Overcoming the Challenges of Vegetable Gardening in the Tri-Lakes

The climate on the Palmer Divide presents many challenges to the vegetable gardener. Our low humidity, intense sunlight, and extreme variations in temperature are definitely unique. Throw in our semi-arid climate, poor soil, and short growing season, and the challenge becomes even greater. However, this doesn't mean that you can't have a successful vegetable garden; it just means you must learn to garden smarter. Hopefully we can help you to do that!

Here are some important things to keep in mind:

- **Our average last frost is 25 May**, and our average first frost is 1 Oct. But a freeze can happen as late as 7 June and as early as 17 September.
- **Using season extenders** such as frost cloth, hoop houses, cold frames, or 'walls of water' can give you the extra time your garden needs to grow more warm season crops that would otherwise not be possible.
- **Choosing varieties that have a shorter maturity date** or are 'cool season' crops as well as buying transplants, or starting seeds indoors, will all help ensure a more successful harvest.
- **Protection from wind** can greatly increase your garden's success. One of our greatest challenges here is the wind. High winds are common, especially in the spring and fall, necessitating some sort of protection for young seedlings or plants that are weak-stemmed. Planting against a fence or building, staking plants, or erecting a wind-break will help protect your plants from wind damage. The winds also dry the soil out quickly, so more frequent watering may be required.
- **Amending your soil** with organic matter is a necessity if planting in the ground. Another obstacle to successful gardening is our soil. It ranges from heavy clay to sand, and has a high pH, making it too alkaline for most vegetable crops. Most gardeners here have learned to plant in raised beds or containers filled with 'good dirt'. An added benefit is that the soil warms up faster in raised beds. Warm season crops, such as tomatoes and peppers, need the soil temperature to be at least 70 degrees to thrive.
- **Supplemental watering** is a must. Because the Tri-Lakes is semi-arid, using drip-irrigation or soaker hoses rather than an overhead sprinkler will ensure more water goes to the plant, and less is lost to evaporation. Watering in the early morning or early evening allows the water to soak into the soil more before the sun and wind can evaporate it. Mulching beds and containers will help conserve moisture.

McCord's Garden Center & Landscaping

McCord's Garden Center and Landscaping

2720 McShane Drive, Monument, CO 80132

(719)375-3573 | www.mccordgardens.com