

Growing Season

I was recently in a local garden center and saw many customers purchasing garden vegetables and annual flowers. I can understand this, due to the recent warm weather. It seemed that many of the customers were anxious to get out in the yard and start planting. However there is an adage in the nursery industry, "plant early and plant often." Garden centers surely do not want to see you have failure in your yard and garden, but they are happy to sell you as many plants as you will purchase. Be aware that many businesses do not warrantee plants due to frost damage.

Traditionally, in Cache Valley the average last frost date is around the first week of June. To be safe, it is wise to wait until this time to plant. Unfortunately by the beginning of June, the selection of many vegetables and annuals begins to decline. One way to avoid this is to purchase plants a week or two in advance and leave them in the containers. On warm days, they can be set out in the sun and when it is cooler, they should be brought inside and placed in a sunny location. Do not forget to water the plants while they are in containers, especially when it is warm and they may need watering every day.

If you want to get a head start on your garden, be prepared to offer them some sort of protection. An inexpensive method of doing so is to use gallon plastic milk jugs. Cut the bottom inch or so off of the jug and place it over the plant. On warm days, it is good to remove the cap to provide air circulation. Carefully surround the jug with enough soil to prevent it from blowing over in the wind. This is a safe method to use a few weeks before the last frost date.

Many gardeners also have problems in late summer and fall due to their melons not having enough time to fully ripen. One way around this is to use a product called floating row cover. It is a lightweight fabric that increases the temperature around the plant enough to allow melons to ripen late in the season. Floating row cover is also beneficial because it prevents many insects from attacking plants. Once blossoms begin to show, remove the floating row cover so that pollinating insects can pollinate the plant, or when daily temperatures are consistently between 80 and 85° F. for non-blossoming plants.

If you would like to get out in your garden now, crops such as broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, onions, peas, radishes, and lettuce can be planted. Remember, if you are using seed, to keep the ground constantly moist but not excessively wet. Many seeds require two to three weeks to germinate, and so patience is necessary. My own father thought he had bad pea seed and was ready to purchase more. However, on that very day the peas started to emerge and he will have a healthy crop.

On a different note, we are happy to announce the continuation of the Cache County Community Garden. It will be located near St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church in Hyde Park. The garden plots will start at \$30, and irrigation will be provided. Contact the Extension Office at (435)752-6263 for further information.