

Growing Veggies!

By Valerie Jean Rose

April 8, 2011

"No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden...But though an old man, I am but a young gardener." – Thomas Jefferson



Growing food in yards, containers and community gardens

We're all young gardeners, really - there's always lots to learn and share. From the Eat Your Yard series at the Anacortes Library to work parties at many of Skagit County's community gardens, it's the season for planting ideas and growing knowledge. Next Tuesday, the WSU Skagit Master Gardeners' Know & Grow workshop focuses on Successful Vegetable Gardening in Skagit Valley (see details in InfoBox.) You can also visit one of our weekly Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinics (see details in InfoBox.) For timely garden advice on-line, you can "Like" the Skagit County Master Gardener's Facebook page by typing WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners in the Search box at the top of the Facebook page.

If you visit the WSU Discovery Garden on Tuesday mornings from 9am until noon, you'll find Master Gardeners working on flower and vegetable beds, compost piles and other projects. Explore the gardens, ask questions, and find inspiration to take home and put into practice in your own yard.

BUT I DON'T HAVE A YARD, OR EVEN A FOOT OF GROUND

All you need for growing tomatoes and salad greens is a sunny spot and a big container. A patio, porch, even a wide stair or windowsill will do, as long as it gets at least eight hours of sun on our lovely sunny days. Look for vegetable varieties that do well in containers. Try planting edible flowers like nasturtiums, with sturdy greens like chard or kale. You can garden in anything from expensive ceramic urns and specially designed plastic boxes to a five-gallon bucket or an old wheelbarrow. Just make sure there are small holes in the bottom for drainage. Use a potting soil that contains coco-coir. This coconut hull fiber is a good alternative to peat moss, which is mined more quickly than it regrows.

You can also grow upwards, using a planter connected to a trellis. Beans, peas or cucumbers will happily climb a trellis, or wrap around strings that are securely attached to a cross piece, or even a wall.

CULTIVATING COMMUNITY WHILE GROWING GROCERIES

Community gardens are sprouting up all over Skagit County. From Anacortes to Concrete, a growing number of gardens are now available. Some have individual raised beds for rent, others are organized so everyone works together growing food for local foodbanks. Fresh produce is usually in short supply for hungry people, so donations of fresh fruits and vegetables are crucial. For an inspiring list of community gardens in your area, visit the Anacortes Community Garden website at:

<http://anacortescommunitygardens.org/resources/skagit-co-gardens.html>

I'm tending veggie beds in my yard and having a great time meeting people in my neighborhood community garden – hopefully you will too.



Jason Miller, editor emeritus of this column, holds a sign during the First Bloom planting party while volunteers plant vegetables in Concrete's fledgling Angele Cupples Community Garden. Miller said the garden grew from the town's *Imagine Concrete* visioning initiative, which won a Municipal Excellence Award from the Association of Washington Cities in June 2010. **Photo courtesy Frank Knight.**

You can share your home garden with the neighbors – the view if not the produce. If your front yard gets good sun, and is protected from reckless runners and dog droppings, it's a great place to grow food and flowers while meeting people. I met my dear friend Habib after he stopped by to say he was tempted to steal some of my tomatoes! Once we became friends I happily shared my garden bounty with his family. Plant a front-yard garden and you can grow friendship and community along with delicious veggies.

USE LESS PLASTIC: MAKE PLANT POTS FROM NEWSPAPER

Another friend told me about an ingenious way to reduce plastic waste and make my own very inexpensive pots for young plant starts. This is a “Do It Yourself” recipe from Organic Gardening magazine. Take a sheet of black-and-white newspaper, lay a 1¼ - inch-diameter dowel along one edge. Roll the paper once around the dowel, then dab small amount of flour-and-water paste on the rolled paper.

Continue rolling the dowel. Stop when there’s only 3 inches of paper left un-rolled. Apply paste on this flap in a zigzag pattern; then finish rolling. Remove the dowel and you have a paper tube. Allow this to dry overnight. Cut the dry tube into 3-inch lengths.



Garlic, like other bulbs planted in the fall, start growing in earnest during the cool Northwest spring weather. **Photo by Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald.**

To sow seeds stand the open-ended cylinders upright inside a planting tray or flat. Fill each with seed-starting mix; then plant your seeds.

Once the air and soil are warm enough for this particular variety of plant, transplant the pots into the soil. The paper will decompose, and the plant roots will not be damaged by being pried out of a plastic pot. When planting, be sure to cover all of the paper pot with soil, so the paper doesn’t wick moisture away from seedling roots.

Whether you grow in a community garden, a five-gallon bucket or an acre of rich land out on the Skagit flats, be sure to nourish the soil with good compost, and plant flowers for beneficial insects. After all, a garden is a partnership between earth air, water, soil life, insects, plants and humans. If we nourish everyone in the food web, we will also be fed.

Know & Grow Workshop

Topic: Successful Vegetable Gardening in Skagit Valley.
When: Tuesday, April 12, 2011
Time: 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM
Where: WSU Mount Vernon Northwestern Research & Extension Center
16650 State Route 536 (Memorial Highway)
Presented by: Local WSU Master Gardeners and Julianne Ash
More Info: 360-428-4720, ext. 0 or http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG/upcoming_events.htm

Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinics

Master Gardeners answer questions on home gardening issues, along with plant, weed & insect identification. These clinics are offered in two locations.

Burlington Location

When: Wednesdays 10 AM – 2 PM
Where: WSU Skagit County Extension
11768 Westar Lane, Suite A

Anacortes Location

When: Thursdays 9 AM – Noon
Where: Anacortes Senior Center
1701 – 22nd Street

For more information:

Call (360) 428-4270, ext. 0 or go online to <http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG/clinic.htm>

WSU Discovery Garden

This interesting and multifaceted garden is open to the public from dawn to dusk, seven days a week. Located at WSU Mount Vernon Northwestern Research & Extension Center, 16650 State Route 536 (Memorial Highway). For more information call (360) 428-4270, ext. 0 or go online at <http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG/discovery-gardens.htm>

RESOURCES:

- Home Gardens, WSU Extension Bulletin EB0422, <http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb0422/eb0422.pdf>
- Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades, 6th Edition, by Steve Solomon, Sasquatch Books, Seattle
- Making Newspaper Seedling Pots, www.organicgardening.com/paperpots
- List of community gardens in Skagit County: www.cityofanacortes.org/parks/CommunityGarden/index.htm