

KPOV – *The Point*
Gardening: Get Good at It
“Season Extenders”
September 11, 2018

Your fall gardening can get rather intense when there is frost in the forecast. Most vegetable crops are very sensitive to cold weather, and the majority grow only during the frost-free months of the year, limiting the growing season in Central Oregon. Be sure that you harvest all of your ripe, tender crops before they are damaged. Tomatoes, peppers, melons, cucumbers, eggplant, and summer squash will be lost if left out in the frost. Hardier crops like cabbage, carrots, scallions, and kale can withstand light frost and it will even improve flavor or crispness.

Central Oregon increases in elevation as you go from north to south. The elevation in Warm Springs is 1000 feet increasing to 4200 feet in La Pine. Higher elevations tend to have winters that are longer and colder. Other effects of higher elevations include lower night temperatures, especially during the growing season.

You also have to determine if your garden is in a microclimate. A microclimate is the climate of a small area like your backyard as opposed to that of the larger region. Some of the factors that determine a microclimate include cold pockets, hills, and the location of houses or other structures. Choose the warmest spot you have for your garden that is not prone to early frost, avoid the bottom of a hill or an area with lots of bushes and trees. A south-facing slope is best for sun. You must understand that the growing season is variable each year due to our low evening temperatures and the frost factor. Also add 14 days onto the number of days given for maturation on the seed packet due to our cool evening temperatures.

If there is a mild frost warning, try covering tender plants that still hold a lot of immature fruit. Baskets, burlap or canvas sacks, boxes, blankets, or buckets will help protect plants from frost. Warm days will mature some of the fruit as long as the plants have nightly frost protection. Other methods available for extending the growing season in Central Oregon include raised beds, greenhouses, cold frames, hot beds, hoop houses, cloches, and floating row covers. These methods can be used in both spring and fall to extend the growing season. Greenhouses, raised beds, cold frames and hot beds require planning and construction prior to planting. Hoop houses are like mini greenhouses so are also best constructed before planting. So let's concentrate on what we can do to protect our not quite ready vegetables from killing frost.

For temperatures down to 24 degrees you can cover your tender plants to protect them so that the fruit can continue to ripen during warm days. Floating row covers are made from spun polyester and polypropylene and are very lightweight. This fabric comes in different thicknesses that allow air, water, and light to move through them. Spread the row cover over the crops you are protecting and weight down the edges so that it stays in place. It is lightweight enough that no additional support is necessary. It will provide an additional 2 to 8 degrees of frost protection depending on thickness. It should be removed when temperatures inside reach 80 degrees. Be sure to monitor conditions carefully so that plants aren't damaged by excessive heat or lack of moisture.

Cloches are structures that shelter plants from drying winds, rain, and cold air. They are set over individual plants or made into tunnels for whole rows. They trap solar radiation and

moisture evaporating from the soil and plants. Cloches generally are lightweight, portable, and reusable. The best designs can be closed completely at night to prevent frost damage and opened or removed completely during the day for good air circulation. Make sure cloches are anchored or are heavy enough so they don't blow away. You can assemble an excellent Quonset-type cloche quickly by covering a 5- to 6-foot piece of concrete reinforcing wire with row cover or plastic. The heavy-duty wire comes in 5- and 7-foot lengths and is strong enough to shrug off snow loads.

Season extenders will allow you to continue harvesting when others are wishing they had taken the time and effort to prolong the goodness that is fresh produce.

For more information about this and other gardening topics log on to gocomga.com and click on KPOV Radio. This has been gardening get good at it on the Point, KPOV High desert community radio.

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/techniques/central-oregon-climate-how-it-relates-gardening>

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/techniques/grow-your-own-beets-carrots-radishes-onions-similar-crops>

<https://extension.illinois.edu/hortihints/0402c.html>

http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/smart_vegetable_gardening_with_season_extenders

https://ag.umass.edu/sites/ag.umass.edu/files/fact-sheets/pdf/season_extenders.pdf

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