

NEWS RELEASE
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MARIPOSA PLANTING DATES

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

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When is our last spring frost date? This question is now coming to mind as we start ordering seeds and plants for the garden. In checking a few seed packets, directions include “plant 2-3 weeks after last frost (pumpkin),” “start indoors 4-6 weeks before last frost (zinnia).” So, what is the answer? It turns out not to be as simple as thought. First, it obviously depends on your elevation and microclimate. Second, the historical period used in the calculations can make a difference.

Using data collected between 1930 – 1960 (over 50 years ago), May 15 was the average last spring frost in Mariposa at elevation 2,000 feet. However, a possibly more useful time period is the last five years, 1997 – 2001. Recorded at the Mariposa Ranger Station, elevation 2,250 feet, the last frost date ranged from March 4 to April 21. The average is April 1, however, during this timeframe, the actual date was later than this average three of five years.

Back to the question, “When can I plant tomatoes in the garden?” At 2,000 feet, the best bet would be to set out a few plants April 1 and continue weekly plantings up to mid-May. This will reduce your chances of a complete crop loss due to frost. It will also spread out your harvest period, often a good idea. Remember to add about five days to these dates for each 1,000 feet increase in elevation of your garden.

Weather Data

To help us provide the most accurate information, the University of California has established a weather station at the Mariposa Fairgrounds, elevation 1,976 feet. During this last week, January 31 to February 5, 2002, the high temperature was 67 degrees, low 28 degrees, with no rainfall recorded.

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