



## Extending the Growing Season - Cloches

Here in the Flathead Valley our growing season for most garden vegetables typically runs from about the middle of May to the second week of September or about 18 weeks. For many things such as beans, peas, carrots, and many squash, this is plenty of time to plant seeds in the ground and harvest vine ripened produce. Some things, however, need a bit more time or protection from our inconsistent spring weather. We've all seen it snow in June! Here are some ways you can extend your growing season.

**Cloches and other frost/cold protection** – A cloche is a device for protecting tender seedlings in the spring. In fancy gardens, cloches are made of glass and shaped like a bell. The whole plant is covered up during cool weather and at night.



It is a short step from glass domes to plastic jugs that you save from recycling. Cut the bottoms off and save the caps to put back on at night. Your grandparents may have also used an item called 'hotcaps' that are still sold today.



Hotcaps are waxed paper domes that are good for a few seasons of use. They have a small tab on top for venting. The photo at right shows the wide variety of containers you can use as cloches or hotcaps. Clear or slightly opaque containers such as milk jugs work



best for daytime protection. Whether you purchase or make your own, they are an important tool for extending our growing season. When you put tender seedlings out, be sure to watch the weather reports for temperatures forecast to go below freezing. If a sunny day is forecast with temperatures above 35 degrees, open the tops of your protectors to allow hot air to vent out. This is even more important as the days get really warm in May. During our typically cold and wet Junes you can leave the covers on all the time to store heat for the plant.



Here at Plant Land we swear by Wall o' Waters. These plastic tubes you fill with water store plenty of heat during the day that keeps tender plants happy all night. You can even close the top to keep heat in better on very cold nights. The picture at right shows how water bottles can be recycled to perform like Wall o' Waters. (The disadvantage to this is that you cannot close the top.) Be sure to remove Wall o'



Waters before the plants grow out the top. Failure to do so can result in weak stemmed plants. They cannot grow all season with this protection. These devices work especially well for tomatoes and pepper plants.

You can be very creative with what you use for frost protection. And don't forget to toss these items back in the recycling bin when you finish with them.

