

NEWS RELEASE
February 27, 2002

MORE ON PLANTING DATES

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

By Gary W. Hickman, Horticulture Advisor
University of California Cooperative Extension, Mariposa County

Since our column on planting dates for the 2,200-foot elevation, several gardeners have asked about conditions at higher elevations. Thanks to contributions from others with weather stations and good records, we have some additional numbers.

As a review, over the last five years, the median last frost date at 2,200 feet (Mariposa Ranger Station) was April 10. Remember that this means the last frost was earlier than this two of five years and later two of five years.

At 2,800 feet, Usona Road area, the median last frost over the last five years was May 12. At 3,250 feet, Lushmeadows area, the median last frost was May 4. Although Lushmeadows is higher than the Usona Road weather station, microclimate differences give it a longer growing season.

Another question being asked relates to climate zones. Many seed and plant companies list varieties based on USDA or Sunset Garden Book zones. The USDA Plant Hardiness zones are based solely on average coldest temperatures. Most of Mariposa County is in zone 8; average lows of 10 – 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

More useful planting zones are found in the Sunset Western Garden Book. These zones are based on many factors, including latitude, elevation, local terrain, etc. Most of Mariposa County is in zone 7 under this system.

If you are tempted to jump the gun and get your garden going, remember to also consider the orientation of the garden area. South facing sites will warm earlier than north facing. As mentioned before, it would be a good idea to stagger planting dates, resulting in a reduced risk of frost damage as well as spreading out harvest periods for many vegetable crops.

Weather Data:

U. C. Weather Station – Mariposa County Fairgrounds, 1,976 feet elevation, February 20 – 26, High temperature 80 degrees, low temperature 36 degrees, rainfall 0 inches. February rainfall to date is 1.87 inches.

The University of California prohibits discrimination against or harassment of any person employed by or seeking employment with the University on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, physical or mental disability, medical condition (cancer-related or genetic characteristics), ancestry, marital status, age, sexual orientation, citizenship, or status as a covered veteran (special disabled veteran, Vietnam-era veteran or any other veteran who served on active duty during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized). University Policy is intended to be consistent with the provisions of applicable State and Federal laws. Inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action/Staff Personnel Services Director, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1111 Franklin, 6th Floor, Oakland, CA 94607-5200, (510) 987-0096.