

KPOV – *The Point*
Gardening: Get Good at It
“C.O. Climate & How it Relates to Gardening”
January 15, 2019

Behind the beauty of the High Desert landscape lies many factors that create challenges for any gardener, from novice to expert. Learning how to work with these challenges can allow you to have a successful and beautiful garden. Some of the main factors that contribute to these difficulties include temperature, precipitation, soil types, elevation, USDA hardiness zones and microclimates. This week we'll discuss each of these briefly and hopefully expand your knowledge and assist you in all of your gardening adventures.

Let's start with hardiness zones. The term “hardiness” refers to the ability of a plant to withstand an average minimum temperature. Often when we purchase plants, the catalog or plant tag will indicate a hardiness zone followed by a number. This number is based on the hardiness zones derived from a map created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. According that map, Central Oregon is Zone 6. You'll find a more accurate guideline for our area on the OSU Extension Service website, but remember to keep in mind microclimates within your own landscape. Microclimates are defined as the climate of a small area such as your backyard or even a portion of your backyard. Hardiness zones are intended to be used only as a guide, not an absolute for plant selection and survivability. There are numerous factors that contribute to whether or not a plant will survive besides just minimum temperatures.

Let's consider the soil in Central Oregon which has a sandy texture and tends to have minimal organic matter. This soil needs to be amended with organic material such as compost or aged manure to improve water holding capacity, increase soil micro-organism activity levels, and improve the overall health of the soil.

What about rainfall? We often think of precipitation in terms of rain. However, here in the high desert, our natural precipitation ranges from 8 to 22 inches per year, most of which falls in the winter as snow. So those numbers may be misleading in terms of the additional water we'll need to provide our plants.

Elevation is another important consideration because higher elevations tend to have winters that are longer and colder with lower night time temperatures, especially during the growing season, and year round increased intense sunlight.

Many people are attracted to Central Oregon because of the large number of sunny days. Ironically, these sunny days are responsible for the occurrence of radiational cooling resulting in frost any time of the year. Historically, there are less than ten frost-free days in the City of Bend. The growing season is variable each year but usually ranges between 60 and 120 days. Central Oregon's climate has a wide range of temperature extremes between day and night. These temperature fluctuations often cause plants to bud out prematurely, only to get nipped by the frost at a later date. Our spring and autumn months do not warm up and cool down gradually and our low evening temperatures limit plant growth.

Here are few tips to help meet these challenges: Select adaptable plants for your area. Consider mature size, light and water requirements. Use season extenders such as row cover, cold frames and greenhouses. In the winter if the ground is warm enough to accept water, give your plants a deep soak every 6 to 8 weeks.

For more information about these and other gardening topics, visit our website: www.gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar.

This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV The Point.

Resources:

From the OSU/Deschutes Extension Website: www.extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/

Bauer, Michael. 1994. The Central Oregon Climate

Sunset Western Garden Book. 2001. Sunset Publishing Corporation

Detweiler, Amy Jo. 2014. "Central Oregon Climate and How It Relates to Gardening" OSU Extension Service, Deschutes County.