



## Owens Valley Vegetable Gardening Tips

A small, manageable garden can be more satisfying than a large, overwhelming one. Common mistakes include starting too big, over-watering, failing to weed, and planting seeds and starts too close together.

**Owens Valley Climate:** USDA Zone 7b or 8a. Microclimates vary throughout the region; ask your neighbors.

Spring is windy and temperatures vary; summers are sunny, hot, and dry. Most vegetables can't survive our freezing winters. Season extenders (cold frames, water tents) allow earlier starts but require more work. Cover plants during frost, and shade cold-weather crops to prevent bolting.

Average Last Frost: Bishop early/mid-May, Lone Pine late April.

Average First Frost: Bishop mid-October, Lone Pine late October.

More detailed temperature information:  
[wrcc.dri.edu/summary/Climsmcca.html](http://wrcc.dri.edu/summary/Climsmcca.html)  
or contact help line.

Waiting to plant by average frost date may shorten the growing season and reduce harvest. It's better to plant when soil warms and then frost-protect. Most warm-season vegetables thrive at 60°F soil temperature, while okra, squash, watermelon, eggplant, basil, and peppers need warmer. Cool-season plants grow at 45°F.

**Water:** Owens Valley's dry climate leads many to over-water. Avoid watering between plants or rows to prevent weeds. Use drip irrigation or a watering can for targeted watering. Set timers for 10-15 minutes daily, water mornings or evenings, and avoid soaking pathways or soil outside raised beds. We don't recommend soaker hoses, or overhead watering from a hose or sprinkler.

**Weeds** compete with plants for space, nutrients, and water, and may establish roots and seeds, causing issues next year. Plan to pull or hoe *at least weekly*. Mulch helps but doesn't eliminate weeds.

**Spacing:** Follow seed packet recommendations. Avoid overcrowding transplants. Peppers and eggplants thrive 18-24 inches apart, and mature tomato plants grow large by August.

**Soil Fertilizers and Amendments:** Most Owens Valley soils benefit from annual compost additions, eliminating the need for inorganic fertilizers. Compost can be purchased or made from 'green' (kitchen scraps, including coffee grounds) and 'brown' (leaves, wood chips) waste. Compost manure before using to avoid burning plants or spreading weeds/disease. More information at <https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8037.pdf>.

**Raised Beds** are useful for poor soils, maximizing space, warming soil early, and controlling weeds. Visit <https://ucanr.edu/sites/newinyomonmg/files/323516.pdf> for guidance.

**Organic Mulch** offers water retention, temperature protection, nutrient addition, and weed suppression. For more information on mulches, visit <https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8672.pdf>.

**For further guidance:** Visit [https://ucanr.edu/sites/newinyomonmg/Eastern\\_Sierra\\_Gardening/](https://ucanr.edu/sites/newinyomonmg/Eastern_Sierra_Gardening/)  
or call **Inyo-Mono Master Gardener Helpline: 760-872-2098**.