

Climate change could shift plant hardiness zone in parts of Oregon

BY KYM POKORNY

Oregon State University

You visit the nursery, pick out a primo plant, come home, put it in the ground and wait for it to become a beautiful tree, shrub or perennial. Then spring arrives and it's dead or floundering.

What happened?

In some cases, cold temperatures are the culprit. It's a matter of right plant, right place, said Nicole Sanchez, Oregon State University Extension horticulturist.

Plants survive to a certain low temperature in their native habitat. You need to know about hardiness zones to be assured your plants will avoid cold-related death. Plants bought at nurseries should have the hardiness zone on the label.

Nearly all of Warrenton and Hammond is in hardiness zone 9, meaning temperatures aren't expected to fall below 20 to 25 degrees in the winter.

Some parts of Astoria and areas east of Highway 101 in the Gearhart area get just a bit



Scotch broom, an invasive plant in Oregon, proliferates quickly in zones 8 and 9, the predominant zones in Clatsop County.

colder -- as low as 10 to 15 degrees in the winter -- and fall into hardiness zone 8.

The zones are determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, working with Oregon State University's PRISM Climate Group and based on a 30-year period of averaged minimum low temperatures.

The latest hardiness map came out in 2012 and is from data collected from 1976 to 2005. Zones are ranked from

1 (-60 degrees) to 13 (70 degrees), though the extremes are rare.

The map doesn't reflect the coldest it has ever been or ever will be at a specific location, but simply the average lowest winter temperature for the location over a specified time.

But with climate change, the zones are shifting, Sanchez said.

For instance, the 2012 map zones changed in many areas

by 5 degrees -- or a half-zone warmer -- than the previous map. Already, there's talk of the Portland area moving from zone 8b to 9a, which has a low of 20-25 degrees.

"We won't know the specifics about zones changing until we have another 30 years of data to go on, but that doesn't mean we wait until 2035," Sanchez said. "They may use an earlier time period. Then we can look and see if there are long-term changes that would be reflected in new zones for particular areas. So, we wait and see."

"I always hear people say, 'This is the warmest spring ever' or 'I've never seen a summer so hot.' Usually, they're wrong. Weather is a short-term phenomenon and climate is a long-term pattern."

The zones are a guide, as nature can throw a curve ball; nothing is guaranteed.

For now, gardeners should base their plant choices on their current zone. Although what happens in your garden could very well be different than your neighbor because of what are called microclimates. A microclimate can have an

effect similar to moving to a colder or warmer zone.

They can be influenced by structures, such as the orientation of your house to the sun. South will be warmer than north, west warmer than east.

Other microclimates may be related to slope: cold air pools at the bottom and the high points are cold, too, because of wind and exposure. So, the middle of a slope is the sweet spot for borderline hardy plants. Microclimates can be created with rock walls and mulches, buildings and fences, and windbreaks created with plants.

"I'm in zone 6," Sanchez said. "If I wanted to plant dahlias, which are zone 7 plants, I'd plant them on the south side with a gravel mulch that would store heat."

Zones are essential when choosing a plant. To be successful, plants must fit into your zone, which helps with selection. If you have five plants you like and only two are in your zone, it narrows down your selection. You can push the envelope; just be prepared to lose plants periodically.

CMH welcomes two new doctors to the staff

Columbia Memorial Hospital has two new providers, a hospitalist and a part-time Emergency Department provider.

Dr. Kenneth Starks began working last week. He most recently worked for Foundation Health Partners in Fairbanks, Alaska. There, he worked as a hospitalist, intensive care specialist and medical director for a hospital group.

Starks also has had his own practice and served as medical director for Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, Foundation Health Partners and Northern Hospitalist Associates.

Starks is board-certified in internal medicine and is a member of the American College of Physicians and Society of Critical Care.

Dr. Rushabh Shah also began working last week in the Emergency Department.

Shah is a full-time provider at Adventist Health in Portland and will cover shifts as needed through CMH's partnership with Oregon Health & Science University.

Prior to moving to Oregon, Shah worked as chief resident of emergency medicine and was a clinical assistant in-



Shah



Starks

structor at Kings County Hospital Center. He completed a residency at State University of New York Downstate Health Sciences University in Brooklyn, New York.

Shah is a member of the American College of Emergency Physicians, the Council of Emergency Medicine Residency Directors and the Emergency Medicine Residents' Association.

His work has been published in The Journal of Emergency Medicine, the American Journal of Emergency Medicine and the Journal of NeuroVirology.

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