



## Edible Gardening

Many fruits and vegetables are easy to grow in the Puget Sound area and guidance is widely available. Several vegetable- and fruit-related WSU publications are listed in our tip sheet #2 "Gardening Publications", available at our King County Extension website, [www.kingcountymg.org](http://www.kingcountymg.org).

### Demonstration Gardens

The Master Gardeners of King County maintain 12 **Demonstration, Youth or Outreach gardens**. Many of these feature vegetable and fruit growing. Harvests are normally donated to local food banks. Visit us during the growing season to get ideas of what to grow and best techniques. A list of our gardens, including descriptions is available at:

[extension.wsu.edu/king/gardening/demonstration-gardens-in-king-county](http://extension.wsu.edu/king/gardening/demonstration-gardens-in-king-county)

Local organizations, including those that focus on **fruit gardening** include the Western Washington Fruit Research Foundation, [NWfruit.org](http://NWfruit.org), who teams with **WSU Mount Vernon**, [MtVernon.wsu.edu](http://MtVernon.wsu.edu). Their fruit demonstration garden in Mount Vernon, north of Seattle, is open to the public daily, dawn to dusk.

**Tilth Alliance** (formerly known as Seattle Tilth) operates several urban gardens in the Seattle area. More information is available at their website: [tilthalliance.org](http://tilthalliance.org)

### Frost Dates

Seed packets often cite "frost date" in advising when to plant vegetables and flowers in the spring, so it helps to know that date for your specific location. Fall frost dates are useful for harvesting some vegetables and deciding when to move tender perennials inside. Frost dates vary by location in Puget Sound and are influenced by proximity to bodies of water, elevation, proximity to urban areas and other factors. **WSU weather stations** in Seattle (at the UW Center for Urban Horticulture), Woodinville (21 Acres), and Puyallup have recorded the following frost-date ranges since 2012:

Location	Last Spring Frost	First Fall Frost	Avg Frost Free Days
Seattle	As early as Feb 23; as late as March 30	As early as Oct 25; as late as Dec 6	240
Woodinville	As early as March 18; as late as May 1	As early as Oct 1; as late as Nov 16	195
Puyallup	As early as March 8; as late as April 23	As early as Oct 1; as late as Nov 18	202

This and more weather data are available at WSU website: [weather.wsu.edu](http://weather.wsu.edu) Station-specific data includes soil temperature, another important consideration in planting time, especially for heat-loving crops such as tomatoes and peppers.

## **Extend the Season**

With our mild climate in Puget Sound, it is possible to circumvent frost dates and inclement weather and grow edibles year-round with the use of season-extending devices such as cloches, cold frames and other techniques. Two useful books on this topic by Pacific Northwest authors are: *Cool Season Gardener: Extend the Harvest, Plan Ahead, and Grow Vegetables Year-Round* by Bill Thorness (2013) and *Winter Gardening in the Maritime Northwest: Cool Season Crops for the Year-Round Gardener* by Binda Colebrook (2012), available at regional bookstores and libraries. Even without the use of season extenders, crops such as carrots, beets, salad greens and kale can be planted in midsummer to harvest in fall and winter.

Another good reference for year-round gardening is Tilth Alliance's "Maritime Northwest Garden Guide" (2014), available to order at their website [tilthalliance.org](http://tilthalliance.org)

## **Location, Location, Location**

There are four important things to consider when deciding where to plant: sun, soil, water, and access. Most vegetable crops need 5 to 6 hours of direct sunlight a day. Soil can generally be improved but consider having your soil tested so you'll know better what amendments to add. Free soil testing is available to most King County residents through the King Conservation District: [kingcd.org/programs/better-soils/healthy-soil](http://kingcd.org/programs/better-soils/healthy-soil) Watering is key so you'll want a watering spigot nearby or adequate hoses to reach. You'll want to be able to easily access your garden so tending and harvesting is less of a chore.

## **Seeds or Starts?**

It depends. Starting with seeds has many advantages: You'll find a far more extensive choice of varieties. Some plants such as root crops don't transplant well and must be started from seed in the garden. It can also be cheaper to start from seed. However, many gardeners find that buying starts of warm season plants such as tomatoes, peppers and eggplant makes more sense because seeds of those plants need to be started indoors with adequate light and warmth. Also, a gardener is likely to use up an entire packet of lettuce in one season but unlikely to need an entire packet of tomato seeds.

## **Local Plant Sales and Nurseries**

Each spring, several of our demonstration gardens, as well as other local organizations host plant sales that include vegetable starts.

Farmers markets often sell vegetable plant starts; Seattle location listings can be found at: [seattlefarmersmarkets.org](http://seattlefarmersmarkets.org). A broader listing can be found at [wafarmersmarkets.org](http://wafarmersmarkets.org)

Local nurseries throughout Puget Sound are a great resource for edibles gardening, from seeds to plant starts, season extenders to gardening advice.

*Additional Master Gardener Tip Sheets, including "Gardening Websites" and "Gardening Publications" are available at [kingcountymg.org](http://kingcountymg.org) Also see WSU's "Gardening in Washington State" at [mastergardener.wsu.edu/resources/gardening-in-washington-state](http://mastergardener.wsu.edu/resources/gardening-in-washington-state) and free downloads of WSU gardening publications at [pubs.extension.wsu.edu](http://pubs.extension.wsu.edu)*