

In the Garden

What Zone Do You Grow In?

This is an important question for everyone that gardens. The zone system of plant hardiness tells us which areas of the planet are suitable for different types of plant growth. For example, Kona on the big island of Hawaii is zone 11b. They can grow avocados but they can't grow apples. In Mill Bay, we are in the range of zone 7. We can grow apples but not avocados. The zone system has been devised to help us understand what will and won't grow in our gardens.

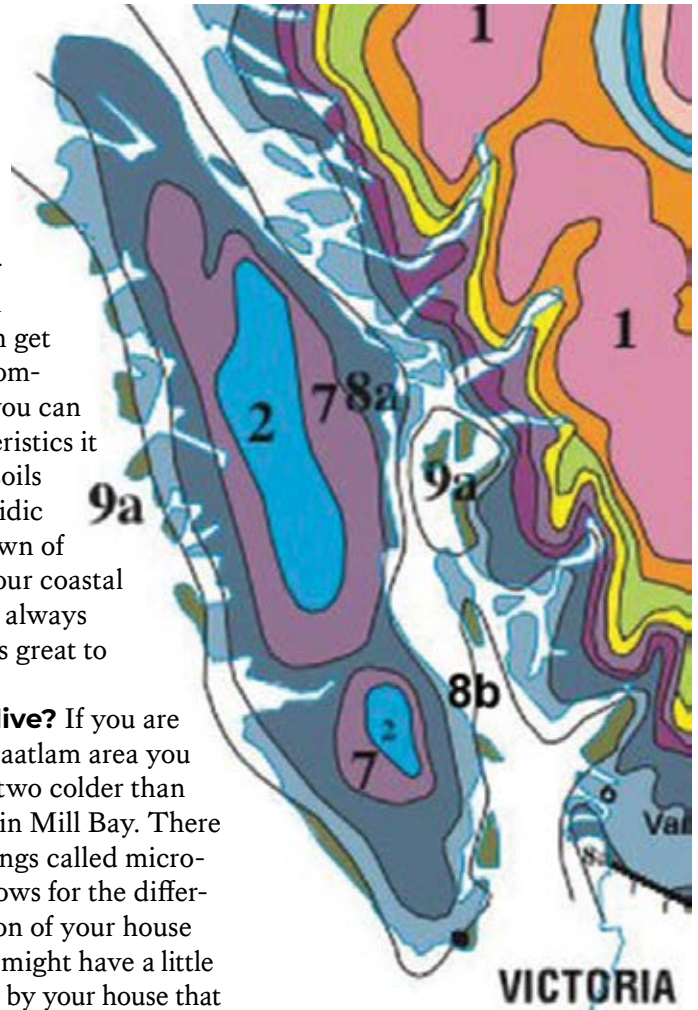
When you are buying a plant the zone listing is on the plant label. If it isn't, be sure to ask. Now, for every zone, there are subzones that are created by tree cover, altitude, soils, and other factors. One of our long time garden club members Bill Herring lives close to the sea. His soil is sandy and he has excellent light. He could be close to a zone 9a and he grows many vegetables over winter and plants very early. My garden is surrounded by mature firs and cedars. The garden soil is heavy and silty. The shade created by the trees means my soil does not warm up much and the heaviness of the soil means that plants struggle for drainage and warmth. I am about a zone 8b. If I follow Bill's example and plant peas in February they will rot and the slugs eat the poor shoots. Slugs really enjoy my garden! My neighbour Liz is less than a block away but her house has fewer trees and lighter soil. She has a warm microclimate with more light and warmth. She can't grow avocados but she can plant earlier and grow later on.

So what does this mean to you folks? Find out what zone you are in. Dig up your soil and crumble it up. *Is it sandy, silty, clay, or loam?*

If you want help, bring it to a master gardener clinic and we will look at it. You can get your soil tested commercially too so you can see what characteristics it has. Most of our soils in this area are acidic from the breakdown of humic acid from our coastal forests. There are always exceptions and it's great to know the facts.

Where do you live? If you are out towards the Saatlam area you are a full zone or two colder than Bill on the beach in Mill Bay. There are also funny things called microclimates. This allows for the difference in the position of your house might make. You might have a little hot corner created by your house that will grow a windmill palm.

Many gardeners know that a warm wall of a house can grow peaches but Bob Duncan of "Fruit Trees and More" in North Saanich can grow lemons! Bob skillfully manipulates microclimate against the south or southwest wall of his house using lights and covers to create a clever microclimate. He can grow acidic citrus: lemons and limes. If you are in a new garden or yours is not growing what you want, find out what plants survive and thrive in your area. For help come to the



Mill Bay Garden

Club meetings on the 4th Tuesday of the month at 6:45 at the Mill Bay Hall or ask at any Master Gardener clinic.

Note: In the previous article the term "cauliflorous" was intended to be "calciferous", but was unintentionally altered at some point during the editing process.

