

## Gardening in Bonner County

### History

Most of the early settlers were squatters who settled on the desirable meadowlands where pasture and hay could be obtained for their livestock. Such lands were easily cultivated, fertile and well supplied with moisture.. Early agriculture was primarily forage and livestock.

### Weather

Annual precipitation at Sandpoint averages 32 inches. The driest months are July and August and the wettest months are November and December. Temperatures range from an average low of 20 F in January to an average high of 82 F in July. Bonner County has USDA Plant Hardiness Zones 3, 4 and 5.

Average last frost date is May 18. Generally, Memorial Day is the date that it is “safe” to set out tender garden plants, although frost should be anticipated well into June, especially at higher elevations. It is a little known fact that many vegetable plants will tolerate frost, such as spinach, radish, peas and lettuce.

Average first frost date is Sept 16. But from Labor Day on, frost can be anticipated, especially at higher elevations. There are some “banana belts” where frost usually takes place at the end of September to early October. Hope, Clark Fork and lake effect areas around Sandpoint are the “warmest” areas that have growing seasons of 150 days, where higher elevations of Bonner County have growing seasons less than 80 days.

In any given year, expect the coldest, hottest, driest, wettest year on record!

### Soils

Generally we have silt loam – either poorly drained or well-drained. If they are well-drained, they can be improved by any means where organic matter is added. Raised beds are recommended.

### Vegetable Gardening

Many cool season vegetables do well. Warm season vegetables will need some protection with row covers, hoop houses or hot caps. Use south facing walls, mulching and raised beds to extend the season.

### Ornamental Plants

Choose natives if necessary. Visit the native Plant Arboretum in Sandpoint. Select naturalized or plants well-adapted to this climate. Create a diverse planting that includes plants that attract beneficial insects. Keep inputs, such as fertilizers, to a minimum. Irrigate sparingly. Be realistic in your expectations.

### Extension Can Help

For questions or problems, our Master Gardener Plant Clinic can help. We are open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 am – 4 pm. Stop by or give us a call at 263-8511.