



Community Gardening By Marie Swanson

Imagine taking home fresh tomatoes, lettuce, beets, peas and carrots that you grew yourself. If you are new to growing, lack garden space or have not gardened in a while consider joining a community garden. It is amazing what you can learn to grow.

A community garden is a local place where people gather to grow food. People can grow fruit, vegetables, herbs and flowers. The community garden can be one plot or several individual plots. The land can be flat or have raised beds. Community gardens are located in rural and urban areas. These locations can be at parks, schools, retirement homes, open fields, yards or church. Community gardens are usually maintained and managed by a group of volunteers and led by an experienced gardener. Often a small fee is required to cover water, seeds and soil.

“How do I begin my own garden?” As a new grower joining a community garden gives you the opportunity to try before starting at home. Learning from an experienced gardener will give you a head start and save money. Determining the best location for a garden is important, too much shade will hinder many vegetables, too much sun will scorch delicate herbs. Before you spend money on seeds and plants, learn about your plant hardiness zone, Mason County is in zone 8b. Tomatoes benefit from 6-8 hours of sun while mustard greens and arugula like partial sun of 3-6 hours. Oregano, parsley and cilantro like cool, shady weather.

Lack of space can also be a challenge. Community gardens can easily provide accessible growing space. A large 4' x 12' individual garden plot can produce an abundance of lettuce and kale, enough to share with the entire neighborhood. A smaller 4' x 8' plot will grow enough carrots, peas and spinach for your family. Some community gardens have “stock tanks.” These are barrel shaped containers to use in a small area that can grow sufficient amounts of herbs, fruit or vegetables.

Getting back into gardening can take encouragement. The community garden can fulfill the need to contribute. Being active with other citizens in a shared area for a common purpose brings people together. Fresh air, sunshine and getting our hands dirty again can be beneficial for our health.

Starting in April WSU Master Gardeners will open the Catalyst Park Demonstration Garden to community members who want to learn best gardening practices. You will be able to learn and observe different growing methods in action from types of soils, when to plant, plant pollination, watering, fertilizing and harvesting. Once a month there will be an educational workshop. For more information contact Kendall Carman at email: kendall.carman@wsu.edu or call 360-427-9670 ext. 682.

Marie Swanson is a WSU Mason County Master Gardener and Master Gardener Foundation member. Marie volunteers on the Plant Clinic, Catalyst Park and Plant sale committees. Marie and DeeAnn Kline lead the Community Garden Bed program.

Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension Office. Reasonable accommodations will be made for persons with disabilities and special needs who contact Kendall Carman at 3030 N 4th St. Shelton, WA 98584, (360)427-9670 ext. 682, kendall.carman@wsu.edu at least two weeks prior to the event.