

Hot Seeds for Cool Climate Gardens

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Seeds for Cool Climate Gardens

ma Alexander ([G_Alexander](#)) March 23, 2015

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Northwest gardeners have the luxury of vegetable gardening year-round, but many of summer's most iconic vegetables t enough heat to thrive here. Which varieties can handle our chilly weather?

Northwest gardeners have the luxury of vegetable gardening year-round. We spotted in the garden in mid-December, checking on Brussels sprouts and ut we pay the price in summertime, when many icons of the vegetable garden roduce before the warm weather turns cool again. Tomatoes are a bit of a ; peppers and eggplant are long shots; and okra? Forget about it. But estern gardeners aren't doomed to year-round salad gardening. With good ent and careful seed selection, we can grow many backyard favorites.



g degree-days are not talked about as often as first and last frost dates, but cept is critically important to vegetable gardeners in cooler climates. Many of st popular vegetable garden plants require a certain number of days above a m temperature to set mature fruit. This base temperature varies by species, (10C) works for most common vegetables. The days to maturity listed for ariety in the seed catalog is based on the growing degree-days where the seed company grows its stock. That acket that says "60 days to maturity" won't deliver on schedule if temperatures in your garden hover at 50 degrees first three weeks.

ar winter skipped the west, leaving many of us with unused skis and high hopes for homegrown hot-season here are some of the best warm-season varieties for cool climates.

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o have a plot in one of Seattle's communal gardens. This particular P-Patch was a former farm in a low-lying area he soil stayed damp year-round. The first summer I gardened there, we had record-breaking high temperatures ough home buckets full of tomatoes. That was the only year I ever ate a tomato from my P-Patch. Every other all lost our tomatoes to late blight.

ays I have a south-facing back yard and my tomatoes do much better. Even so, varieties requiring 72 days to y need not apply to my Northwest garden. Cherry tomatoes always seem to do better than larger varieties. Early d Stupice are garden standbys. Other safe bets are varieties bred here in the Northwest: Gold Nuggett, ette, Legend and almost any variety with ïOregonï in its name. If you're like me, and can't resist an unusually l fruit, Cherokee Purple, Black Krim, Sungold, and Green Zebra are fairly reliable.

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ss that I have never successfully grown peppers in my Puget Sound garden. A single night exposed to atures under 50° F will shock them, and it doesn't take much more for permanent stunting. Start hardening seedlings at the same time you plant your tomatoes out instead of planting them out together, and consider using /ers at night for most of the season. Small-fruited varieties are said to do better than bell types, which may only e a couple of peppers per plant. If you really want bells, Golden Bell and Gypsy have Steve Solomon's vote. Morris has suggested Bulgarian Carrot. You may have to experiment with a lot of varieties before you find one rks in your garden. Stick with the early varieties (these are the ones requiring the fewest growing degree-days) ow that this is one plant where microclimate and cultivation methods can make all the difference.

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ore sensitive than peppers, eggplant seedlings will stunt if nights drop below 50 degrees, and will stop fruiting e first cool night. Like peppers, they benefit from black plastic mulch and overnight row covers. If you must try to ggplant, look for varieties advertised as early and chill-tolerant.

is the standard variety for cool climate gardeners, although it's worth trying the compact Fairytale, especially in a a sunny patio. The new variety Traviata looks very promising. For Asian varieties, try Ichiban, Short Tom, or ire.

ie of its importance as a commercial crop, most of the research on growing degree-days has been done using or years, Golden Jubilee was the standard variety in most parts of the country, but it doesn't always produce in ller areas of the Northwest, such as the Puget Sound where I garden. Any variety claiming to be earlier than Jubilee (90 days in the Territorial Seed Company catalog) is a good bet.

e is a great option. Sugar Buns, Strong Start, Quickie, and Luscious are also good choices. If you're looking for y Painted Mountain or Hooker's Sweet Indian corn. White corns tend to ripen late, but you can try Mirage.

ial soil temperature for sprouting melon seeds is 80] F. This fact should give Pacific Northwest gardeners pause. ie unusually warm winter has you hopeful for a hot summer, and you're up for the challenge of sprouting with heat, mulching with black plastic, and possibly managing cold frames all summer long, stick with the earliest s you can find. Muskmelons (like Halona) and cantaloupes (try Alvaro) often do better than watermelon in the est. If you can't resist trying watermelon, your best bet might be Sugar Baby or Yellow Doll.

Gemma Alexander

is a contributing writer to Dave's Garden.

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Delores • 2 days ago

I live in Salem, but came from Seattle. When I was a kid, we were the only family in our area to have a garden (1958-1966). We also had a compost pile. I have continued having a garden when I moved to Oregon (1972). I do a lot of canning. Right now I've got my dining table covered with starts - I've even have had success growing celery - it will winter over to an extent here. Kale, chard, spinach love our climate. Salem is a tad warmer than Seattle & a little less rainy (Portland is about the same as Seattle rain wise).



gemmaDalexander > Delores • 19 minutes ago

Oh, that's a great point - there are plants like celery that we can overwinter here that people in other areas have to grow to harvest in the summer. Thanks, Delores.

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