

Speaker 1 ([00:01](#)):

Welcome to the old fashioned on purpose podcast. As many of you know, we live in South Eastern Wyoming and I am convinced it is one of the worst places in the United States to garden. We get late frost in the spring, early frosts in the fall, blizzards in the middle of may and tons of hail. But we still grow a good amount of vegetables most years. So take heart, my cold climate gardening friends, there is hope and I want to share some of my best cold climate gardening tips with you today. I'm your host Jill winger and this is the podcast for people who are disenchanted with conformity. If you like to swim upstream while the rest of society rides the river of least resistance or you're a trailblazer, a Maverick, a homesteader, a modern pioneer, or a backyard farmer, well you have found your tribe. So we've been gardening here for almost 10 years and I have learned there's really no sense complaining about how things roll here, although I still do complain sometimes, but it's just how it goes in this part of the country.

Speaker 1 ([01:19](#)):

But I wanted to encourage those of you listening today who live in a similar climate or maybe one that's not quite as bad as ours, but I want to give you hope that it is possible to grow a lot of food even in a place that has a really short growing season. Because there has been a lot of years where we grow hundreds and hundreds of pounds of vegetables and we dodge the blizzards and the frost and the hail and it still works. So it's possible with just a little bit of creativity. So we're in garden zone five, just so you kind of have a little bit of frame of reference as we go through this episode. I generally plant the majority of our vegetable seedlings or starts around Memorial day or the first week of June. We also can have frost as early as like the first or second week of September.

Speaker 1 ([02:15](#)):

And sometimes we get lucky and it pushes it later into the fall. But we basically have to be prepared to have our most important crops done and wrapped up by mid September at the latest. So can you do the math? That's a pretty small window. So if you have a similar type of growing season, here are some of my best tips and strategies. Okay. Number one, we've talked about this before, but you got to know your frost dates and your planting zones and it's really easy to figure out. It's literally a Google search away. You can look at the USDA plant hardiness map and it will tell you zones and I think frost dates as well. You'd have figure out your state on the map and it color coordinated and it's super easy. But it's important that you understand your first and your last frost dates because if you're new to gardening, some of this is review for some of you, but if you're new to gardening, your seed packets or your seedlings generally come with instructions that will tell you when to plant them.

Speaker 1 ([03:23](#)):

And if you plant your tomato plants outside two weeks before your last frost date, odds are they will die. So you gotta understand when that date occurs. Obviously it's not foolproof and freak storms happen or freak temperature changes happen. But I will say that planting like Memorial day or right after Memorial day, which is our last frost date has never like led me astray in our zone. I've always been okay, I'm just following that bit of advice. So that's really important for you to understand so you can maximize your growing season as much as possible. My second tip is to make sure that you're picking the right seeds and buy right seeds. I mean you need to know how many days it takes for each of the varieties that you're selecting to grow to maturity. And honestly with a lot of things, let's say like your Bush beans, your corn, your summer squash, you know, you're probably going to be okay.

Speaker 1 ([04:29](#)):

But there are things, the melons or the gourds or maybe different varieties of beans that are long, they take longer to mature. So, you know, if you have a variety that is going to take a lot of days, then it's probably not going to be a good fit if you live in a short growing season climate like I do. So just understanding, roughly paying attention to that as you buy your seeds is going to set you up for success and ensures that you have the best chance of a harvest that you can get before a frost hits it. Also, this brings us to number three, lets me know what I need to start indoors and a big part of gardening for us, this is really the only way I can make this work here is that I start a lot of my seeds inside. Namely peppers, tomatoes, cabbage, broccoli and a few little herbs.

Speaker 1 ([05:29](#)):

I start all of those from seed in my basement, usually late February to mid-March. Because things like cabbage, if you look on the back of the package, it'll say, you know, start the seeds before you put them outside. And if you do plant them direct to soil, maybe if you live somewhere super tropical that would work. But for most of us, we have to give them a headstart indoors while it's still snowing outside. And then we'll transplant out once the danger of frost has passed. Now I have videos on seed starting. I have blog posts on seed starting and I'll drop some of those links in the show notes. Cause it's kind of a, it's a hands on process and I want you to be able to see how we do it. But we have a system set up in our basement that really wasn't that difficult.

Speaker 1 ([06:20](#)):

I used some equipment from, or not equipment, but I bought some lights and some shelving from Lowe's hardware store and set it up. But it saves us a lot of money because when you go buy tomato plants or pepper plants at the garden store, you know, they're three or four bucks a piece. And if you want to plant any quantity of vegetables that adds up, compare that to a \$4 packet of heirloom seeds. You will save hundreds of dollars your first year. So I highly recommend starting those seeds indoors. And if you live in a really harsh climate, you can even start things like your summer squash or some melons, things like that indoors, just to give them a headstart. Okay. Number four is that you can use season extenders. And one topic that comes up a lot when we talk about gardening in a cold climate is using things like greenhouses hoophouses or cold frames.

Speaker 1 ([07:17](#)):

And I think those things are definitely worth looking into if you live in a area with a short growing season. Now, to be perfectly honest, we haven't ventured into that world quite yet. We have toyed with the idea for years of building a greenhouse. It's actually kind of a running joke with some of our local friends like, Oh, is Christian building your greenhouse this year. And I'm like, no, not yet. Like we haven't figured out design or what we want to do or we want to put it. So it's kind of perpetually on the to do list. But there are other things you can do, even if you don't want to build a full greenhouse, you know, with a cold frame or use old windows or if you have raised beds like we do, you can put hoops over them and put thick plastic over the tops just to kind of protect those plants either early in the spring or late in the fall.

Speaker 1 ([08:08](#)):

So there definitely are options out there. I know there are people who grow lettuce and kale or other greens well into the snow season. It's just a little bit extra effort to set those things up. Confession, part of the reason we haven't done this yet is kind of by the time October rolls around, I'm usually ready for a

break. Ready to put the garden to bed for the year. So I am not someone who necessarily wants to garden 365 days a year. You may be though, you might be that person. So that could be a reason to look into the cold frames, et cetera. All right, number five, this is a strategy for some of you, not all of you. Gardening with raised beds has been a good fit for us in our cold climate. I do not think they are an absolute necessity, but one reason they can help is that they can increase the temperature of your soil a little bit so they can give you a little bit of a leg up to start things in your garden a tiny bit sooner. It's not enough of a temperature difference to let you start at weeks ahead of time. But one of the biggest factors in knowing when your garden is ready for planting in the spring is when the soil temperature is up to the right temperature. Because cold soil, even if the sun is shining cold soil will not allow seeds to germinate. So depending on the size of your raised beds and how deep they are, you can just let that soil heat up a little bit more quickly. Maybe get things started a little bit sooner.

Speaker 1 ([09:51](#)):

All right, number six, rolling through these. So if I'm not going too fast, your hand might be getting tired of you're taking notes. But one of the strategies that has helped me a ton, and I learned this the hard way and spent a lot of, let's say, wasted a lot of money back in the day, but is to pay attention to where you're getting your plants if you live in a cold climate. So we live out on the Prairie, as you know, we're about 45 minutes away from the bigger town with the gardening stores. And I didn't realize this, I had to talk to some local gardening experts, who filled me in on this, but I would get different trees and shrubs and things from Lowe's or home Depot or the big box gardening stores. They never really thrived as much, even if they were labeled as being appropriate for zone five.

Speaker 1 ([10:45](#)):

And I couldn't figure it out. So when I talked to, like it was a smaller local gardening store who's native to the area and understands the area, he said, you're always better off to talk to someone who understands the nuances of your area and your zone. So like Lowe's or home Depot, we'll get plants that are rated for zone five but not necessarily our type of zone five with the freak storms and the wind. So he suggested going with smaller stores with people who are native to the area. They understand all the little ins and outs. And that has really played a big role in helping me buy plants that have done much better. So my currant Bush is an example. In the past I've tried growing different fruit trees and different berries that Lowe's and home Depot said would work for zone five, but they never really worked.

Speaker 1 ([11:43](#)):

So last year I started talking to the some local gardening people and researching currants and I learned that there this particular currant variety that is designed to thrive. It's native to these harsh Prairie climates. And so I got one, it bloomed in April, it's happy, it is withstanding the wind and the crazy freezes and it's done really, really well. So it was worth the money I paid a little bit more cause I bought it from a local gardening store versus the discount store. But it works. And the same thing goes with our tree row. Some of you may have seen in pictures or videos behind our house. We have this extensive tree row and when we put that in, it was a long time ago, but we worked with local tree experts to find the right varieties to plant in our situation on our land.

Speaker 1 ([12:38](#)):

And they could tell us the hardiest tree species that would work out on the Prairie that would work with high wind. And that made a big difference versus just going and buying some little baby trees from a random store in town. And in case you're wondering, I know some of you will ask, we ended up planting

Austrian and Ponderosa Pines, native plums, lilacs, and a couple of different varieties of Cottonwood trees that are mixed in. And those were all recommended to us. They've done very well even with minimal water and lots of wind and it's been a great choice. All right. Lastly, tip number seven would be to look for areas on your land or on your property that are a little bit more sheltered. Cause you might have some microclimates depending on how your house or your outbuildings are situated.

Speaker 1 ([13:32](#)):

For example, we have our little kitchen herb garden that is up against our house and it is South facing and it's sheltered from the wind and it just stays a little bit warmer than other areas of our property. And so if I have plants that are rated for zone five, but they need a little extra TLC, they go in the sheltered area, like my raspberries have done well there. As they're out of the winds, they get a lot of sun. And so you may be able to either create those sort of microclimates or find ones that already exist and plants accordingly to give yourself a little bit of an advantage. All right. That was a lot of information, wasn't it? Hopefully that gave you some ideas though. And here's my takeaway for you. It is possible to garden almost anywhere. And if you just are willing to do a little extra research, do a little extra work to figure out what is working in your area, it's worth it.

Speaker 1 ([14:32](#)):

And it's kind of fun. I think it's maybe fun is not the right word. It's a challenge. It's a rewarding challenge once you figure it out and you're eating that fresh tomato from your garden after everyone told you it wasn't possible. So it feels good. And if I can garden in the wide open, windy Prairie of Wyoming that I'm pretty sure you can do it too. So I know I get a ton of questions about our raised beds. If you've seen pictures of them, they're a little bit unique as far as raised beds go, and if you'd like to know how we built them, what materials we used, I put together a little guide, you can grab it for free over at [theprairiehomestead.com/raised bed guide](http://theprairiehomestead.com/raised-bed-guide) and we'll drop that link in the show notes as well. And that's it, my friends, don't forget to hit subscribe over on your favorite podcast player.

Speaker 1 ([15:24](#)):

So all future episodes get delivered to you automatically. And thanks for listening. We'll chat more on the next episode of the old fashioned on purpose podcast. It has begun. Gardening season that is, and maybe you're not quite digging out in the garden quite yet. I'm definitely not because there is still snow on the ground, but odds are you're probably in the thick of planning, dreaming, and buying seeds to make the process just a little bit easier for you. Whether you're a newbie or an experienced gardener. I've put together a little pack of gardening, planning, printables, as well as a list of some of my very favorite vegetable varieties. You can grab the whole thing for free over at [theprairiehomestead.com/gardenplan](http://theprairiehomestead.com/gardenplan). We'll also drop that link in the show notes, but one more time. It's [theprairiehomestead.com/gardenplan](http://theprairiehomestead.com/gardenplan).