KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Central Oregon Climate”

February 4, 2020

What is a hardiness zone, and in what zone is Central Oregon?

The term “hardiness” refers to the ability of a plant to withstand an average minimum temperature. Oftentimes, when we go to purchase plants, the catalog or plant tag will indicate hardiness zone followed by a number. This number is based upon the hardiness zones derived from a map put out by the United Stated Department of Agriculture.

There are 11 designated zones in the United States, with 1 being the coldest climate and 11 being the most temperate.

When choosing a plant, pick one with a rating that falls within your zone, or one zone colder. For example, if your area is designated as hardiness zone 4, purchase plant material hardy to zone 4 or less, such as zone 3.

Hardiness ratings or zones are intended to be used only as a guide, not an absolute for plant selection and survivability. That is especially the case here in Central Oregon, where we have several microclimates.

There are numerous factors that contribute to whether or not a plant will survive besides minimum temperatures. These factors include soil type, rainfall, heat tolerance and exposure to wind and sun. According to the USDA Hardiness Zone map, Central Oregon is placed in Zone 6. However, this is really oversimplified given our many microclimates in the High Desert.

Lapine and Sunriver (the coldest areas in Central Oregon) are USDA hardiness zones 3-4. Bend, Prineville, Redmond, Sisters and Tumalo range from zones 3-5. And the warmest zones, Crooked River Ranch, Culver, Terrebonne, Madras & Warms Springs are in hardiness zones 4-5.

Many people are attracted to Central Oregon because of the large number of sunny days we experience here. Interestingly enough, these sunny days are responsible for the occurrence of radiational cooling, resulting in frost any time of the year. Historically, there are less than 10 frost-free days (32°F or greater) in the city of Bend. These dates occur during July and August.

Central Oregon’s climate has a wide range of temperature extremes between day and night. These temperature fluctuations often cause plants to bud out prematurely, only to get nipped by frost at a later date.

Relatively low evening temperatures limit plant growth and the production of some heat-loving crops such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and melons.

Our spring and autumn months do not warm up and cool down gradually. The growing season ranges from 60 to 120 growing days, with the shorter seasons occurring in the higher elevations and southern regions of La Pine and Sunriver.

I’ll share some basic tips to extend the growing season and help you find ways to successfully garden.

* Use season extenders such as row covers (to prevent frost damage), Walls-O-Water (for tomatoes), cold frames and greenhouses.
* Water during periods of winter drought if the ground is warm enough to accept water. Every six to eight weeks, give your plants a deep soak to prevent winter desiccation.
* Mulch around your perennials to insulate them for the winter.
* Select adaptable plant material and be sure to put the right plant in the right place.
* Protect plants from wind by planting a windbreak or planting on the east side of your home.
* Add 14 days to the number of days given for maturation on the seed packet for direct-seeded vegetables and flowers due to our cool evening temperatures.

Behind the beauty of the High Desert landscape lie many factors that create challenges for gardeners. The main factors that contribute to difficulties include temperature, precipitation, soil types, elevation, USDA hardiness zones and microclimates. Learning how to work with these challenges can allow you to have a successful and beautiful garden.

For more information about our Central Oregon climate and other topics, go to our Master Gardener website at [www.gocomga.com](http://www.gocomga.com) and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. Thanks for listening to… Gardening, Get Good at It on KPOV, The Point.

Resources:

Gardening in Central Oregon’s Climate

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/node/94211/printable/print>

OSU Extension Office in Deschutes County

<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/deschutes>

Central Oregon Gardening Publications <https://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/techniques/central-oregon-garden-publications>

Music: Perceptions

<https://www.bensound.com/royalty-free-music/4>