

THE THREE SEASON GARDEN – When to plant crops for success in Ridgway

The climate in Ridgway can hamper successful vegetable gardening, but if we understand the 3 seasons of growing with each seasons associated challenges, we can grow nutritious veggies quite easily.

The three seasons are:

A cool spring with frost, wind, and cold temps – sometimes temps in the mid 20's!

99 days of growing season for cool season veggies

A hot summer with wildly fluctuating temperatures!

64 days of growing season for warm season veggies

A short but warm fall with dipping nighttime temps

A great time to replant cool season veggies

Spring = April and May

- Soil is still cold (40 to 50 degrees) with the sun at a low angle. Nights bring dropping temperatures with frost and freezing temps for sensitive crops.

Summer = June, July, August

- Soil is warm (50 to 70 degrees) Wild fluctuations in temps, more wind and even a frost or two in late June.

Fall = September and October

- Soil is cooling, shorter daylight hours and a low angle sun, plus our first frost and freezing temps as early as Sept. 7!

By looking at the three seasons we can see the challenges of growing in Ridgway: Soils are dried by wind, intense sunlight at 7000 feet can burn tender leaves, and cold temps can occur in early summer and again in early fall.

Our growing season dates:

Last killing frost in summer = June 7 / 50% probability of a drop below 28 degrees at night!

Last non-killing frost = June 25 / 50% probability of a drop below 32 degrees at night!

First frost in fall = August 28 / 50% probability of a drop below 32 degrees at night

First killing frost = September 14 / 50% probability of a drop below 28 degrees at night

Therefore, our average growing season for COOL SEASON crops = 99 days

But our average growing season for WARM SEASON crops = only....64 days!

MEET THE CHALLENGE OF GROWING AT 7000 FEET

We can EXTEND our short growing season and protect crops by using floating row cover, such as Agrobion fabric or Dio-betalon to guard against the cold and wind. Shade cloth can be used to protect tender young plants from the intense sun.

We can also do a great deal to succeed in the garden by planting the right crop at the right season and avoid planting everything at once in the spring. Mulching the soil around crops helps keep soil cool in the hot summer months and guards against drying winds.

WHAT TO PLANT FOR SUCCESS IN EACH OF THE THREE SEASONS:

COOL SEASON CROPS – plant in spring and again in late summer for a fall harvest: These are frost hardy and thrive in cool weather. They will sprout in cold soils that measure only 40 to 60 degrees. Some may be planted as early as April 15th. They can also handle the wild fluctuations in temps, and many will survive a frost or freeze - with floating row cover protection! Row cover keeps warm ambient air near the plants where it can protect them against cold nights.

Plant in spring and fall – arugula, beets, bok choy, broccoli, brussels sprouts, bulbing onions, bunching onions, cabbage, cauliflower, chard, chicory, chives, collards, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lettuce, mustard greens, peas, radicchio, radish, spinach, turnips.

Many of these crops can be started inside weeks before they are to be planted out – check the seed packet or a good seed catalog for starting dates. You can also purchase starts at your local nursery, or plant directly from seed. Check the preference on the seed packet!

WARM SEASON CROPS - plant in summer when daytime temps are high, and nights are warm and frost free. These also need warm soil to sprout, so check the optimum soil temperature on the seed packet. These are frost tender crops and should not be planted until all danger of frost is past.

Plant in summer – Basil, Beans, carrots, celery, chard, collards, cucumbers, marigold, melons, parsley, parsnips, peppers, potatoes, pumpkins, summer squash, sunflowers, tomatoes, zucchini.

FALL CROPS - Plant again in late summer for early fall for a harvest time of late August and into early October! (Time frame = Late July to late August) Arugula, broccoli, choy, greens mixes, lettuce, peas, radish, spinach.

Fall: Garlic / Plant in early to mid-October. Allow garlic bulbs to begin to set root, then the bulbs will go dormant through the winter and begin to sprout in spring, for harvest in late June to mid-July.

These crops are NOT advised for Ridgway, because they require a very long and hot summer season to be grown successfully: corn, eggplant, melons, sweet potatoes, and winter squash.

Please visit the Ridgway Community Garden website at: ridgwaygarden.com

RCG: Green St. and Marion Overlook at the Parkside neighborhood