

Season Extenders for Your Vegetable Garden

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Several tools and techniques will lengthen the growing season in your garden, making it possible to begin earlier in the spring and end later in the fall. They can be used on individual plants, rows, or raised beds. They can also warm the soil before planting. Try some of these methods in your North Idaho garden next year! Detailed plans can be found on the Internet or a favorite gardening magazine.

Cold Frames: This is a simple structure that provides warmth from the sun and blocks the wind. The sun's rays enter through a transparent cover. Use to harden off transplants or raise a few early salad vegetables. They can also be used to plant late cool vegetable crops for a second fall crop. Wood and glass models are common but you can also use plexiglass or a double layer of clear plastic. Make sure to include a hinge for hot days so cool air can enter.

Hoop House/Low Tunnel: Larger than a cold frame these are made with metal or plastic pipes bent into a series of hoops that are stuck in the ground or attached to a raised bed. They are covered with clear plastic sheeting. Remember to install a ventilation method for warm days by opening ends or rolling up sides.

Hot Caps/Cloches: These tools add 3 to 4 weeks to your growing season. They are mainly used on individual plants after transplanting like tomatoes or peppers. Some common examples are milk jugs, water bottles, wall of water, or cages with plastic covering. As always, be sure to remove or ventilate on hot days

Floating Row Covers: These are used to cover rows of plants increasing temps by 5 to 10 degrees. They are made of polyester or polypropylene and look like fabric. They are permeable to light, water, and air. They can be used in early or late gardens to protect plants from wind, rain and frost. They also are a good barrier to insects.