



Choosing outdoor plants that will survive local conditions

Temperature variations can even be seen within a single property

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Julia Justice wants her customers to be successful gardeners.

That's why she takes the extra steps to ensure her flowers, shrubs and grasses are adapted to the Grant County climate before they're sold.

"I've had customers come in and point to a shrub and say they want it," she said, "but it just came in by truck, so I tell them no, let me show you one in back."

Justice's Better Blooms & Gardens nursery on Highway 26 west of Prairie City is a complex of greenhouses, starting sheds, rock gardens decorated with antique bikes and large piles of potting soil and mulch.

She started her business 20 years ago. The old wooden building was the shop for the Carpenter & Lee Lumber Co. mill, which once occupied the site.

The John Day Valley — from Prairie City to Dayville south to Seneca and north to Long Creek and Monument



Judy Jarnes selects flowering plants in the floral display greenhouse at the Better Blooms & Gardens nursery in Prairie City.

— generally sees a shorter growing season. Typically homes see frosts until the first of June, with frosts sometimes sneaking around in August, but micro-climates also exist — from city to city and even within each city.

"Nighttime temperatures are cooler in Prairie City than in Mt. Vernon," Justice said. "Seneca will see frost every day of the year."

Homes that are closer to rivers or on slopes above the valley floor will see cooler temperatures.

"The John Day Community Garden sees cooler temperatures because it's down near the John Day River," she said.

Temperature variations even can be seen within the boundaries of a property.

"You need to understand your yard layout," she said.

Some places get direct sunlight, and others get filtered sunlight, Justice said. Homeowners should wake up at 5:30 a.m. and look for the frost streaks around their property to understand where the warm and cold

places are.

Tricks to extend the growing season include starting plants indoors or inside greenhouses, planting in old tires filled with potting soil or using water-filled plastic protective barriers such as Walls of Water.

Cooler temperatures are not the only hazards facing Grant County landscapers.

"Deer are a huge issue," Justice said.

A wide variety of deer-resistant plants are available, including elderberries, barberry and potentilla shrubs,



The propagation greenhouse at the Better Blooms & Gardens nursery in Prairie City.



Ornamental trees hardened for local conditions at the Better Blooms & Gardens nursery in Prairie City.

perennials such as lavender, Russian sage, catmint and ornamental grasses such as blue oat grass and Karl Foerster feather needle grass.

Justice uses drip irrigation for her nursery and rec-

ommends similar systems for her customers.

"There are simple systems available," she said. "They save water — you don't waste water on weeds."

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