



Living in the foothills...

Advice from Master Gardeners, Ray and Ruth Conner, Oakhurst, CA

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Tomatoes in Foothill Gardens

Tomatoes are popular to grow in family gardens. It is possible to grow them in the foothills; as well. We don't start the plants from seed in the ground, as our summers are too short. We are usually blessed with 100 days of summer from the first of June to the first of September. In the foothills, the last freeze or snow can occur even into the first days of June.

Two ways of dealing with late, cold weather are to either raising the plants in the house until the threat of frost has passed or use walls of water. We have found the latter suggestion works great. Walls of water are made of vinyl formed into a circle and consist of tubes placed side by side with open tops. The wall is placed around a plant and the tubes are filled with water. Water requires energy (heat) to change from the liquid state to ice so as the air cools to freezing, the water in the tubes cools as well, and when the water freezes, it emits heat, keeping the tomato warm. This technique works for any vegetable plant placed in the ground before the danger of a freeze has passed. The wall can be left around the plant to protect it from the ground squirrels or rabbits.

The part of the tomato that grows out of the cone will be susceptible to frost, but it will recover. Covering the tomato with row cover in the fall will help protect it from a freeze way into October. The row cover should not touch the plant and needs a frame to hold it off of the plant.

Besides the frost, in the foothills we have ground squirrels, gophers, and rabbits. To protect the plants, one can put the plant in a barrel or a bed with a wire barrier at the base.

Keeping all of these things in mind and using the walls of water will help you enjoy a wonderful tomato every summer.

