

Newcomers to the Bay Area quickly discover the vast differences in climate throughout the region and the gardening challenges that exist here. To help understand the different growing conditions, a number of systems have been developed to group cities with similar conditions together into climate zones. The UC division of Agriculture and Natural Resources identified three zones: A, B and C. For the Spring Garden Market, we've combined the UC zones A, B and C with color codes red, yellow and blue. We then identified the best growing zone for each plant and color coded it to match the zone color.

- A = Hot = **red**: warm-hot summers and cool winters; least coastal influence
- B = Sunny = **yellow**: transitional zone: warm sunny summers and mild winters; some coastal influence
- C = Foggy = **blue**: the coastal climate dominates with colder and foggier summers, and mild winters without frost

Spring Garden Market

When you go to the Spring Garden Market this year, find your city on the SF Bay Area Map and/or chart located inside the event center and note the color of your zone; red, yellow or blue. Next, as you choose your plants, select those with the sticker color that matches your zone color. This will ensure the best results for your garden.

Growing Tomatoes

Tomato plants love heat and grow best in warm, dry weather, ideally between 55°F and 90°F. Temperatures outside of this range interfere with the plant producing fruit. They can grow year round in warmer climates; however, in the Bay Area, tomatoes grow as annuals because they are eventually killed by the cold and frost. Our growing season usually starts in the spring, after the last frost, and goes until the fall when the first frost arrives and damages or kills the plant. These dates may vary based on the growing zone.

Ripening Season

As a general rule, tomatoes that ripen quickly are the smaller, "early to ripen" varieties such as "cherry" tomatoes, and the varieties that ripen all at the same time (determinant). These grow well in cooler climates because even though they will grow slower due to the cold, they are quick to ripen, thus increasing the odds of the fruit ripening before the season is over. The larger, "beefsteak" tomatoes ripen slowly and are better suited for the warmer climates where they will have more heat and time to fully ripen.

The more you know about your zone, your growing conditions and the plants you select, the more successful your garden will be. Please remember that each garden space may have its own conditions which create various microclimates within the same garden.