



Great Garden Tool -- Floating Row Cover

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Hands down, one of the best gardening aids is a floating row cover.

What is a floating row cover? It is a light, non-woven cloth, usually made of polypropylene or polyester. Unlike plastic, it's permeable so air and water (as in rainfall) can get in. Row covers come in varying widths, weights, and light transmittance. Look for one that allows 85 percent light transmittance as it will be the most versatile; strong enough to last more than a season but light enough to be used all season long for vegetables like lettuce. The lightest version can just be draped over a planting bed and anchored with "U" shaped landscape pins. Heavier covers work best with a structure to lean on. The very heaviest weights provide protection for shrubs or citrus that might be damaged by frost.

Where do you find row covers? They are often carried at local nurseries or online at garden and nursery supply sites. Just google "floating row cover." They come in pre-cut panels or by the yard on a roll.

Use row covers to warm the soil and aid in germination, provide frost and wind protection, and protection against small and large pests -- think little bugs and birds. Yes! Birds often devour young seedlings -- so this is double protection from the elements and predators. Row covers also contribute to water conservation by reducing evaporation. Using them late in the season, they provide shade for young seedlings, making row covers an excellent season extender.

How are they used? After seeding a planting bed, just drape the row cover over the bed. Although a row cover may be thin, it will provide some warmth and help the seedlings get started. If you are transplanting seedlings, give them an extra boost by putting them under a row cover with a structure. This can be as simple as bending 8 to 10 foot lengths of 9-gauge wire into hoops to lay a lightweight cover over the hoops. A sturdier method is to build a frame out of PVC. Take 6 foot lengths of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch PVC, bend them into hoops and sink them into your bed at three foot intervals. To keep the hoops upright, thread a three way $\frac{3}{4}$ inch PVC slip fitting into each of the end hoops before sinking them into the ground. Slip four-way $\frac{3}{4}$ inch slip fittings

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onto the interior hoops before sinking them into the ground. Then cut pieces of ¾ inch PVC pipe to connect the fittings on each hoop, positioning the fittings at the top of each hoop. You can see both of these techniques at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden at Folsom Lake College El Dorado Center on 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville. The demonstration garden opens to the public again on April 1, 2016.

A word of caution: it is not always wise to leave your crops unattended under the row cover. Plan to inspect them early and often, lest you find an errant pest that crept in on a transplant, found protection under the cover and feasted on your seedlings. Nevertheless, row covers are a wonderful gardening tool to get seedlings and transplants started in your garden and extend the growing season in spring and fall.

Mark your calendar! The annual Master Gardener Plant Sale will be Saturday, April 23, 2016 in the Sherwood Demonstration Garden. Plants of all types, from veggies to perennials, will be available at great prices.

There are two Master Gardener classes this Saturday, March 5th. Join Master Gardeners Gail Fulbeck and Debbie Hillel, first in the classroom and later in the adjacent Sherwood Demonstration Garden to learn about selection and germination of seeds, seed starting media, planting containers, growing out, hardening off and transplanting seedlings, and common reasons for germination and seedling failure. Participants will plant containers with seeds to take home for their summer gardens; seeds and containers will be provided, bring clean gloves to participate. The free, three-hour class starts at 9:00 a.m at Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville.

A new, free Master Gardener Kid's class, "Grow n' Show Your Plants at the El Dorado Fair," is for children 5-12 years old to learn about growing plants, and then be encouraged to demonstrate their new skills by entering their plants in peer competition at the upcoming county fair. The plants, soil and pots will be provided and kids can their work home to foster for entry in the June 2016 fair. Class is from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. in the El Dorado County Fairgrounds Floriculture Building, free parking is available immediately outside the building. Interested students are encouraged to preregister online at:

http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/El_Dorado_County_Fair/ or by calling the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County office at 530-621-5512.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:(530)621-5512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmg>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.