



Advice to Grow by...Ask Us! Master Gardener Program

University of California Cooperative Extension 



March 2024

Is March the month when you get a bit tired of cold weather? I am ready to get going on my garden and it is difficult to be patient! This month I plan to install a set of heat cables in a cold frame I have been using, unheated, for the past three years. Without heat, the cold frame has successfully grown chard and some parsley over the winter, but not much else. I plan to document my upgrades and share with you the results. I am hopeful the system will allow me to use the cold frame year round to grow more variety of crops and maybe jumpstart my summer veggie and flower seedlings.

This month, we bring some great stories to you; all about onions, the new USDA zones, and recommendations on books to inspire your children to enjoy gardening. Take a look at the calendar for upcoming events here in the Tahoe basin and in adjoining counties.

This late March photo is from a visit to the Atlanta Botanical Garden in Piedmont Park, an attraction not to be missed if you plan to visit "the A."

Your feedback is important to us. Please contact [me](#) with suggestions and comments.

Sandy Gainza
UCCE Master Gardener Volunteer, Newsletter Editor



Planning on growing food this year? Save These Dates!

2024 Grow Your Own Garden Festivals!

Friday, May 31 in Tahoe City

Saturday, June 1 in Truckee

Saturday, June 8 in South Lake Tahoe

[For details, please click here!](#)

Upcoming Events

Slow Food Lake Tahoe Hosts a

A FREE family-friendly afternoon celebrating the upcoming garden season with veggie seed giveaways, kids' activities, and sweet songs from Tahoe Truckee School of Music.

[More Information Here!](#)

- **[Click here to discover UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County events.](#)**
- **[This link will take you to the complete list of UCCE Central Sierra events.](#)**
- **[Click here to discover UCCE Master Gardener of Placer County events](#)**
- **[Click here to discover UCCE Master Food Preserver of Central Sierra events.](#)**
- **[Click here to see a list of University of Nevada Extension events.](#)**



Want to grow onions this year?

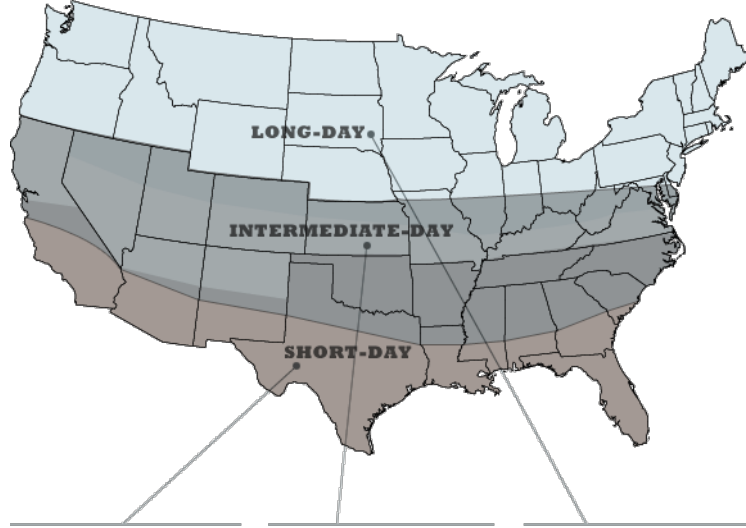
Master gardener Dave Long has information about onions which might help you select which will work for you plan.

From Dave: Over the last several years the Master Gardeners of Lake Tahoe have hosted workshops on growing onions. Generally speaking, our short growing season and cool temperatures mean that Tahoe grown onions are small sized. Grow Your Own has tried

many varieties over the years in order to find the best selections for Tahoe Basin gardeners. The 2024 GYO Garden festivals will present a workshop featuring two onion varieties, along with leeks.

Onions are biennial which means that the first year is all about forming a bulb. The second year the plant forms flowers and sets seed. Harvest onion bulbs at the end of the first year's growth, before freezing night temperatures occur. Freezing temperatures can create problems during planting as well. If there are several freezing nights before transplanted onion "starts" (seedling onions) become established, then the onion will halt bulb formation and bolt. Once the flowering starts, there is no further bulb growth. Climate and soil conditions greatly affect the flavors of the onion. Much like wine, there is something special about the terroir or place where onions are grown.

[Read on for Dave's Tales of Historic Onion Varieties](#)



Which onion is best?

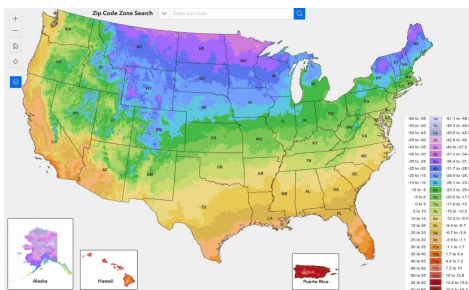
Onions are categorized in a couple of ways. Sweet onions like the Vidalia, grown in Georgia or the Sweetie Sweet onion grown down the road in Yerington, Nevada, are grown for their sweet flavor. Alternatively, there are onion varieties known as storage onions. Storage type onions have more “onion bite” in their taste than sweet onions. Storage onions store better, while sweet onions have a higher moisture content, generally more sugars, and less sulfur in the bulb. They do not keep as long as storage onions. Another way to categorize onions is by growing habit. The amount of day length needed by the plant to start bulb formation determines which onions grow best at which latitudes. Long day onions need 14-16 hours (or more) of daylight for maximum bulb formation. Short day onions need 10-12 hours. Of course, there are intermediate, or day neutral varieties that split the difference. The line of latitude that separates long and short day varieties runs near Lake Tahoe, making our area less than ideal for either long or short day varieties. GYO has tried both long and short day onions, and both produced smaller bulbs than expected.



Need help with IPM?

Get customized monthly emails

about how to use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in your garden. **Subscribe** and enter the region you garden in. Tahoe gardeners use "Central Sierra" to get tips relevant to our climates.



Updated USDA Plant Hardiness Map: What Gardeners Need to Know

By Cindy Wise, UCCE Master Gardener

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) periodically updates its Plant Hardiness Zone Map (PHZM) to reflect shifts in climate patterns and provide gardeners and growers with the most accurate information for successful

plant selection and cultivation. Plant hardiness zones delineate geographic regions based on average annual minimum temperatures, helping gardeners determine which plants are most likely to thrive in their specific climate. The zones range from 1 (coldest) to 13 (warmest), with each zone representing a 10°F difference in average minimum temperature.

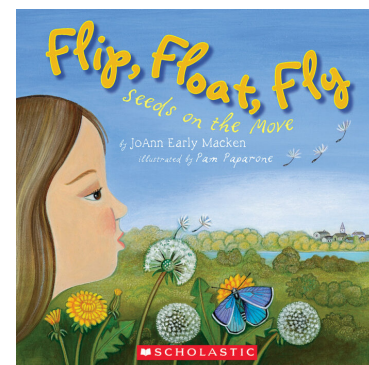
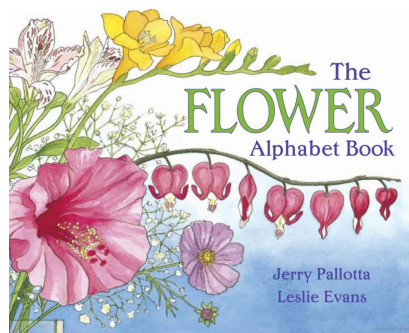
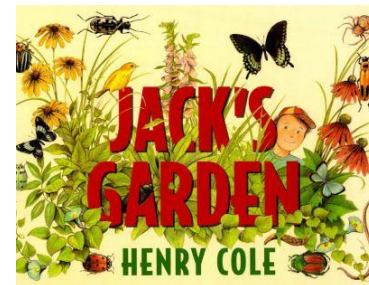
The USDA just updated its PHZM for the first time since 2012. The update of the PHZM incorporates data from newer weather stations, improved modeling techniques, and more recent climate data. These enhancements provide a more accurate and detailed portrayal of temperature variations across the United States. One notable change in the updated map is the inclusion of more "half-zones," which denote areas that experience temperatures intermediate between adjacent full zones. For example, Zone 7's freezing range is between 0 and 10 degrees. In Zone 7a, average freezing temperatures hit between 0 to 5 degrees; 7b's range is between 5 and 10 degrees. These half-zones offer gardeners a better understanding of microclimates within their region, allowing for more precise plant selection.

Staying abreast of these changes is crucial for adapting gardening practices to evolving climate conditions. With more accurate zone delineations, gardeners can confidently select plants that are better suited to their local climate, increasing the likelihood of successful growth. By understanding the nuances of microclimates within their zone, gardeners can strategically place plants to optimize growing conditions and mitigate potential frost or heat damage. The updated map serves as a reminder of the impact of climate change on gardening practices. According to the updated map, about half of the United States has shifted to a new hardiness zone. As temperatures shift over time, gardeners may need to reassess traditional planting strategies and explore new techniques to adapt to changing conditions.

The PHZM is available online [here](#). It is easy to use, interactive and free. By typing in a zip code, the user will get a zoomed in, color-coded view showing what the zone was in 2012 and what it is now. The map also includes a link on how to use the map and explains the other factors besides temperature that can affect plants such as light, soil, moisture, and humidity. The updated USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map is a valuable tool for gardeners seeking to cultivate thriving and resilient gardens in a changing climate.

Kids Corner: Try Gardening Books!

Kristianne Hanneman, Master Gardener class of 2024 has compiled a great list of books for children about growing food and gardening. Check out Kristianne's recommendations [here](#).



Master Gardener Annie Christy shares her March to do list:

Start vegetable seeds indoors. More information from Utah State University [here](#).

Walk around your garden and take inventory – is anything missing? Add a few shrubs to your wishlist if your garden lacks color or structure. Please keep in mind maintaining defensible space when selecting additions to your garden. [Here](#) is more information on making fire wise landscaping choices.

Order plants now to receive them in spring.

Keep container plants watered as they dry out more quickly than plants in the ground.

Clean and disinfect all unused containers and all tools to prevent the spread of disease to future plants. Check [this page](#) from the Iowa State Extension for detailed instructions.

1.

UCCE Master Gardeners of Lake Tahoe
530-314-8383
laketahoemg@ucanr.edu
<https://ucanr.edu/sites/mglaketahoe/>

Connect with us



UC Cooperative Extension Central Sierra | 311 Fair Lane, Placerville, CA 95667

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