every two hours.

The sun shines above us every day of our lives—even on cloudy days it's still there, warming our planet. Without sun, Earth would be a dead and lifeless chunk of ice. Even though it makes you sweat, the sun will warm you, nourish you—and can even help guide you home.

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## Too Much of a Good Thing?



Sunlight is essential for our health. Without sun, we would be pale and unhealthy, like plants kept in a closet. We might even die without sunlight, which provides our bodies with vitamin D, an essential nutrient. But too much sun can be harmful. Look at your shadow—if it's shorter than you are, that means the sun is high overhead, and at its strongest.

A sunburn, or even a deep sun tan, are bad for the skin—they can cause premature aging, and even skin cancer. Suntan lotion is meant to moisturize skin and aid in tanning, so for the most sun protection use sun block, which blocks the harmful ultraviolet rays. Better yet, wear a t-shirt over a bathing suit, and a hat and sunglasses to protect skin and eyes when the sun is strongest.

