

Opinion: Dramatic changes in planting zones

By Ari LeVaux, High Country News

This is the time of year to think about planting trees. It's a powerful, important and often a genuinely fruitful thing to do. Planting a tree is also a long-term commitment. It requires a deep look into the future, and given the way the climate is shifting around us, it's like aiming at a moving target you can't even see.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's plant-hardiness zone boundaries are marching steadily northward, as can be seen on a map loop. In the 15 years since my friend Tom McCamant planted his peach orchard in northwest Montana, his land has been reclassified from Zone 5b to 6a.

It wasn't long ago that if you wanted to grow peppers here in Montana, you had to plant them in a greenhouse. Now we get outdoor peppers every year. Ranchers who used to get two cuttings of alfalfa are now getting three. Pasta makers are already looking northward, in search of the next hot spot for the best durum wheat. Some wine grape growers are preparing to move north as well.

[Read the whole story](#)