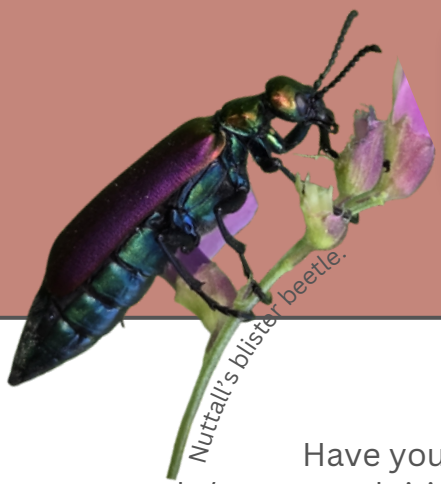
COMMUNITY Food Connections ASSOCIATION

GROWING GARDENERS

NEWSLETTER FOR SOUTH EASTERN ALBERTA

THE DIRT THIS MONTH

CFCA's Growing Gardeners Newsletter aims to support gardeners of all experience levels in Medicine Hat and area. To sign up for our mailing list, email CFCAGarden@gmail.com.


Nuttall's blister beetle.

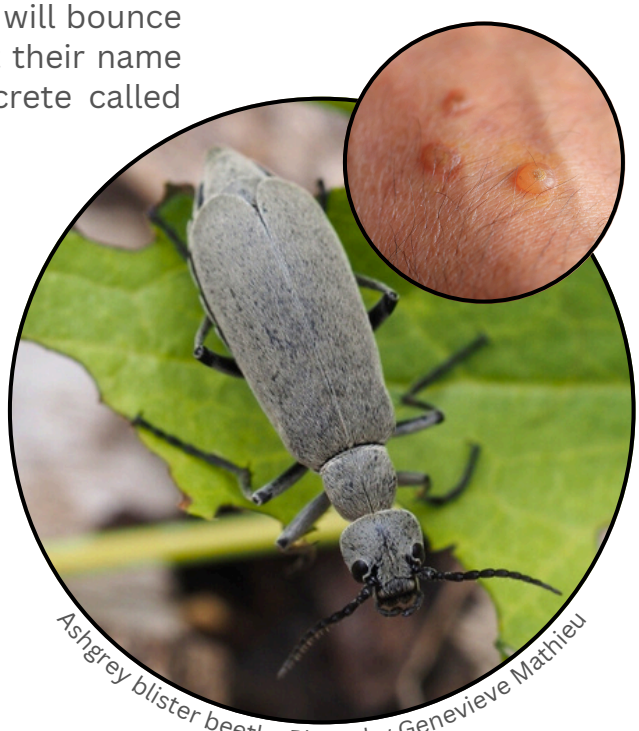
Bug Curious

Learn about some of the insects that may be visiting the garden at different times of the year.

BLISTER BEETLES

Have you seen this bug? It has a long, narrow body that can be grey, shiny black or even purple/green and iridescent. Blister beetle numbers are higher following seasons when grasshoppers are abundant. This is because grasshopper eggs are an important food for blister beetle larvae. Unfortunately, as they mature, their palates broaden as they appear in the garden in swarms, voraciously feeding on foliage and flowers. Some species prefer legumes (peas, beans, etc) while others feed on nightshades (tomato, eggplant, etc), beets/chard, and brassicas (radish, turnip, etc). This complicates the management of these insects; their larvae are considered beneficial in managing grasshopper populations, but as adults, their are considered garden pests.

Plant damage is most severe on younger plants, but most will bounce back once the beetles have moved on. Blister beetles get their name from the effects of the irritating chemical they can secrete called cantharidin which can cause blisters on exposed skin.


Ashgrey blister beetle. Photo by Genevieve Mathieu

SE Alberta Species of Concern:

- Nuttall's blister beetle (*Lytta nutalli)*
- Black blister beetle *(Epicauta pennsylvanica)*
- Ashgrey blister beetle *(Epicauta fabricii)*

Life Cycle: One generation per year. Clusters of eggs are deposited in soil and hatch within weeks. Larvae feed on grasshopper and other insects eggs then pupate in the soil over winter, emerging the following summer as adults.

Integrated Plant Management:
Physical/Mechanical control - Hand pick (wearing gloves) or surround infested plants with a tarp and gently shake to dislodge insects. Deposit blister beetles into a bucket of soapy water to destroy.


Black blister beetle.

"Their numbers are higher following seasons when grasshoppers are abundant... because grasshopper eggs are an important food for blister beetle larvae."

Reference: Goosey et al. (2025). *Blister Beetles of Montana.* MSU Extension. www.montana.edu/extension/montguides/montguidepdfsforstore/MT200209AG_Blister_Beetles_of_Montana_rev02.25.pdf

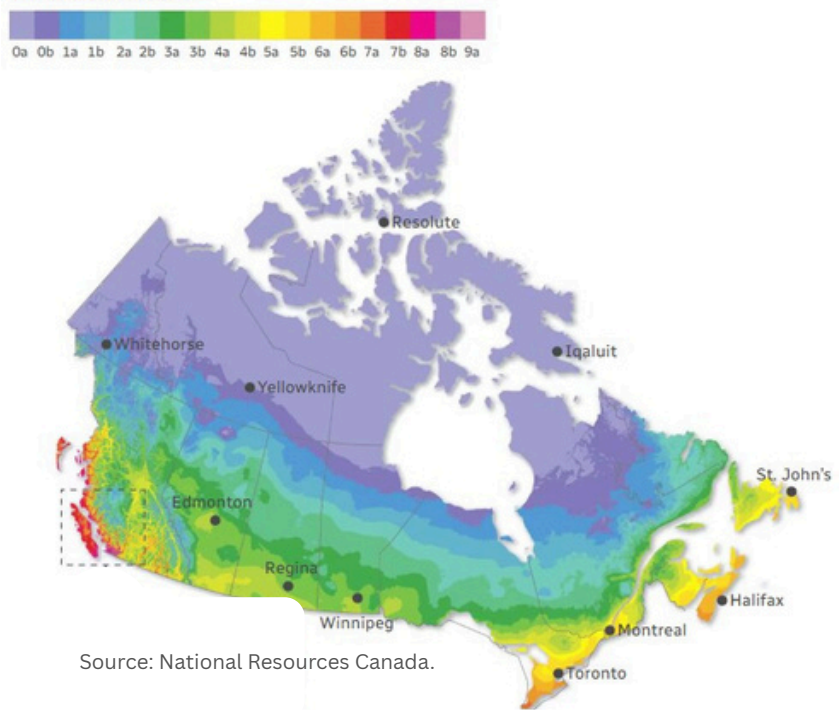
Hardiness Zones

Chose the right plant for the right place by understanding the updated plant hardiness zone.

Have you ever looked at a plant tag at the gardeners centre and stopped to wonder "What is the deal with hardiness zones?" Developed in the early 1960s by Natural Resources Canada, plant hardiness zones aim to **help growers to choose suitable plants** for their climate conditions. All of Canada is mapped out into geographic zones represented by a number (in Canada the range is 0-9). Zones with highest numbers enjoy the mildest climates, while the lowest are the most challenging. Each number is accompanied by a letter, where "a" is closer to the next lower number, and "b" is closer to the next higher number. Canadian and US zones are not the same: add 1 zone to convert from USDA to Canadian zones. So a plant rated USDA zone 4 becomes Canadian zone 5.

While our frost free period (the number of days between the last frost expected in spring and the first frost expected in fall) helps guide decisions about when to start seeds indoors, transplant or direct sow, hardiness zones are a better guide for **choosing perennial plants** that we hope to overwinter. The zone formula does include an area's frost free period along with elevation, average minimum temperature in winter, average maximum temperature in summer, rainfall between June and November, precipitation in January, average maximum snow depth, and average maximum wind gust. The Canadian zones have recently been updated to reflect the changing climate of our country.

According to the new plant hardiness map, Medicine Hat has been bumped from zone 4a to 4b, **slightly milder than before**. We can fairly safely grow plants rated for zones 0 - 4b. This isn't to say that we cannot grow plants rated for higher zones, but it requires a little creativity. Many of us are already **growing perennial plants as annuals** (like tomatoes). We can try to **overwinter tender plants indoors**, like fig or lemon trees, bringing them out after risk of frost has passed in spring. And finally, there are some parts of the city (like the SE hill), and areas within many yards, that offer more **protection from the elements** while still getting adequate sun and moisture. We can try growing zone 5 plants in these **microclimates** and they may well survive.



Source: National Resources Canada.

One additional challenge that we have here in south eastern Alberta is that our winters are not consistently cold, and when a **chinook** comes through, **plants can be damaged** as moisture is pulled away by the warm wind. The roots of these plants are unable to replace the lost moisture as the ground is still frozen. Ensuring plants are **properly watered** in late fall before the ground freezes, and protecting tender plants from wind when possible, can help to minimize winter damage.

Reference: McKenney, C. & Campbell, K. (2002). *Getting into the Zone: what does Canada's new plant hardiness zones map really mean?* Canadian Forestry Service. https://www.planthardiness.gc.ca/pdfs/Tech_Note103_E.pdf

EVENTS


PRAIRIE EXPLORERS
SUMMER PLANT WALK
SUNDAY . AUGUST 10TH
2:00 PM - 3:00 PM
Join us to explore some of the plants along Seven Persons Creek. Starting from bottom of Sholten Hill. Free to attend. Registration is required.
CALL THE NATURE CENTRE (403.529.6225) FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REGISTER!
Made possible thanks to
Land Stewardship Centre
MH INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM
Managed by the Society of Grasslands Naturalists


MH INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM
Managed by the Society of Grasslands Naturalists
prairie
Free!
Guided Nature Walk
SUNDAY AUGUST 24, 11AM
Meet at the Police Point Park Nature Centre.
Limited space, pre-registration is a must.
Email prairieprideguild@gmail.com
Join us after for hot dogs and marshmallows!

GARDEN PLANNER

COMMUNITY Food Connections ASSOCIATION

2025 ZONE 3/4

		Indoor Start Dates		Transplant Out Dates		Direct Sow Dates		Min. Soil Temp	Days to Maturity	
Vegetable	Method	Earliest	Latest	max	min	max	min	(Celsius)	min	max
Beans (bush)	DS	x	x	x	x	May 20	July 1	15	50	60
Beans (pole)	DS	x	x	x	x	May 20	July 1	15	60	70
Beans (drying)	DS	x	x	x	x	May 20	July 1	15	90	100
Beets	DS	x	x	x	x	April 22	June 24	5	50	70
Broccoli	Trans	March 11	March 25	April 29	May 6	x	x	5	60	100
Brussels Sprouts	Trans	April 8	April 22	April 29	May 6	x	x	5	100	180
Cabbage	Trans	March 11	March 25	April 22	April 22	x	x	5	70	100
Carrot	DS	x	x	x	x	April 22	June 24	10	60	80
Cauliflower	Trans	March 25	April 8	May 6	June 3	x	x	5	60	120
Celery (stalks)	Trans	February 26	March 11	May 13	June 3	x	x	5	130	140
Celery (root)	Trans	March 11	March 25	May 13	June 3	x	x	5	100	150
Corn	DS	x	x	x	x	May 27	June 24	15	70	105
Cucumber (pckl)	Trans+DS	April 22	April 29	May 27	June 3	May 27	June 17	15	55	65
Cucumber (slice)	Trans+DS	April 22	April 29	May 27	June 3	May 27	June 17	15	55	65
Eggplant	Trans	March 25	April 8	June 3	June 10	x	x	15	100	140
Kale / Collards	Trans+DS	April 8	April 22	April 22	May 13	April 22	July 29	5	55	75
Kohlrabi	Trans	April 8	April 22	April 29	May 13	x	x	5	55	70
Leeks	Trans	March 11	March 25	April 22	June 3	x	x	5	120	150
Lettuce (head)	Trans+DS	April 1	April 15	April 22	May 20	April 22	April 29	10	40	80
Lettuce (leaf)	Trans+DS	April 1	April 15	April 22	May 20	April 22	April 29	10	40	80
Melon	Trans	April 22	April 29	June 3	June 10	x	x	20	70	130
Okra	Trans	April 15	April 29	June 10	May 20	x	x	15	50	65
Onion (dry)	Trans	March 11	March 25	June 17	May 13	x	x	10	100	120
Onion (green)	Trans+DS	April 8	May 6	May 6	June 3	May 6	July 1	10	40	60
Parsnip	DS	x	x	x	x	May 6	June 3	10	110	130
Peas	DS	x	x	x	x	April 22	May 27	5	55	85
Peppers (hot)	Trans	March 11	March 25	June 3	June 17	x	x	15	80	100
Peppers (sweet)	Trans	March 11	March 25	June 3	June 17	x	x	15	60	90
Potato	DS	x	x	x	x	April 22	May 13	10	90	130
Radish	DS	x	x	x	x	April 8	June 3	5	45	70
Shallot	Trans	March 11	March 25	April 22	May 13	x	x	10	90	120
Spinach	DS	x	x	x	x	April 8	May 27	5	45	60
Squash / Pumpkin	Trans+DS	April 22	April 29	May 13	June 3	May 13	June 10	15	85	120
Swiss Chard	Trans+DS	April 8	April 22	May 20	June 3	April 22	June 24	5	50	75
Tomatillo	Trans	March 25	April 8	June 3	June 10	x	x	15	75	100
Tomato (cherry)	Trans	March 25	April 8	May 20	June 10	x	x	15	65	75
Tomato (paste)	Trans	March 25	April 8	May 20	June 10	x	x	15	70	90
Tomato (slicing)	Trans	March 25	April 8	May 20	June 10	x	x	15	80	95
Turnip	DS	x	x	x	x	April 22	June 3	5	45	70
Zucchini	Trans+DS	April 29	May 6	May 13	June 3	May 13	June 24	15	50	70

DS = Direct Sow **Trans = Transplant (start indoors or buy seedings)** **x = does not apply**

ABOUT CFCA AND GARDEN CLUB

2025 will be our 4th year offering Growing Gardeners Education Program, CFCA's free garden club. We are excited to continue to provide ecologically-responsible advice and the opportunity for gardeners of all experience levels to learn from one another in Medicine Hat. We are tremendously grateful to be able to host garden club at the Root Cellar Food & Wellness Hub, where we help to maintain the community access garden located behind the building. Follow us on social media (FB + IG) for updates about Growing Gardeners and other CFCA programs. To sign-up for our mailing list, and have this newsletter delivered straight to your inbox, email CFCAgarden@gmail.com.

Growing Gardener's is a **free, hands-on garden club** hosted by CFCA from April to September. Join us as we cover different topics for growing health, delicious food in our climate. Registration is not required. Children are welcome if accompanied by an adult.

WEDNESDAYS @ 7:00 PM (WEATHER PERMITTING)

BEHIND THE ROOT CELLAR, 440 MAPLE AVE. SE

fcss Family and Community Support Services

COMMUNITY Food Connections ASSOCIATION
FoodConnections.ca

COMMUNITY GARDENS · ROOT CELLAR ·

ABOUT COMMUNITY FOOD CONNECTIONS ASSOCIATION (CFCA)

Community Food Connections Association is a non-profit organization based in Medicine Hat, Alberta. Launched in 2003, we have been working to support food security in the community through education, programming, partnerships and policy support for improvements in food, nutrition, health and local agriculture.

Our programs include the Good Food Club, Community Kitchens, the Local Food & Producers Directory, Medicine Hat Community Gardens, and Growing Gardeners Education Program. To find out more, head over to our website, FoodConnections.ca, or social media accounts:

@COMMUNITYFOODCONNECTIONS

COMMUNITY Food Connections ASSOCIATION

@CFCA_MH + X