

Combat Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression in which the symptoms correspond with the seasons. Fall and winter can bring feelings of lethargy and moodiness to affected individuals. The reduction in hours of sunlight is suspected to be one factor influencing SAD. Other influences may be less time spent outdoors due to colder temperatures resulting in more isolation/less socialization.

Increasing time spent outdoors is one recommendation to reduce the symptoms of SAD. Maintaining a healthy diet and exercise are also important. Since gardening is known to be a form of physical activity, you can use this as a proactive strategy to thrive during the off-season. However, weather is a concern for plant growth this time of year as well. Fortunately, there are options for protecting cool-season crops to keep them growing through the winter.

Season extension tools provide insulation making it possible for plants to live beyond the typical growing season for the climate. Low tunnels, cold frames and even empty, plastic milk jugs are some simple options for season extenders.

Low tunnels are created by lining up rows of plastic or wire hoops to support fabric that blankets the crops. The fabric is commonly made of spun-bonded polyester or polypropylene. Thicker fabrics are used to provide protection at lower temperatures. The length and width are determined by the amount of garden space that needs to be covered. Once placed over the crop, the fabric is secured with weights around the edges or metal staples can be used. Lower growing crops such as lettuce tend not to require hoops. Instead, the fabric can be laid gently over the top of the plants. This is known as a row cover.



Photo Credit: Utah State University Extension

A cold frame, resembles a small greenhouse, and is often made of wood with framed windows. The small size makes the cold frame portable so it can be placed over winter plantings as needed. The top of the cold frame is often built at an angle to allow more light to enter when it's positioned facing the sun. The top of the cold frame should be hinged so it can be opened on mild days, otherwise the structure will quickly overheat and damage plants.

Individual plants can be protected with smaller season extenders such as hot caps or cloches.

Mental Health Monday

There are decorative options, but empty milk jugs with the bottom cut out can also be used. These are used on a small scale due to the time it takes to place and remove the containers. For lightweight season extenders such as milk jugs, it is helpful to secure the covers to the ground



Photo Credit: Michigan State University

otherwise they may easily become displaced.

Cool season crops including, but not limited to, radishes, lettuce and spinach are great options for growing beneath a season extender. While taking steps to improve well-being by increasing physical activity and spending more time outdoors are beneficial, please seek professional help for diagnosis and treatment if you believe you are suffering from SAD.



Photo Credit: Utah State University

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