

Best season for planting varies in Western Oregon

The relatively mild climate of Western Oregon allows gardeners to have a very long planting season, depending on what you are planting.

Bare root trees and shrubs should be planted between January and March to give them the best chance of developing a good root system before the heat of summer is upon us. If the trees or shrubs you buy are potted and have a good root system, you should still plant them no later than early April to give them time to get established before the high moisture demands of June.

It is pretty common to see homeowners in our area buying trees and shrubs as we get into late spring and early summer. As temperatures get into the upper 80s and 90s, plants that have not been in the ground for a month or two will not have established a sufficient root system to take up enough water. Often these late planted trees and shrubs suffer leaf scorch or die.

When the weather pattern is like our normal wet winter, it is important to know when you dig a new planting hole in your yard for a tree or shrub, don't compact the bottom or sides of the hole. Glazing the sides of the planting hole with a shovel can make it as impervious as a pot.

If the sides of the hole become compacted, the hole can fill up with water from rainfall and drown your plant. If your tree or shrubs doesn't drown during winter, the roots of the plant will be restricted from growing out into the soil, making it difficult for the plant to take up enough water during summer.

If your lawn has been damaged and in need of replacement or renovation, there are two preferred planting seasons. The best season for seeding a new lawn is in late August into early September. In late summer the soil is still warm to help germinate seed and the day length is receding, making it easier

to keep the soil moist with frequent light irrigation.

The second-best time to seed turf grass is in April, but following a long-wet winter, the ground can be too wet to prepare well. If you wait too long into May to seed, the young grass plants may not have a very strong root system before the heat of summer arrives. Using sod to establish a new lawn is often the best choice for our region in spring.

When planting a vegetable garden, we need to remember that cool season crops like garlic, onions, peas, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, lettuce, kale, collards and leeks are quite frost tolerant and can be planted whenever the soil is dry enough to work come March. If the soil is 50 degrees or warmer, any of the cool season crop seed will germinate and establish.

If you use raised beds for planting, they stay about 3-5 degrees warmer than the ground, helping plants grow more actively through winter and early spring. Starting cool season crops from seed in a greenhouse or in your home and later transplanting to your garden or raised bed is often a good idea when winter is wetter or colder than normal.

When planting your vegetable garden with warm season crops, it is a very good idea to wait until the soil temperature is at or above 60 degrees. It is also important to know what the last expected spring frost date is for our area.

Around Roseburg the average last frost date over the relatively warm past ten years is April 15. The average last frost date over the past thirty years is May 9.

As we get to the end of March or early April, you will be able to make a better estimate of when you can either seed or set out warm season plants. If you want to experiment a little you should plant a tomato of the same variety in your garden in



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Extension Spotlight

mid-April, one in early May and another in late May. Often the late planted tomato will look as good as or better than the early planted tomatoes by July 1.

That happens around Western Oregon because the soil temperature and the nighttime temperatures don't really start warming up until the last half of May. Because the late planted tomato had a consistently warm soil and air temperature it grew more rapidly and was not bothered as much by insect or disease pests.

It is still a little early to know whether our area of Southwest Oregon will have an early spring or an average spring. We had a very mild January with high temperatures on many days reaching 60 degrees. Then February came along with several weeks of very cool days.

A couple of species that are known to be very temperature sensitive, lilacs and honeysuckle, are not responding the same this year. The honeysuckle was beginning to show signs of new growth in late February. While the lilacs showed no sign of bud break even in early March. The normal bloom time for these plants in our area is in late April, so it seems likely we will see bloom a little earlier than usual for the honeysuckle while the lilacs will be about normal.

So far in 2021 daffodils, Pieris japonica shrubs and Forsythia shrubs all bloomed at their expected times. With so many mixed weather and plant signals this year it seems likely we will end up with a pretty average spring planting period for vegetable crops.

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