



Sustainability and Recycling

Grow Local, Grow Smart: Your Guide to Gardening in Helena's Climate

In Helena, gardening is a bit like high-stakes poker with Mother Nature. Between the short growing season and our semi-arid climate, planning your garden is essential to a bountiful harvest! Here is your quick start guide to this year's growing season.

Know Your Numbers: Zones and Frost

In Helena, we generally fall into USDA Hardiness Zones 4b or 5a, depending on your elevation. The average last frost is on May 15th (though many wait until the Memorial Day weekend to plant heat-loving or more tender plants, such as peppers). The first frost typically occurs on September 25th, leaving us with roughly 130 days of prime growing.

Choose "Helena-Hardy" Crops

Don't fight the climate—work with it! Choose crops suited to cool nights, hot days, and windy conditions. Select varieties labeled "early," "cool-season," or "short-season" for best results. Here are some plants that thrive in our area:

- **Tomatoes** (choose quick-maturing types): Early Girl, Stupice, Glacier
- **Greens** (tolerate cool weather): Buttercrunch Lettuce, Red Russian Kale
- **Roots** (grow well in Helena's soil): Danvers Carrots, Detroit Dark Beets.
- **Squash** (fast to mature): Black Beauty Zucchini, Waltham Butternut.

Wind and Water Considerations

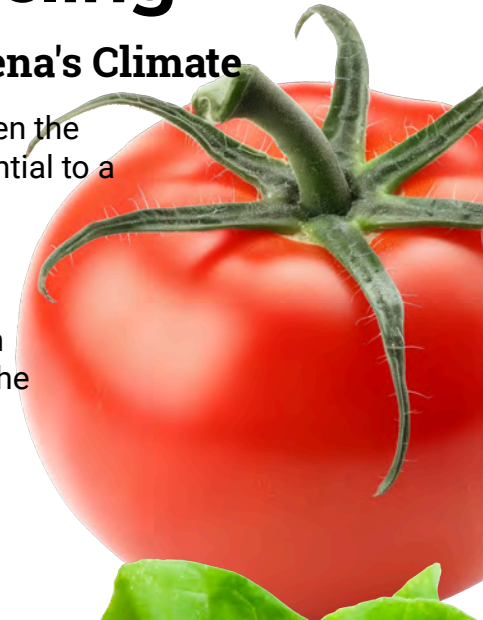
Helena's wind can quickly damage seedlings, so use a windbreak. If you lack a fence, plant a living windbreak—like sunflowers or peas—upwind of delicate crops.

In our low-humidity climate, mulch is non-negotiable. Apply a thick layer of straw, wood chips, or herbicide-free grass clippings to keep moisture right at the roots. This simple mulching step not only retains moisture but also helps you conserve water, reducing how frequently you'll need to irrigate.

March Checklist:

- Sterilize your seed trays with a 1:9 bleach-to-water solution.
- Sketch your garden and rotate crops from last year.
- Check your stash of "frost blankets" or old bedsheets for those inevitable late-spring cold snaps.
- Don't forget to get your compost from the Lewis & Clark Co. Landfill! Call 406-457-8521 to arrange pickup. Finished compost, when available, is \$60 per ton, with a half-ton minimum.

As you've seen in previous newsletters, gardening is a great way to create a sustainable community, reduce shipping emissions, and keep it "local." Happy planting!





Right Around the Corner: Eco-Friendly Construction and DIY Season

Mother Nature's mood swings might have you swapping snow boots for sneakers twice in the same week, but rest assured, spring is near, and along with it come those long-awaited construction and DIY projects. Maybe you've been staring at a leaky faucet since January or dreaming of a backyard pergola for those upcoming summer BBQs. Before heading to the big-box home improvement store for materials and supplies, there's a smarter, more sustainable way to gear up for the spring thaw: local thrifting.

The costs of raw materials, new fixtures, and supplies can skyrocket quickly. By sourcing materials second-hand, you're not just saving a significant amount of money—you're participating in an eco-friendly "circular economy" that keeps high-quality materials out of the landfill.

Why Thrift Your Project?

Cost Savings: High-end items such as solid-wood doors, designer lighting fixtures, and cabinetry are often available at 50–70% less than retail prices.

Superior Quality: Older "salvaged" wood often comes from old-growth trees, making it denser, stronger, and more durable than the quick-growth lumber sold today.

Eco-Impact: Construction and demolition debris account for a massive portion of landfill waste. Reusing a single door or window saves the energy required to manufacture a new one and prevents the old one from taking up expensive landfill space.

The Construction Thrifting Checklist

You might be surprised at what you can find at thrift stores, reuse-it centers, and online community marketplaces. Here are the best items to hunt for:

- **Fixtures:** Sinks, faucets, showerheads, vanities, and mirrors.
- **Hardware/Tools:** Draw pulls, door handles, hinges, boxes of unused nails and screws, electrical outlet covers, hammers, saws, power drills, and shop vacs.
- **Building materials:** Unused lumber, windows, partial boxes of unused tile, bricks, and occasionally bumping into what seasoned thrifters call "the unicorn" - antique or vintage items such as pocket doors, retro kitchen cabinets, or a pile of reclaimed barn wood!
- **Paint and Stains:** Pick up free paints and stains from the bi-annual City of Helena Paint Exchange held at the Transfer Station every April and October or find your perfect color at a reuse-it store, or the "oops" paint section offered by most major paint retailers.





On the Flip Side: Savvy Demolition Tips

If you are the one doing the demolition, garage clean out, or renovation, try the 'gentle demo' approach to help keep materials and items functional and visually appealing. Donate usable items and materials to local thrift or reuse stores (don't forget to ask if a tax-deductible receipt can be provided).

Following these simple steps diverts unnecessary items from filling up the landfill, builds momentum in our quickly growing local circular economy, and allows the item to continue serving its purpose or be repurposed in its new home for years to come.

A Campaign to Protect Water Quality and Solve America's Ocean Pollution

The 2026 Wyland National Mayor's Water Challenge is upon us! For the last 16 years, the Wyland Foundation has put out a call to action, encouraging communities across the country to band together to protect water quality, reduce waste, and build resilience in local water systems. Once again, the City of Helena is participating in this friendly competition among cities nationwide, held every April. The challenge is meant to inspire action around water conservation, efficiency, and sustainability of water-based ecosystems.

- The average faucet flow rate is two gallons per minute. Turning off the faucet while brushing your teeth can save up to eight gallons of water per day.
- A running toilet can waste up to 200 gallons of water per day.
- A faucet leaking at one drip per second can waste over 3,000 gallons per year.

That's why we, as residents of Helena, need to do our part to conserve water and energy. Be part of the National Mayor's Challenge for Water Conservation and make your pledge to reduce your water consumption at www.mywaterpledge.com.

Did you know?

- As of 2015, the total water usage in the United States was approximately 322 billion gallons of water per day.
- In the United States, the average American uses about 82 gallons of water per day at home.
- In Europe, households use an average of 144 liters (about 38 gallons) per person per day.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, residents use significantly less, averaging five gallons per day.

If our city has the highest percentage of participating residents taking the pledge, we will all be entered to win great prizes, like \$3,000 toward your home utility payments, home improvement store gift cards, and more. We are all in this together!

Helena Water Usage: December 2025 - February 2026

City of Helena water usage comparison in millions of gallons. Differences between treatment plant outputs are typically due to maintenance or the need to utilize additional water sources as natural water flow fluctuates throughout the year.		Ten Mile	Eureka	Missouri River	Monthly Total	Peak Day Demand	Average Day
	December	83.1	19.1	1.8	104	3.6	3.4
	January	89.8	18.8	0	108.6	4.6	3.5
	February	80.8	15.6	0	96.4	3.6	3.4



Clear Out the Clutter Safely: Recycling & Reusing Household Hazardous Waste

Do you have chemicals taking up space that you need to clear out, but don't know what to do with? We have the answers for you!

While the City of Helena is not planning to host a household hazardous waste collection soon, we do have outlet suggestions for reusing or recycling most things. Here are a few examples:

Paint: Good, usable paint can be brought to the Transfer Station during the Spring or Fall Latex Paint Exchange for others to use, or check with local shelters to see if they are accepting paint donations.

Pesticides and Herbicides: Most lawn care and landscaping businesses are happy to take these chemicals off your hands for reuse.

Cleaning Products: These can be donated to local shelters (human and/or animal).

Used Motor Oil/Antifreeze: These can be recycled at the Transfer Station in the designated Recycling area.

We understand that not everything can be recycled or reused, but let's do our best to keep harmful chemicals out of our landfill! If you have questions about disposal or reuse, please reach out to the Transfer Station for direction.



Transfer Station Hours

Open daily, 8 a.m. - 4:15 p.m.
Vehicles must be unloaded and out of the facility by 4:30 p.m.

Want to see more from us?

Go to
www.helenamt.gov/Departments/Public-Works/Sustainability
to sign up for our monthly newsletter.

