



Diggin' In The Dirt: Hardiness Zones in Oregon Part 1: What It All Means For My Figs...

By Kim Camarda

One of the most confusing things about gardening in the Pacific Northwest for me has been the issue of "Hardiness zones." Coming from Zone 3, which is pretty consistent-- the weather is either cold or not to varying degrees; the ground is frozen or not-- I thought Zone 8b was going to be a paradise, practically the tropics... Oh, the amazing things that would live through the mild winters of Oregon...the flowers that would reward me for all my hard work. Oh, the dreams of gardeners.

If only zone placement were all there was to it.

The zones are a good starting point, but you still need to determine for yourself what will and won't work in your garden in a given spot.

Minimum temperatures are not the only factor in figuring out whether or not a plant will survive/thrive in your environment. Soil types, rainfall, daytime temperatures, day length, wind, chill hours, humidity and heat play their roles. Where there is shelter, where the cold air stays put, etcetera. Your yard or garden space is a special climate, not found in a book.

For example, under the USDA zone map, the Olympic rain forest and the Sonoran desert are in the same zone.

The USDA plant hardiness map divides North America into 11 hardiness zones. Zone 1 is the coldest; zone 11 is the warmest. Only helpful in a general man-

ner. It's a jumping-off point for areas like Vernonia.

Sunset Publishing has been publishing "The Western Garden Book" for this part of the country for many years. They have a different set of hardiness zones for the region, a little more accurate but still not reliable in places like this. In this map, they have identified 24 different climates for the west. This includes: Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and all states west.

This hardiness map takes into additional consideration: latitude, the continental air influence, the ocean air influence, and directional influences to a degree.

"Latitude" impacts growing because the farther you go from the equator the colder and longer the winters are and daylight will increase in summer and decrease in winter. A degree of latitude is approximately 69 miles.

"The continental air influence" plays its part as well. The North American continent creates its own weather, in a sense. The longer an air mass hovers over a given area, the more likely it is to take on the characteristics of that area. Also, the farther inland you go, the stronger these influences can be.

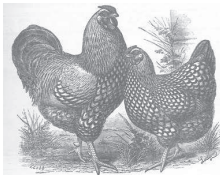
The "ocean influence" can also generate weather patterns. Some ocean currents, such as those causing El Niño and La Niña, can have an effect on temperatures and weather patterns all over the planet. Some are cold water currents, carrying cooler water

from the arctic areas down toward the tropics. Others, such as the Gulf Stream, do the opposite. All affect air temperatures and humidity.

"Directional influence" or what side of the mountain are you on? Mountains, hills and land formations influence the weather and wind patterns beyond them in different ways. South slopes get more heat from the sun than flat land. Slopes can also effect airflow, depending on the orientation. Warm air rises, cold air sinks. Hillsides are never as cold as the hilltops above them or the lower ground around them. This is called a 'thermal belt.' Lowlands that have cold air flowing into them are called 'cold air basins'.

All this will affect where and when to plant. We are 621 feet above sea level here in Vernonia at main street level. The surrounding areas can vary up to 150 feet. I have neighbors up the hill from me who get snow when I'm dry. They are only 60 feet higher in elevation. Higher elevation gardens tend to have longer, colder winters with lower nighttime temps.

The American Horticultural Society has created a heat-related Zone Map showing max temps and heat trends, and a chill map is published showing average chill hours for a given area. These will help form an overall picture of Vernonia. My figs are still alive. I was told when I bought them they were tolerant of this part of Oregon. I wasn't sure what that meant at the time. Now it seems to mean it will make it through a cold snap in the low teens.



Barnyard News: Which Came First?

By Dawn Carr

This month we're going to discuss Chickens.

The first question I'm going to ask is, are they smart or are they stupid?

During the cold snap we had in December, my husband put a heat lamp

in the hen house to keep them warm. But my chickens were so scared of it that they roosted outside in the 4 degree weather. So instead of the 250 watt bulb we had originally put in, we decided to go with a 75 watt heat lamp. Well, the Leghorns were fine with it, but not the White Rocks. They were having none of

it. So, in all fairness, we took it out and they all roosted in the house that night. So, stupid or smart?

I went on the Web looking at chicken rumors, myths and facts. This is what they had to say: There are some stupid chickens. And there are some really stupid chickens. But not all chickens are stupid. Similar to how wild sheep are much more intelligent than domesticated sheep, the more wild the chicken breeds are, the more intelligent the chickens typically are. Nature tends to weed out stupidity. Any animal that is not intelligent enough to survive gets eaten, can't find enough to eat or dies some other way. The less intelligent or weaker of a species don't get a chance to reproduce and pass on their genes to offspring. That's what happens in nature. But when we step in, things change. Instead of them having to fight for survival, we protect the animals, and select not the most intelligent or best animals to mate, but instead the best egg-laying or meat producing. Which makes sense to me.

So now let's talk about the things you can do during the cold weather to help your chickens. First, let's discuss the availability of water. Chickens need fresh water daily-- not a frozen block of ice found in the morning when you check the flock. So this is what I have seen work. Instead of buying a \$45 heater to go under your water container, put a submersible fish tank heater in it. This will help keep it from freezing. Just make sure not to let the water tank get empty. You can spend anywhere from \$10 to \$30 on a heater. I picked one up at Creatures pet store for around \$10. Make sure you follow the directions on the heater. One time, I turned on a heater and then put it in the water. BIG mistake! It broke the minute it hit the water. Luckily no one was hurt-- not even the fish in the aquarium.

OK, now let's discuss frostbite. Roosters and hens with larger combs/wattles are more prone to frostbite. Make sure your hen house has good air exchange, making sure damp air is not trapped. I also read that you can use Vaseline on the comb/wattles to help prevent frostbite in the colder months. But I also read that it is not advisable to use after frostbite has occurred.

Another thing to consider is egg production. Putting a light up to extend daylight hours helps the hens to keep producing, and putting your light on a timer helps keep constant daylight hours for your hens. Using a timer will also help you-- this way you aren't going out to turn it on or off, making your chicken experience more enjoyable.

I guess the moral here is-- it doesn't matter if your chickens are smart or stupid, as long as you're smart about caring for them.

Hope you had a very Merry Christmas and a safe and happy New Year.

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