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When Should I Plant?

In the last Master Gardener meeting they were trying to get me to say “IT IS TIME TO PLANT” (with no stipulations). In other words, they wanted me to guarantee them that there will be no more frost. No way, like the old saying “I may only look stupid” (it doesn’t mean that I am). Last year we had our last scattered frost on April 23rd. This was the latest I have ever seen a frost in the Pee Dee. Before that it was April 18th in 1986. A frost is a very fickle event. Many different variables will determine if you have a frost in your yard.

For instance, if the wind blows the likelihood of a frost is lessened. The type of frost we mostly have in the spring are called inversion types. What takes place is the warm air at the surface rises and cold air takes its place (inverts). Cold air is heavier than warm air and will flow like water to low spots. If wind blows it mixes the warm with the cold air. This is the theory behind the wind machines in the peach orchards. They stir the air and mix the warm air which is about 30 feet up with the cold air at the surface.

Next, if your yard is on a hill the likelihood of a frost is lessened. Again the cold air will flow away to low spots or what we call the hollows. This is why peaches are planted on the tops of hills.

Next, if you have a lot of tree or tall shrub cover the likelihood of a frost is lessened. The tree cover will hold in the warm air and prevents it from escaping. Evergreen or trees with leaves are more efficient at holding heat.

Next, if you are very near a lake the likelihood of a frost is lessened. Water holds heat and releases it slowly. Especially the big pond, what many WWII vets like my Dad called the Atlantic Ocean, will regulate the environment for miles. In fact, most of the coastal areas are in a total different temperate zone because of the ocean effects.

Finally, there are many little tricks you can do to reduce the likelihood of frost in parts of your yard. Irrigating, lighting, covering and mulching will add or hold warmth and prevent that cold air from overflowing your yard and plants. Throw Christmas lights over a plant and cover with a sheet. Paint buckets or barrels black, fill with water, and cover the plants and them with plastic. Irrigate early to allow the water to collect heat before the frost. Throw pine straw over the top of plants. Plant near a sun warmed brick house. ETC., use your imagination just hold the warmth or keep out the cold.

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