

# General Gardening Conditions for Northern Idaho

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Compiled by Pat Baillie, Certified Idaho Master Gardener

*Our area may be called:*

- The Inland Northwest.....which includes Spokane
- or: The Idaho Panhandle.....which includes Sandpoint and Bonners Ferry
- or: Northern Idaho.....from St. Marie's to the Canadian border
- or: Kootenai County.....covering Coeur d'Alene, Rathdrum, Hayden, Post Falls, and Athol
- *The Coeur d'Alene Garden Club covers Kootenai County*

## **CLIMATE / WEATHER**

We have a Continental (Inland) climate, rather than a Coastal one.

## **TEMPERATURES**

This type of climate has more extremes between day and night time temperatures. Eg: in summer, 90°F in the day – 50°F at night. Temperatures below 50°F occur often during the summer for many areas (especially in the spring and early summer).

## **RAINFALL / SNOW**

The average precipitation is 26" per year (Spokane gets 16"), but this can vary between 42" (2012) and 15" (1929). Snowfall some years can be almost none (11" in 1933-34), but in 2007-08, it was 173" – that's 14' of snow!

Precipitation (rain and/or snow) is heaviest in Fall, Winter, and Spring. July and August are almost totally dry.

## **GROWING SEASON**

Thus, our growing season averages around 120 frost-free days (mid to late-May to mid-September), but in 2017, it was 180 days (early May to end of October).

## **LATITUDE**

We are positioned at about 49°N and the resulting hours of daylight for gardening in the summer stretch from 5:00 am to 9:00 pm. In winter, it is only light from 7:00 am to 4:00 pm. That's 16 hours of summer growing versus 9 hours (cloudy conditions) in winter.

Plants from frost-free climates and tropical latitudes – flowers, vegetables, or fruits – need to be started indoors, under grow lights, or bought as transplants from nurseries.

**As a consequence of these considerations:**

Check out the Growing Zone of your plant. Many horticulturists suggest we are in Zone 6, *but* given our occasional extreme temperatures, you are safer choosing a Zone 5 or Zone 4 plant. For long-living shrubs, trees and perennials, choose Zone 4 seedlings. You will always be safe choosing plants that fall below a 4.

**SOILS OF THE INLAND NW**

Most of our soils were developed on glacial gravels at the end of the last Ice Age. In some areas, they are also formed over basalt layers, giving a more clay-like soil. In valley bottoms, the alluvial soils are sandier and drain faster.

Most soils are not very deep, perhaps 12", but, more importantly, they are low in organic matter. Wherever possible, add compost, either homemade or purchased. Compost (not manure) is usually the answer to most soil structure issues.

If we have had a long, hard winter, sometimes with a snow cover for 4 months, soils are slow to warm up in the spring. So, use a soil thermometer to check the actual soil temperature. The soil must be at least 50°F to start cool weather veggies (lettuce, spinach, peas), and we don't usually plant these seeds before late April. See the separate handout "Growing Vegetables in Northern Idaho."

If we have had a long, hot summer, soils stay warm until early December. You can plant shrubs, trees, and some perennials in September to get them established before winter sets in.

**PROBLEMS WITH PESTS**

INSECTS

Aphids.....Use a powerful jet of water or insecticidal soap per the label.

Slugs.....Try beer traps, boards, diatomaceous earth, pine needles or copper strips.

Caterpillars.....Use grow-cloth barriers or Bt-Dipel sprays.

WILDLIFE

Deer.....Use an 8-foot mesh fence (or taller) a 6-foot solid fence or a double fence. Some shrubs and flowers are deer resistant in some areas of town (See handout)

Squirrels.....Use traps, or dogs in the yard as a deterrent.

Raccoons/Skunks.....Use traps.

Birds.....Use netting over strawberries and blueberries.

**WHAT GROWS WELL HERE?**

See the book *Landscape Plants for the Inland NW* by the Spokane Master Gardeners – available at the Kootenai County Master Gardeners' office with UI Extension in Post Falls.

## **HELP WITH GARDENING QUESTIONS AND PROBLEMS**

*Kootenai County Idaho Master Gardeners' Plant Clinic*

April through September, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

958 S. Lochsa Street, Post Falls, ID, Phone: (208) 292-2525

<https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/county/kootenai/garden>

<https://www.facebook.com/UIExtension.Kootenai.IdahoMasterGardenerProgram/>

*The Coeur d'Alene Garden Club*

Meets second Tuesday of each month, 1:00 pm

[www.cdagardenclub.com](http://www.cdagardenclub.com)

*Local libraries for books and talks: non-fiction ref: 635*

*Susan Mulvihill's local gardening column and blog*

Spokesman Review column: [www.spokesman.com/staff/susan-mulvihill/](http://www.spokesman.com/staff/susan-mulvihill/)

Facebook: Susan Mulvihill

Blog: [www.susansinthegarden.com](http://www.susansinthegarden.com)

*The Idaho Master Gardeners' booth at the Kootenai County Saturday Farmers' Market*

May through September, Saturdays, 9:00 am to 1:30 pm