

Know when to bring your veggies outside

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, March 19, 2019

Q. I'm new to the area, enjoy gardening and would like to know when it is safe to plant vegetables outside. Is there a typical last frost date for Redding?

A. The last frost date for our area is usually around April 15. However, the date of the last hard frost can vary quite a bit from the first part of April to the first part of May. Also keep in mind low-lying areas are prone to earlier and later frosts than the hills around Redding. For example, on average, the first fall freeze at Redding Fire Station No.4 on South Bonneyview Road is around Nov. 7, while the first freeze for the Redding Fire Station at Placer and Buenaventura is Nov. 30. The last frost for Shasta Dam is usually around April 16, but for the Redding airport it's April 28. The last and first frost dates average a 30-percent probability and are calculated using 1981-2010 climate normals.

Most of the long-time gardeners in our area say you should look to see if there's snow on Shasta Bally. There will be a late frost if there's still snow on the mountain. But if the snow melted there's a very low chance of a killing frost. In the 20 years I've lived here, this rule has held true.



March is the time to really get to work for gardening preparations. (Photo: Submitted)

If you're just itching to get your garden planted, you can always plant your tomatoes and other summer vegetable plants, then protect them from frosts by covering them with a blanket, tarp or row cover. Don't use plastic for frost protection; it does not have enough insulating properties. This early planting plan does require you to pay attention to the weather and cover plants when frost is in the forecast. I live in one of the cold spots in Redding,

so I always cover my plants if the weather forecast says nighttime lows will go below 38 degrees.

To work well, the frost protection covering can't be touching the plants. Use PVC pipe to build a frame.

Make sure to remove the covering during the day. If you're just planting a few vegetables, one-gallon milk jugs with the bottom cut out work well for protecting plants on cold nights and don't have to be removed during the day unless the days get hot.

Don't plant too early. It's best to wait until soil temperatures warm to at least 65 degrees before planting summer vegetables. If planted sooner, plants will be stressed, and growth can be stunted with colder soil temperatures. Check your current soil temperature at Greencast Online:

<http://www.greencastonline.com/tools/soil-temperature>.

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.