

Gardening in Wyoming

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The Growing season in Wyoming is short the temperatures fluctuate from cold to hot and often including untimely frost. With the weather this year being so cold and the soil temperatures in particular being cold do not get in a hurry to put any warm season crops too early. High or steady winds can cause physical damage to plants plus soil erosion and rapid drying. This extreme weather sure makes getting a garden in this year interesting. Also the poor native soils are usually alkaline, low in organic matter, shallow, rocky, and cold.

Smart home gardeners find many ways to tailor the garden environment such as locating the garden on a gentle slope facing south, southeast, or southwest. This will allow the soil to warm up more quickly in the spring and cold air will drain away. Vegetables planted on the south side of a building often mature sooner because of the reflected heat from the building and possible protection from the wind.

When selecting vegetables, choose early maturing plants. Some vegetables, such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, melons, winter squash, pumpkins, and sweet corn, must have hot weather and a long growing season to produce well. A gardener can gain a few days or even weeks of growing time by setting out transplants at the normal time for outdoor seed planting. Protect vegetables early in the season from frost. Individual plastic plant covers or circular plastic tubes filled with water can help. A fabric cover over a row of plants will give some frost protection and will raise the air and soil temperatures under the cover, speeding plant growth.

Organic matter is usually lacking in Wyoming soils. Organic matter will lighten heavy clay soils, improve water-holding capacity for sandy soils, improve soil structure, allow better water penetration, allow air to reach root systems (roots must have oxygen), and provide some essential nutrients. As an added benefit, organic matter aids soil microorganisms, helping to make nutrients more available for plants. Never add sand to a clay soil because compaction and density will become problematic.

When watering the vegetable garden avoid using water which contains large amounts of dissolved salts which cause major problems with the soil and plants. Most vegetables will require at least one and one half inches of water each week as they near maturity. Gardens growing in sandy soils will require more frequent watering than gardens in clay soils. If you are using a sprinkler irrigation system which keeps the leaves wet for, long periods of time (one hour) this could lead to foliar disease problems. Mulching is an excellent home garden practice, which helps

maintain uniform moisture and temperature in the soil reduces erosion, water loss, and weed problems.

Plant tall vegetables, such as corn and tomatoes, on the north side of the garden so they will not shade the smaller vegetables. Early maturing crops can be planted in the same row or between rows of later-maturing crops. This will give you the opportunity to produce more vegetables in your garden and when the early ones are picked then the later maturing ones will have the room need to grow. Vegetables suitable for spring or fall gardens are beets, carrots, lettuce, onions, peas, radishes, spinach, and turnips. The best time of day to harvest is in the early morning when the sugars are at their maximum. Also pick most of the vegetables when they are young which provides the best flavor tenderness and most nutrition. If you are not sure when to pick go to the grocery store and look at their vegetables.

Be on the lookout for insects and disease problems. Usually picking the insects off or the diseased leaves off will eliminate the problem from getting worse. There are many controls for insects and diseases, but the key is early detection.

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