

Planting an early garden can prove to be a gamble

Planting an early garden can mean double yields or double trouble.

When the occasional cold snap wipes out young transplants and seedlings, it also wipes out hope of a production headstart for home-grown vegetables.

When the University of New Hampshire looked at ways to help their commercial growers in a short season, cool climate, one thing became clear. Traditional methods of protection had a major disadvantage, all had high maintenance requirements. An "ideal" system would provide a safe environment for plants, with a minimum of work on the grower's part.

The commercial system they devised did more than protect. It substantially increased yields. Based on their conclusive research, Carefree Garden Products of West Chicago, Ill., developed the same kind of system for home gardens. New for 1981 is the first high yielding, total environment system for starting plants ahead of safe gardening dates. The Great Vegetable Cover-Up comes equipped to protect 16 feet of garden row within its mini-greenhouse environment.

Clear plastic has long been used to warm air temperatures. However, warm air without ventilation can overheat and kill plants on sunny days. The Great Vegetable Cover-Up solves this problem with clear vented plastic, allowing air circulation for low maintenance protection. Sturdy wire

hoops support the vented structure.

Warming soils is accomplished by the addition of black plastic. Black plastic serves more than one function for its 16-foot row. It can be kept on all seasons to reduce watering requirements and keep weeds at bay. Hoops and clear plastic can be removed when warm weather is assured.

As soil and temperatures rise to safely enclose young transplants and seedlings, so does humidity. This greenhouse effect provides that necessary additional feature to give plants weeks of extra growing time. Yields can be expected one to three weeks ahead of traditionally planted gardens.

Warm-loving vegetables such as tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, squash and cucumbers thrive, and substantially increase their yields with this protective system. Use of a mini environment may be the only way to successfully grow melons, which produce few fruit under cool, short season conditions. Research gains for melon crops jumped 105 percent with Great Vegetable Cover-Up protection.

Preliminary estimates indicate a banner year for vegetable gardens. Droughts and southern frosts are already taking their toll in produce prices at the grocery store. Look for the Great Vegetable Cover-Up at hardware stores and garden centers across the country this spring. The secure, high production garden may be one sure answer to cutting food bills, as well as gardening success.

Hot weather conditions can kill trees and shrubs

Summer weather is usually hot and dry in East County. These hot weather conditions take their toll on trees and shrubs each year.

The newly established plantings suffer the most — from very little or no growth at best to death of the tree or shrub at worst.

This results in loss of beauty, money and time. The loss of time may be the most critical especially if a tree is involved.

Quite often plants are lost due to lack of water even though the gardener is convinced that sufficient water has been applied. Lack of water is a function of several factors — soil percolation, water penetration, evaporation and water retention to name a few.

The use of bark can materially increase the survival rate of your plantings.

Start by mixing a fine grade bark with the backfill when planting trees and shrubs. The bark provides long lasting organic matter which improves the water penetration and

water holding capacity of the soil. It increases the soil air space and the nutrient holding ability which increases the efficiency of water use by the plants.

After planting, mulch your plants with a bark mulch, 4 to 6 inches deep. This affects usable water in many ways. A bark mulch prevents the top of the soil from packing and sealing off, thus allowing more water to soak in. It reduces evaporation thus improving water retention.

It prevents growth of weeds and grass thus preserving water for use by the tree or shrub.

It insulates the soil resulting in lower soil temperatures which aids root growth for better utilization of available water.

Most movement of water in a soil is vertical. There is very little horizontal movement of water in the soil, thus roots have to grow to new soil areas in order to tap additional water.

Blueberries serve a dual purpose

Blueberry bushes can serve a dual purpose in the home landscape. Besides producing tasty, bright blueberries, the bushes make excellent ornamental shrubs.

"Blueberries have attractive flowers in the spring and finish the season with a spectacular display of autumn foliage," notes Ray McNeilan, Oregon State University Extension home gardening agent.

Blueberry bushes will grow well in nearly any part of the yard where a four to five foot ornamental shrub is desired. They are similar in growth habit and culture to rhododendrons and azaleas. They are shallow-rooted, prefer acid soils (pH 4.5),

and can't withstand drought conditions.

Blueberries grow best when mulched to control weeds and conserve water. Three or four blueberry plants usually produce enough blueberries for most families.

Young plants usually need several years of growth to reach productive age and size.

Here are some varieties for Oregon gardeners, listed in order of ripening with the earliest ones first: Earliblue, Collins, Bluejay, Berkely, Atlantic, Ivanhoe, Bluecrop, Herbert, Jersey, Coville and Dixie.

Blueberry bushes should be planted at least four feet apart to allow for normal growth and air circulation.

Set them at the same depth as grown in the nursery.

Before planting, apply one pint of 10-10-10 fertilizer per 100 square feet of area to be planted. To ensure adequate drainage, plant them in a mixture of about one-third peat moss and two-thirds soil. Mulch the plants with two inches of barkdust or sawdust and gradually increase the depth of the mulch to six inches over a period of two years.

Six weeks after the plants are set, sprinkle a small handful of ammonium sulfate on a wide bank around the new plants and water it into the soil. After that, a yearly application of ammonium sulfate will take care of most of the blueberry plant's nutrient needs.

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Don't wait for Arbor Day to plant a tree

Don't wait until Arbor Day to plant a tree. Do something nice for your yard and yourself today.

We were never meant to live in a world removed from all that is green and growing. Our world needs plant life and the balance of nature it provides.

According to the American Association of Nurserymen, it is up to each of us to take the steps necessary to preserve that balance.

The AAN suggests several ways in which you can create a more livable environment and save money as well.

— Plant trees in the yard, placing them to shade your house in summer, shield it from cold winds in winter.

— Use hedges as outdoor walls to provide privacy and buffer sound. Leaves from trees, hedges and other green plants filter dust and other pollutants, thus helping to refresh and cleanse the air in your outdoor den.

— Plant shrubs, vines and ground covers to stabilize and enrich the soil while adding

natural beauty to your yard.

— Stretch your food budget by creating a small vegetable garden or by planting trees and shrubs that produce tasty fruits, nuts and berries.

— Use the green, growing gifts of nature to screen some of your outdoor living areas from the rest of the world, and to conceal such secrets as trash can storage, air-conditioning units, mulch piles, etc.

These days when traveling away from home for good times becomes more and more costly and difficult, you can discover the pleasures of all you can do to make growing things happen in your own backyard.

Your nursery garden center or landscape professional can advise you or perform any part of the yard beautifying process you want.

But don't wait for Arbor Day to think about adding living plants to your life. Do something nice for yourself and your corner of the world today. It's another expression of Green Survival.



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