

Quick Tips For Year-Round Gardening Mini Course

Hey guys, I'm Sheri Ann Richerson and I'm the author of several books, including The Complete Idiots Guide to Year-Round Gardening and the Complete Idiots Guide to Seed Saving Starting.

You can also find me online on a number of websites, including exoticgardening.com and experimentalhomesteader.com.

So today we are going to talk about year-round gardening and we're going to talk about how to garden outdoors year round, even in a cold climate using protective covers or garden structures.

We're going to talk about how to protect your cool weather crops and heat loving crops depending on the season.

So you can use these techniques summer or winter.

And we're all going to also going to talk about how to keep overwintered plants producing fresh food all winter long, even in a cold climate.

So a lot of times people go wrong because they don't get their plants started early enough in the season so that they are mature if they are trying to grow in the fall or early spring into, you know, the, the cold months.

Or they try to grow cool crops like lettuce in the summer when those tend to bolt if you're not doing something to protect them and help to keep them cool.

So this is kind of a problem.

Another thing that people tend to do is overcomplicate it while you do need row cover, and I suggest six mil. plastic if you're not using anything else.

A lot of people feel like, oh, it's so cold, I have to put heat and have heated greenhouse, or you know, there's just no way that row cover and plastic are going protect my plants.

And they just tend to overthink it. When as long as you're choosing the right plants and you're giving

adequate protection, those plants are going to be just fine.

Even in the cold winter, even when it's freezing outside and there's snow on the ground.

First of all, a cold frame or a protective garden structure can be made out of anything.

You can use bales of straw and an old window.

If you don't have an old window, you could use six mil. plastic and secure it to the top of those bales of straw or better yet to the ground because the key is to keep the heat inside of your structure and not let it escape.

This is why it's so important to have your structure properly secured to the ground, so the wind or wild animals, or even domesticated animals for that matter, can't move that plastic and get it up and allow the cold air to go inside.

The fastest way to lose your crops is to not keep that warm air in and let the cold outside air come in.

You can go fancy, you can build a cold frame, you can buy a tunnel house.

You can even buy small cold frame if that's what you want to do, but like I said, it does not have to be a fancy structure.

We have used one by twos and six mil. plastic with the frost cover inside, and it has worked just fine.

It hasn't looked pretty, but it's worked, and that's the key here. During the wintertime when you need to protect your cool crops, you're trying to keep all of that heat in.

If you want to put a little bit of mulch over the roots or compost that's a really good idea because you wanna protect those roots and try to keep them warm, as well as the foliage of the plants.

And what you don't want to do is allow the plastic or the frost cover to touch any parts of those plants because those things are going to get cold and there's nothing you can do about that.

It is okay for the plastic or the frost cover to get cold.

You just don't want that touching your plants because if it's touching your plants, it's going to transfer that cold into the plant's foliage and it's going to kill off that plant.

So that's why this is so important. During the summer , you don't have to be careful about the materials touching the plants necessary, although I do suggest that you elevate the materials so they don't touch your plants.

But if they touch your plants during the summer, it's not such a big deal except maybe the plastic, the plastic could transfer the sun's heat and cause the plant to overheat.

So you do have to be really careful and ideally you wouldn't even be using plastic during the summer unless you're growing in a tunnel house.

Or inside of some kind of garden structure and then you really need to have some kind of airflow because those structures can get over a hundred degrees in the summertime and that's going to cook your plants.

So how do you keep these plants cool?

Whether you're growing in the garden or in a garden structure, one thing you can do is to provide some type of shade.

You could grow your cool weather crops, like your lettuce, your spinach, those kind of things under a

shade tree.

You could create a raised bed or use a container and put them under a shade tree so they have shade during the hottest part of the day.

Now you want to make sure that they do get some sun.

You know you don't want dark, dark shade because they won't grow right if they're in dark shade. So something that is movable or plant someplace that has morning sun, and afternoon shade.

That would be an ideal location for those cool weather crops during the summer.

You also want to use compost or some kind of mulch.

Again, mulch the roots three inches, keep the mulch away from the stems, but use three inches of compost or mulch around the roots.

That's going to really help to keep that soil underneath cool and moist.

You want to make sure the plants get adequate water.

You don't want the plants swimming in water, but you want the soil to stay moist because that soil moisture is going to keep the temperature down around the roots.

And that's why this is so important.

Some people will use shade cloth and create a structure up above the plants or create something that will throw shade down onto those cool weather crops so that they can grow them all summer.

Again, depending on your climate, you need to try different techniques and see what works. You can use frost cover during the summer if you want.

I do suggest venting it at least, I mean, it is sort of a see through flowing type of material that really should not hold the heat in, but you're gonna want some pollinators in there depending on what you're growing.

Even if you're growing tomatoes, which we know can self-pollinate, you're still going to want to let some pollinators in from time to time.

But one of the things that the frost cover or row cover as it's called can do in the summer for you is

if you're having problems with bean beetles or other kind of pests, like Japanese beetles, anything that's eating your plants, using this is going to put a barrier between your plants and them. And so when they land, they're just going to land on that cover and they're not going to be able to get inside to your plants under most circumstances.

I mean, the material could tear, and the animal could come along and create an opening, but under most circumstances, if you have that material secured to the ground, you're going to be good to go.

Those pests are not going to be able to bother your plants, which is a great method of organic pest control.

But remember, at some point if your plants need pollinated, you're going to have to open that up and allow the pollination, and then you could recover your plants at night if you wanted to.

So how do you keep over winter plants producing fresh food all winter long, because that's our goal, right?

To grow as much of our own food as we can.

This is really simple.

I have a tunnel house now, but you can use a cold frame to do this.

You just need to make sure that whatever structure you use is tall enough and big enough to allow you to put your plants and that frost cover inside.

I have a fancy hoops now that you can buy online.

They're just metal hoops that are flexible and bendable.

I have used plastic conduit in the past to create the hoops with.

You can use anything that you have, even tomato cages.

Those are great if you're growing lower crops like lettuce or charred.

You just want to be able to put that frost or row cover over your plants and make sure it's not touching it.

And then you need at least one layer of six mil. plastic on top of that.

Make sure that plastic is an inch or two away from that frost cover. because you don't want it touching, and you want that airspace because that's where your heat is going to gather, and that's what's going to keep the plants inside alive.

Now, you don't want to open your structure in the morning on cold days because your plants are going to be frozen.

They're going to look like they're dead, and you're going to let all that cold air in.

So this is another technique that you have to think about is, you know, are you going to have time between say, one o'clock in the afternoon and three o'clock in the afternoon to go out, to open up that structure to harvest your plants and to get it covered up very quickly before that cold air gets in.

This is why a walk-in structure, if you can get one, is really nice.

But again, a cold frame will do the job.

You've just got to be really quick about it.

So here are the specific action steps to get your year-round garden going, and you can start right

now this spring using these action steps to get a headstart on your spring and summer garden, and then you can use them again in the fall to extend that garden into the winter and early spring season.

So first of all, you need to choose a plant protection method.

Are you going to go with a cold frame?

Are you going to go with a tunnel house?

Are you going to use an unheated greenhouse?

Because a tunnel house and an unheated greenhouse are a little bit different type of structures. Are you going to build something? Whatever type of structure you're going to use, that's the first thing you need to do, is choose what type of structure you're going to have.

You're going to need some six mil. plastic and you're going to need some frost or row cover.

You can buy that online, and you're going to need to make sure that you have enough of those materials to cover the structure that you're planning.

Because if you have to piece plastic together, which you really don't want to do, but sometimes you may have to, you're going to want to take the clear packing tape and you're going to want to tape it on both sides.

This way it's not just two pieces of plastic flopping in the wind, because it will tear if the plastic can flop and the wind can get up underneath of it.

It will tear.

This is why if you take your plastic and you take a stick or something and you put your plastic on it and you want to roll it under and then secure it to the ground.

If you don't have enough to roll under, just make sure that the edges of that plastic are held down really tight.

Whether you use bales of straw, pieces of wood, brick, rock, whatever you have on hand, make sure the wind can't get up underneath and grab that plastic because if it can, it will tear.

Next you need to choose the best seeds for the location and the season.

For example, there are types of lettuce and carrots and different types of vegetables that are bred for cool season growing.

They're going to do a lot better in the winter months, the fall, the early spring.

They're going to do better during those months than something that say is bred for the heat of summer.

That's not to say that crops that are bred for the heat of summer. won't survive through the winter. And that's not to say that you have to go out and buy specific seeds for fall or winter gardening, but that's to say if you want to have the best success, go ahead and buy those specialty seeds that are created for those cooler temperatures.

You're going to be glad you did. You want to start seeds at the right time and I suggest starting those seeds indoors if you're planning for early spring.

If you're planning for fall, go ahead and start those outdoors because you'd be starting those in July.

But for early spring or late winter, you want to start those indoors and then harden those off.

The reason for this is the heat is going to allow those crops to grow a little faster and a little bigger. And what you want for fall, winter, or early spring is mature size plants that you are planting. . You don't have to plant them as mature size plants, but they need to be mature size by the time that you're covering them up and getting them ready for that growing season.

The reason for this is those plants are not really going to grow during the colder seasons.

They're going to sit there in kind of a dormant state waiting for you to harvest them.

So if they're not a mature size, then they are going to sit in an immature size, and once the temperature warms, then they're going to start growing and they're going to want to bolt.

So size matters.

You want to cover your plants quickly anytime that you have to uncover them, and again, harvest in the afternoon on cold days. These are all really, really important techniques.

I know that some crops such as kale, Jerusalem artichokes, and Brussels sprouts taste a little bit better after they've had frost hit them.

So if you want to allow a light frost to hit some of those type of crops that do taste better after frost hits them, you could allow one or two light frost to hit those crops and then go ahead and use your plant protection methods and cover them over for the winter.

That way they're going to last a little bit longer than they would in the open garden, and you're gonna be able to harvest them a little bit longer.

And let's face it, harvesting fresh produce in the middle of winter is a great way to save money at the store, have more nutrients in your food, and get more out of your garden than you would if you just allow it to go dormant for the winter.

I hope you have enjoyed this little tutorial and I look forward to interacting with all of you.

Have a fantastic day and thanks so much for watching.