



Row Covers: Helping to Grow Your Own Food Year Round
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We are having record warm temperatures for winter this year, and a drought. In Northern California we didn't have a snowy Christmas that we may have expected, while the rest of the country was having record cold and snow. During our late fall record cold temperatures, even my potatoes froze all the way back -- it hasn't frozen like that since 1990. With temperatures down to 20 degrees Fahrenheit, row cover could have protected sensitive plants, depending on the thickness and type of cloth used. Row cover kits include hoops, protective film (row cover), fabric clips and staples. A row cover system uses a covered hoop to help protect raised beds or growing fields. It keeps wind and pests out, allows moisture in and extends the growing season for your beloved plants. Row covers are less expensive than constructing cold frames, and can be more easily moved around your garden as the seasons change. They allow shelter for tender plants and will help harden-off seedlings that are directly seeded.

Winter crops like chard, kale, broccoli and carrots do well when they are direct seeded. After you have amended and prepared your planting bed, plant your seeds and then place row cover over the soil surface and secure it. Covers can be secured with landscape staples, rocks or bricks. Since the row cover fabric breathes, seedbeds can be watered through the fabric. After germination occurs, remove the row cover or leave it nearby, depending on the weather (or pest pressure), but check regularly to adjust the fabric as needed. Mulching with bark, straw or compost is also a good idea in the winter to conserve moisture and discourage weed growth. Thin your new seedling plants as recommended.

A successful example of using row covers is at the Fair Oaks Horticulture Center where the UCCE Master Gardeners of Sacramento wanted to protect a cherry tree from the Spotted Wing Drisophola (SWD) pest. They constructed a tent around the tree using Agribon Row Cover. They were able to demonstrate this as an effective cultural method to exclude the harmful SWD pest: no SWD was found on the crop. The cost was \$200, it took a few people and ladders to construct the cover, and temperatures were monitored in the hotter months -- but this shows one of many creative uses for row cover in the garden or farm.

In our growing region, with some protection when the weather is very cold, salad greens can be grown year round. Use a row cover, and there isn't a need to put your vegetable garden down for the winter. Take a gander around some of the garden supply magazines at the various row covers that may suit your garden. Hope this inspires you to grow year round or extend your growing season. Happy New Year and great growing in 2014!

Join Master Gardeners to learn about the art of roses at the popular Rose Pruning class this Saturday, January 18th, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Timing of rose pruning is critical in our foothill climate, and mid-February is the earliest roses should be pruned. This free, interactive class will be conducted at the UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County Demonstration Garden, located in front of the Community Observatory at Folsom Lake College (El Dorado Campus), 6699 Campus Drive, Placerville, CA. Since this is an outdoor class, its recommended attendees call the Master Gardener office or check our website (below) just prior to the class to confirm the location.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.