

Colorado Master Gardener

Year Round Gardening

Getting Rosemary through a Colorado Springs Winter

Fredricka Bogardus, Colorado Master Gardener

Rosemary is an herb which is popular to grow in Colorado. It has wide culinary use, anything from marinades to bread will benefit from a sprig or two. It is a very attractive, subshrub plant which looks great in the right spot in your garden. It is a tender perennial plant, which will not survive our winters without protection.

This herb is from the Mediterranean, a region with long summers and gentle winters. *Rosemary officinalis* is described by the USDA as a zone 7 plant, other sites consider it zone 8. That means that it will probably not survive in temperatures below about 15°F. There are some cultivars described as zone 6 hardy, meaning it might survive at 0°F.

You can overwinter Rosemary indoors. My personal experience with that is that it always becomes infested with insects in winter, and I end up throwing the plant out. About a year ago I was told that it was possible to keep Rosemary alive, in the garden by putting a wall of water on the plant in late autumn. Honestly, I didn't believe it would work. However, I had 3 rosemary plants in pots and thought why not give it a try?

So last year in late summer I took the first step in a trial that I was positive would end with dead plants I moved the plants from pots, to a sunny (south facing) space near a light-colored wall. My goal was to find the microclimate in my garden that would stay the warmest, and have good drainage. The plants adapted well to the transplant, and in late October I placed a season extender on each plant. The extender looks kind of like a plastic tepee, comprised of cylinders that are filled with water. They are widely used by gardeners to plant tomatoes a few weeks earlier than our climate allows. The water in the tubes heats up during the day, then warms the plant in the colder nighttime. Tradenames for this type of season extender include Wall o' Water, Tomato Teepee, Kozy Coats, etc.



Jan 31, 2017



June 8, 2017

The plants in this new warmer environment starting growing a bit, putting new foliage on that I was sure would turn black as soon as we had a hard freeze.

The freeze came about two weeks into December, one night it went down to -6°F, I was sure the plants were gone. DEAD, DEAD, DEAD! Imagine my surprise when I looked at the now frozen solid water enclosure, and the plant still looked green.

About 2 months later in late January one of the plants bloomed! The plants survived the winter. I was able to cut sprigs of rosemary for cooking whenever the structure wasn't frozen.

One of the walls did blow down a couple of times. Refilling the walls in mid-winter was not fun, I will try to avoid repeating that. This year I will try to contrive some kind of external structure to prevent the structure from collapsing and emptying out mid- blizzard. Some kind of tomato cage will probably suffice.

This column generally tries to provide well tested scientific information. This is not that. It is one trial, in one garden, during one winter. While we had some very cold weather last year, we also had lots of warm days in between. Except for the January windstorm I would categorize the winter of 2016-17 as mild. I encourage you to give this technique a try if you are okay if your plant doesn't make it through next winter.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions by keying in ask.extension.org. any time day or night. Monday to Thursday from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. you can phone 520-7684 or emailing CSUmg2@elpasoco.com .

For current garden tips visit www.facebook.com/ColoradoMasterGardeners.EPC

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Steps to overwinter Rosemary in your garden

1. In August Relocate your plants if necessary
 - Sunny, south facing is best for winter sun
 - Well drained
 - Accessible in winter
2. The wall of water will accommodate up to about an 18 inch diameter plant. Prune back before covering if necessary.
3. In October put up, and fill the walls of water, probably late October, watch the weather and get it done prior to first drop below 30°F.
4. Consider using a tomato cage or other option for additional stability in the wind.
5. Remove the wall of water in May and watch your plant thrive. (I hope)



Join us on August 19 for our community plant swap, held at the Extension Office at 17 N. Spruce Street.

How the Plant Swap works:

1. Bring your plants to the Swap, Saturday, August 19 from 8:00 to 10:00 am for check-in.
2. At check-in, you will receive a numbered ticket admitting you to the Swap.
3. Participants will swap in the order of the numbered tickets beginning at 10:30 am.
4. Each plant accepted entitles you to one “swap”.
5. Swap begins at 10:30 am.

Guidelines

- Only perennials and houseplants will be accepted. No annuals or vegetables.
- Plants must be healthy (no bugs, diseases, etc.). No noxious weeds or invasive species.
- Labeling is encouraged and appreciated.
- Up to 20 plants per person allowed.
- No more than 5 of any single variety.

For more detailed plant guidelines check out:

<http://elpaso.extension.colostate.edu/2017-plant-swap/>