



Easy Row Covers to Protect Your Garden Beds by Summer Brasuel UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

In this time of shelter-in-place, we all have time on our hands. People who have never had the time before are now putting in gardens. Plant and seed stocks in nurseries are low and many on-line sales have been suspended due to the garden craze. People are even seeking plant starts on their social media networks. This is wonderful! Those of us "in the know" understand the positive impacts of gardening, both physical and psychological.

In many elevations in El Dorado County we have a Mother's Day rule: Do not plant until after Mother's Day, due to our inconsistent weather. Some of us, at higher elevations, have a Memorial Day rule. That said, in these unusual times most of us are breaking those rules and planting anyway. In spite of the warm days, our nights are still too cool for most young plants. One way to protect these young plants is to install row covers on hoops over our garden beds. These hoops can be installed over raised beds or in-ground beds.

PVC pipes are a good material for the hoops. UV resistant PVC is preferred as it will not become brittle from sunlight, and it is flexible. PVC with a ½" outside diameter is a good size to use. Some people use rebar, which is more expensive, and some use bamboo, but PVC is readily available and inexpensive.

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Installing the piping is pretty easy. On raised beds made of wood, you can install conduit straps to hold it in place. Choose a strap size that is larger than the outer diameter of the PVC pipe you are installing. This way the pipe can be removed at any time. If you have in-ground beds, you can drive some rebar into the ground and place the pipe over the rebar. Be sure to use a rebar that is smaller than the inside diameter of the pipe.

Once your hoops are installed you can attach your row cover material to protect your plants.

- Protect your plants from cold weather by covering your beds with plastic, or frost cloth.
- Protect your plants from a summer heat wave by covering your beds with shade cloth.
- Protect your plants from birds by covering your beds with bird netting (1/2" grid) or woven or non-woven row cover.

Binder clips (size large) are good fasteners to use for holding the material onto the hoops. They are heavy-duty and clip onto a 1/2" diameter pipe with no problem.

These easy row cover structures will help eliminate damage to plants from planting too early and extend your garden season to get the most out of your garden.

In response to Coronavirus (COVID-19) California Department of Public Health and El Dorado County Health & Human Services guidelines, all UCCE Central Sierra El Dorado and Amador County Master Gardener public events and classes are cancelled through May 31st, 2020. Check in with us on our website for updated schedules as public health guidelines change.

We realize our public classes are valued by County residents and we especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge. Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the "Ask a Master Gardener" option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We'll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. If you are looking for garden inspiration, while our garden is closed due to COVID-19, our website has pictures, plants lists and much more. [http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration Garden](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden). To sign up for notices and newsletters, see <http://ucanr.edu/master> gardener e-news.