**TAYLORSVILLE CITY – MARCH 2008 – TREE OF THE MONTH - THE GREAT ZONE DEBATE**

What is your zone? Chances are you already know your United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) hardiness zone. Different parts of the world have different climates, which make a big difference in annual, perennial, shrub, and tree gardening. Some plants can grow where other simply can't. Some plants prefer colder temps, while others thrive in dry heat. Some plants need desert-like conditions to grow successfully, and other plants need a freeze and gradual warm-up to complete their growth cycle.

The idea of cold hardiness zones started in the 1920s, but it wasn't until 1960, when the USDA official introduced the first USDA cold hardiness zone map. Arnold Arboretum also started a cold hardiness map in 1938 and updated the map in 1978. The USDA created zone hardiness map which assigns each area of the country a hardiness zone. An area's zone is dependent on the average minimum temperature the area sees in a typical winter. The colder the average winter temperature is, the lower the zone number the area is assigned. The hotter an area is, the higher their zone number will be.

What does this have to do with gardening? It is important to know what zone you live in. Your zone determines the difference between a certain plant being sold as a perennial (will come back year after year) or annual (only last a year) in your area. For example, plants that come back year after year in southern Texas are often sold as annual "patio plants" in northern Minnesota.

How do I know what zone my plant is for? The majority of plants are sold with an informational tag attached. One of the items listed on this tag is often what zone the plant is "hardy to". This means the coldest temp (or lowest numbered zone) that the plant can survive in. Be sure to check these tags, as many plants are sold in areas that are not necessarily appropriate for it to be grown as an annual, perennial, shrub or tree. You can buy any kind of plant to grow in your garden, but only plants that are hardy within your zone will perform as perennials.

How strictly do you have to adhere to zones? As previously stated, plants purchased from a nursery will have an informational tag. This tag will generally state what zone the plant is "hardy to". These tags are truthful and should be followed. However that is not to say that living in a zone three means you will never be able to grow a plant hardy to zone five. Many people have done this with success by planting these more fragile plants closer to their house, mulching in the fall/winter, and giving extra TLC. There is no guarantee though, only experimentation.

Regardless of what zone you live in, if you get an unusually hard freeze, you may lose your plants. Zones are determined by average temperatures, and temperatures outside of normal that last for an extended amount of time may shorten the life of your plants. Below is a list of zones and what temperatures are included in it. By averaging your minimum winter temperatures, you can determine what zone your area lies in. Temperatures listed are the lowest average temp in that zone. (Zone 1: Below -50 F), (Zone 2: -50 F to -40 F), (Zone 3: -40 F to -30 F), (Zone 5: -30 F to -20 F), (Zone 6: -10 F to 0 F), (Zone 7: 0 F to 10 F), (Zone 8: 10 F to 20 F), (Zone 9: 20 F to 30 F), (Zone 10: 30 F to 40 F), and (Zone 11: Above 40 F)

The Arnold map slowly disappeared from the gardening scene in the 1990's with concern of changing growing conditions and global warming. The USDA hardiness zone map was updated in 1974, 1985, 1990 and 2006. The 2006 updated map is based on changes observed based on weather data for the last 15 years. Most areas of the United States are one zone warmer than they were 15 years ago.

Salt Lake County is located in a heat island, like many large urban areas carry a warmer zone designation that the surrounding countryside, like Phoenix. Salt Lake County is also one zone warmer that the rest of the Wasatch Front. Elevation differences can make areas warmer or cooler than the surrounding area and are giver a different zone designation. The USDA new hardiness zone map for Taylorsville is rated to be zone 7a, the new 2006, the United States National Arboretum new hardiness map that puts Taylorsville into zone 7a. Other US cities with a 7a cold hardiness designation are Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and South Boston, Virginia.

In any case cold hardiness is only one factor to consider when designing your landscape and selection of plants. Moisture, light, altitude, snow cover, frost date and summer heat are a few of the other factors that you should consider when purchasing plants.

Perennial, shrub and tree gardening is easiest when the zone maps are followed. Ensure successful growth by learning what zone you live in and what plants grow best in your area. By making use of the zone maps, your gardens will be more productive. Happy gardening! Thoreau wrote nothing is as beautiful as a tree.

## USDA

## Hardiness Zones for Utah