

# Gardens and Landscaping

**T**he Hood River Valley is a great place to grow a garden. Not only can gardens produce fresh food and improve the beauty of our homes, but they can provide a chance to relax and to reconnect with nature. Knowing a few facts about your new surroundings can further enhance your gardening experience.

## Climate

Like most of Oregon, Hood River has a winter rainfall climate. The months of November through March generally receive the most precipitation. Annual precipitation totals differ greatly from the west to east side of the valley and are also dependent on elevation. Average annual rainfall in the county is 35 inches.

The valley sometimes gets late hard freezes wreaking havoc on gardens and fruit trees alike. The average last frost in the lower valley is the first week of May. Towards Mt. Hood, the frost date will be later in May or early June. A rule of thumb is not to plant your garden until all of the snow melts off Mt. Defiance.

Winds are another common weather feature. Seedlings and even established plants can snap in gusts. Additionally, wind coupled with extreme temperatures can take a toll on plants. Plants transpire (lose water by evaporation) more under these conditions.

## Choosing a Garden Spot

Researching the needs of the plants you want to grow can save a lot of energy. Things to consider include hardiness zone (Hood River is generally considered Zone 6-7), frost, rainfall, soil tilth and sun exposure. Plants vary in their requirements for sunlight and choosing a location with enough sun may be one of the most important considerations you can make for the success of your garden.

## Soil

Soil is the foundation of a healthy garden. Soil tests can give you a baseline understanding of your soil chemistry, but it's the life in the soil that helps aeration and makes nutrients available to plants. You can improve your soil by reducing tillage and increasing organic matter. Compost and aged manure can be mixed into the soil to help feed your soil microbes. See the chapter entitled "Soils" for more information.

## Resources

Hood River Climate Data: (Select Area 6)

[www.ocs.oregonstate.edu](http://www.ocs.oregonstate.edu)

OSU Extension Service

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/gardening/>

## Water Conservation Tips

Water conservation saves time, money and energy, and can improve the health of your plants. Some water-wise gardening tips include:

- Group plants with similar water, soil and sun exposure needs.
- Select plants that are adapted to your site.
- Water in the early morning and avoid watering when the wind is blowing.
- Eliminate leaks inside and out.
- Keep irrigation water on target (off cement).
- Apply water to the plant root zone (top 12").
- Mulch to reduce evaporation.
- Consider planting drought-resistant varieties.
- Install an irrigation system that fits your needs.

*See the chapter entitled "Irrigation Water Management" for some more water conservation tips.*

## Pests

What may seem like pests are often beneficial. By working with wildlife rather than against it, unintended consequences can be avoided. For insect pests, try attracting predatory insects to your garden to keep the unwanted bugs in check. You can attract beneficial insects and pollinators by growing plants as nectar and pollen sources, creating alternative habitats, providing water sources and using selective insecticides rather than broad-spectrum ones. If you decide that treatment is necessary, choose the least toxic alternative for controlling the specific pest. Always follow the label when applying pesticides to avoid unintended consequences.



The OSU Extension Service Master Gardener Program in Hood River County ((541) 386-3343) conducts weekly plant clinics to help answer garden-related questions. They also offer yearly training on gardening this area.

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