

Cache Frost-Free Days

Determining when to plant a garden can be somewhat confusing in Cache Valley's unpredictable and varied climate where first and last frost dates vary by many days within just a few miles. Many experienced gardeners have planted at one point and later lost the plants to frost.

In Cache Valley, frost-free days for particular areas vary from an average of 113 days in Lewiston and Trenton to 158 days on the USU campus. Although exact frost dates are not available for all areas of the valley, it is still possible to determine when to plant. Many times the best thing to do is chat with a local farmer or experienced gardener in your area to determine what works for them.

Other factors to consider include the geographic characteristics of where you live. When a yard is located in a populated area or on a mountain bench, it usually has a longer growing season. Other areas located at slightly lower elevations, where cold air drains and cannot escape, have a shorter season due to the increased cold air. This is why local commercial orchards are generally located on benches. Additionally, urban and suburban areas are slightly warmer than surrounding areas due to the urban heat effect. Heat from buildings and warmth generated by sunlight reflected from roads and other surfaces increase temperatures and delay frost.

In addition to knowing frost information, a wise gardener takes into account the needs of the plants. Vegetables planted locally fall into four basic categories: hardy, semi-hardy, tender and very tender. Depending on which category a plant belongs to, planting dates vary from early spring until early summer. Consider the following:

- Hardy vegetables, including asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, onions, peas and spinach, can be planted as soon as the soil is workable in early spring. This usually ranges from April 1 to April 15 in Cache Valley. These same vegetables can be safely planted until late May.
- Semi-hardy plants, such as beets, carrots, lettuce and potatoes, can be planted 1 to 2 weeks after the hardy group. These can additionally be planted until late May or early June.
- Tender vegetables, such as celery, cucumbers, corn and most beans, should be planted on the average last frost date, generally in late May or early June for most areas of Cache Valley.
- Very tender plants such as squash, beans, melons, tomatoes, eggplants and peppers should not be planted until at least a week after the average last frost date has passed. Even if frost does not occur before this time, these plants will not grow well and are more susceptible to disease until warmer weather.

If you have lost plants to frost, you are not alone. It is often due to Utah's fickle weather, and all we can do is try again. If you are interested in fruit and vegetable gardening and want more information, access the new USU Extension website at: <http://extension.usu.edu/yardandgarden/htm/vegetables-fruits-herbs>.