

Gardening in Wyoming



Wyoming's growing season is short, and temperatures fluctuate from cold to hot, and there are untimely frosts. High or steady winds can cause physical damage to plants, soil erosion and rapid drying. The native soils are usually alkaline, low in organic matter, shallow, rocky, and cold.

Innovative home gardeners find many ways to tailor the garden environment, such as putting the garden on a gentle slope facing south, southeast, or southwest. This allows the soil to warm faster in the spring. Vegetables planted on the south side of a building often mature sooner because of the reflected heat from the building and protection from the wind.

Select 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 from frost early in the season. 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 speed growth by raising air and soil temperatures.

Organic matter is usually lacking in Wyoming soils. Organic matter will lighten heavy clay soils, improve the 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 helps soil microorganisms make nutrients available for plants. Never add sand to a clay soil because compaction and density will become problematic.

Watering plants with water that contains large amounts of dissolved salts can cause major problems. Most vegetables will require at least 1½ inches of water each week as they near maturity. Gardens growing in sandy soils will require more frequent watering than gardens in clay soils. Foliar disease problems could occur if sprinkler irrigation keeps leaves wet for long periods.

Mulching is an excellent home-garden practice. Mulching helps maintain uniform moisture and temperature in the soil, and reduces erosion, water loss, and weed problems.

Plant tall vegetables, such as corn and tomatoes, on the north side of the garden so smaller vegetables will not be in the shade. Early maturing crops can be planted in the same row or between rows of later-maturing crops.

Vegetables suitable for spring or fall gardens are beets, carrots, lettuce, onions, peas, radishes, spinach, and turnips. Harvest vegetables in the early morning when sugars in the plant are at their maximum.



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