

Date: June 3, 2004
Release: Home Gardening
Writer: Tony Melton, County Agent
Florence County

Why Is It So Difficult to Grow Things In S.C.?

For those of you from the north or what I call “of the northern persuasion”, admit it, you have asked many times, “Why Is It So Difficult to Grow Things In S.C.” In the north, you throw out a few seeds and it is like the “Jack and the Beanstalk Story” with everything growing to the sky and producing an abundance of flowers and fruit. I have seen many avid gardeners head back north with their horticultural pride abased murmuring to themselves that S.C. is full of insects, weeds, and disease.

Truthfully, the Pee Dee area of S.C. is one of the most difficult areas in the country to grow plants. First of all, we are in what is called a transition zone. A transition zone is an area where it is difficult to grow cool season plants because of the heat and warm season plants because of the cold. With our wild fluctuations in temperature plants must be able to take the heat and the cold. Depending on the year, we may be wearing shorts, light jackets, or fur coats at Christmas. Both we and plants have to adjust to our environment, and so-to-say “plants are naked in their environment.”

Next, excluding our wild fluctuations in temperature it is warm or hot all year in S.C. I tell northerners we have four seasons in S.C. almost summer, summer, still summer, and Christmas. Without very cold temperatures and the ground freezing many insects and diseases persist all year long in S.C. Also, our warm temperatures allows organic matter in the soil to degrade all year long. Therefore, all the work of adding compost, black cow, manure, and etc. to the soil must be repeated each year.

Next, it is really humid here. Our humidity makes it dangerous to jog even in the mornings. Your sweat doesn't evaporate and cool your body. Plants use evaporating water (transpiration) to cool themselves, take up water, and get nutrients. In other words if it is tough on you it is tough on plants.

Finally, some years are too wet but most years are too dry. No wonder farmers are always complaining. We never seem to get that perfect amount of rain. Therefore, irrigation is a must in S.C., if you want any consistency in plant growth, flowering, or yield. However, improper or excessive irrigation encourages more disease, insects, and weeds.

However, many southerners and transplanted northerners have learned to appreciate, manipulate, and love our southern growing environment. Personally, I love having something growing twelve months out of the year, quick growing plants, and having a long growing season without frost.

Also, to learn the specifics on gardening we have both free and for-sale publications at our office in the back of the Public Services Building on the corner of Third Loop and Irby St. You may also visit our Home & Garden Information Center through our web site at www.clemson.edu/florence. I may be contacted through our web site, amelton@clemson.edu, or 661-4800.

Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service offers its programs to people of all ages, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital or family status and is an equal opportunity employer.