

Made-in-the-shade gardening

The past four years have seen a consistent warming trend in summer temperatures. It seems like daytime high temperatures in the 90s have become common, with nighttime lows from 65 to 70 degrees.

When I first came to this area, in 2000, we would have a week or two in late summer with mid to upper 90s, but not the whole summer. The impact on our garden plants is that they are continually under moisture stress, unless we pour the water to them, mulch heavily or create great soil that holds more moisture.

Over the years, I have spoken with you about how to make great garden soil. It is an important and continual process that involves a number of steps, including growing cover crops, adding manures or compost, rotating crops and using biochar to help neutralize soil and retain moisture for plant roots.

I have also written about adding composted materials as a mulch to the garden to help retain moisture and slowly build the organic matter content of your soil. What I haven't shared with the public is the practice of using white row covers that are woven material used to keep plants cool in summer or warm in winter.

The white row covers usually come in 20-by-4-foot sections that can be draped over mature plants or trellis support systems. When used as a cover for seedlings or small plants, you need

to place some 2- to 3-foot metal or wood stakes down the center of the rows to hold the cloth above the plants. Hold the sides of the cloth down with pieces of firewood or rocks.

When used in this manner during our hot summer, I have measured the temperature under the white cloth to be 5 to 7 degrees cooler than the outside air. During a hot summer, like 2017, the impact on the quality of plants is striking. Not only have plants grown faster

under the cloth, but also, the plants are healthier. I have noticed a dramatic reduction in sunburn, plant disease, insect issues and, an increase in plant vigor.

This positive impact has been great for cool-season crops growing in summer, like peas, broccoli, kale and collards. However, the biggest quality impact on any plant so far has been for tomatoes. Through August, I have seen no diseases on my soaker hose-raised plants.

I have never grown tomato plants in western Oregon that didn't have some leaf blight (early blight or late blight). These are fungal diseases that flourish in warm days and cool nights with lots of dew present in our mornings. With the white row cloth covers, the plant has a much more consistent temperature day and night, and dew is not prevalent. I highly recommend using this system for your next vegetable

gardening summer season.

We are currently signing up people for our next Master Gardener training that begins in January. We are taking applications now through Sept. 29 at the Extension office. Apply early to reserve your seat. Class size is limited. To obtain an application with complete details, go to our webpage at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/douglas/>, then scroll down to "Hot Topics and Seasonal Information" and find "Do you want to become a Master Gardener?"

If you are interested in learning more about gardening in western Oregon, come by our office with your questions to visit the Master Gardeners Plant Clinic 1 to 4 p.m., or call the office at 541-236-3052.



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Extension Spotlight

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