

### 3.1 Plant hardiness zones

Plant hardiness is the ability of a plant to withstand year-round climatic conditions. Hardiness zones are geographically defined areas in which plants are capable of growing. This allows for a quick and simple assessment to be made as to whether the particular plant is site appropriate and what its lifespan is likely to be [\[1, 2, 3\]](#).

Hardiness ratings were developed by various countries to provide a system to classify the zones. There are many different hardiness rating systems, which are in part determined by location and climatic conditions. There is no standard system and this is where it becomes confusing. The USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) system is most widely used and is based on average annual minimum winter temperature. Several other systems are also based on the USDA system [\[4\]](#). Using a system developed for use in North America can be misleading when applying it to Europe. The weather in Europe is variable and unpredictable due to the relatively close proximity of the Alps and the Atlantic Ocean. The RHS system (Royal Horticultural Society, UK) is based on the UK minimum winter temperatures and temperature swings (especially during spring and autumn) and provides a description [\[5\]](#). Having knowledge of the systems, their deficiencies and climate classifications, is an additional tool to be used when choosing plants.

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