

For all of us here in southern Idaho, with our above sea level altitude and northern latitude, growing a garden might seem to be a bit more tricky than it is for gardeners in southern states. Below you'll find some tricks for growing a garden when you only have a few frost-free months per year.

### From Sleeping Bison Farm, an Idaho's Bounty producer

At our small truck garden north of Ketchum, we've developed a number of techniques for extending the growing season so that we can grow more than just leafy greens:

1. Plant seedlings, rather than seeds, when possible. We grow seedlings in our passive solar greenhouse, but they can be started in a sunny window. Instead of growing your own you could purchase them from Sleeping Bison Farm (Wood River Valley members), Canyon Bounty Farm (Boise members) or from local nurseries. Root vegetables and peas do not transplant well and need to be seeded directly.



2. Distinguish between cool season and heat-loving vegetables. Plant the cool season veggies earliest. These include leafy greens, the cabbage family, peas, and most root veggies. Once they've germinated and grown a few leaves, they can handle temperatures down to about 27 degrees F. Heat-loving veggies, such as tomatoes, peppers, squash, corn and cucumbers, should not be planted unprotected in the garden until all danger of frost is past.

3. By covering your plants, you can keep them from freezing. A bed sheet will trap the warmth of the earth around the plants and keep them a few degrees warmer than the surrounding air. Garden fabric, available from farm supply outlets, has been developed specifically to keep plants warm and can keep them 5-10 degrees warmer than the air temperature. Cold frames work especially well for plant protection. A simple tunnel constructed of PVC tubing and plastic sheeting will provide up to 10 degrees of protection.

At Sleeping Bison Farm, we have sturdier aluminum-frame polycarbonate cold frames with automatic air vents to keep the frames from overheating during the day. The temperature in the cold frames is generally 15 degrees warmer than the outside air at night, although by covering the frame with blankets or a tarp, we can keep the plants inside from freezing down to an outside temperature of about 10 degrees. By providing an environment that is warmer than the outside air, we can extend the growing season by about 2 months in the spring and again in the fall.



4. "Wall-of-waters" work great for protecting tomatoes and peppers until nights warm up. Water, in a series of tubes that surround the plant, is heated by the sun to keep plants warm at night and tempers the solar gain so they plants don't overheat during the day.

5. Container gardening is also a good way to deal with the short season. Plants can be placed outside in the sun during the day and then brought in on cold nights. There are a number of containers with wheels available that make this easier.



This may sound like a lot of work, but we find it really rewarding! Fresh vegetables that were "alive and kicking" just a few hours earlier taste so much better than something that was harvested and trucked from California (or further) a week earlier. We know that they were grown with all organic methods, without unfair labor conditions and with a small carbon footprint. And, the weather has become an integral part of our lives – we watch the ten day forecast, so we can anticipate how much effort we'll need to invest to help the garden thrive.



**Sleeping Bison Farm**

[www.sleepingbisonfarm.com](http://www.sleepingbisonfarm.com)

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