

Slug: Ask the Master Gardener
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Gardening in Skagit County in January is sometimes challenging. The main thing is to change one's mind set. **There are gardening chores to be done in January!** They just might not be done in the garden itself. Start thinking about the garden and how beautiful it will look this spring, summer and fall. There are always preparations to be made. Although the rainy, windy days can become dreary, talking about gardening in Skagit County in January is not like talking about snowshoeing in Phoenix in July.

Garden tools might need to be cleaned, sharpened and oiled. Frequently, the time available or the conditions at the time do not allow cleaning of tools at the time they are put away. Clean them now. Service lawn mowers and other garden machinery. Now would be a good time to clean and sterilize pots and trays.

One of the chores that can usually be done in January is some pruning. It is a particularly good time for fruit trees, while roses should be put off for a month or two. It is not good to stimulate rose plants when future danger of frost remains. Pruning fruit trees is another matter, and if trees have not repaired from damage by last month's wind, it is time to do so. When conditions are not too cold or too blustery, try to get the pruning tools out of storage and into action. It is even better to have a well-trained grandson or granddaughter to do it. If information is needed on how to do pruning there are some fine publications available. Look at WSU Extension Publications: Pruning Trees (EB1619) and Training and Pruning Your Home Orchard (PNW0400). Another publication that is very helpful is Pruning & Training Plants, A Complete Guide by David Joyce and Christopher Brickell.

January is a really good time to do garden planning, and in particular, vegetable gardens. Site the vegetable garden in as sunny an area as possible. Raised beds would help. Get seed catalogues and order veggies that do well in our area and have been taste tested. There are many. Trellis some of the climbing varieties to make more room. Plant the early plants in one area and sow successive crops after harvest. Good planning will allow harvesting from spring to fall.

Finally, do not forget the Northwest Flower & Garden Show in Seattle (website: <http://www.gardenshow.com/seattle/index/index.asp>) next month! It starts on Valentine's Day and continues through the following Sunday. There will be many, many displays to inspire garden work this year. With good planning this month, you will be able to research the materials to carry them out and find new ideas to supplement your plans.

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Extension, 306 S. First Street, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.
