

Ultimate Season Extender

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The best season extender, without going to a greenhouse would be a hoop house. A hoop house is just a frame with a cover over it. It is pretty easy to double the growing season in Wyoming by utilizing a hoop house. It is also quit therapeutic to be in a warm sunny environment working with plants early in the season and later in the fall.

We know that if we can get by those late frosts in the spring and the early frost in the fall we can substantially increase the growing days. This means we can grow those vegetables which require a longer growing season that some years we are not able to or the amount we could harvest if given just a few more weeks. Also how about getting an early start on growing tomatoes so you can be picking a month earlier and later into November. There are many forms of season extenders from using milk cartons with the bottom cut out or hot caps from garden centers, but these only work on one plant at a time.

To construct a hoop house all you need is a simple frame and cover it with a cover and have a source of water. They need not be expensive or elaborate to construct. What they provide is a natural heat source to warm up the ground early and late. This allows early planting and late harvest. The cover is a major cost of all season extenders. What the University of Wyoming recommends is a plastic weave material which is sturdy and diffuses the light inside the hoop house. This type of material has been tested around Wyoming and will stand up to high winds and even strong hail.

The frame can be as simple as pvc pipe bent into a hoop and fastened to the ground by slipping it over a rebar driven into the ground. The ends can each have a door on them or just one end. The next major item to consider is a water source. If you are going to use the hoop house early or late a frost free hydrant inside is needed. Inside the hoop house you can plant as is or build raised beds.

There is more management needed when using a hoop house. The main concern is getting too hot so the door needs to be open in the mornings or the sides up during the day. Good air circulation is needed to avoid disease problems. Also aphids and white flies can be a problem because of the high humidity. You need to be watching the plants on a regular basis for signs of disease or insects as they can multiply in a short period of time in this type of growing conditions.

The biggest advantage is being able to grow cool season crops in April till May, then warm season crops all summer, and then being able to grow and harvest cool season vegetables again all fall and into winter. This double or triple cropping really adds to the vegetables you can produce on a small area. To this you can always add any kind of fruit such as raspberries, strawberries, or those other fruit trees which may not be zoned for Wyoming.

To enjoy more vegetables for you and your family or for sharing with others consider a hoop house for your garden. For more information contact the Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service, New Mexico Cooperative

Extension service (hoop house design), or <http://www.uwyo.edu/barnbackspt/Articles/2010/Winter10/Hoophouse>. There are several plans on the internet or the University of Wyoming has some on their web site.

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