

WSU Skagit County Extension Plant Clinics

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By Jane Billinghamurst



Bring your garden's mysteries to Master Gardener plant clinics.

Through its Master Gardener program, WSU Skagit County Extension trains volunteers in environmentally sound gardening practices, and your Skagit County Master Gardeners are here as a resource if you have plant-related questions.

If you're looking for plant inspiration, you can stroll through the 23 themed gardens at the Discovery Garden at 16650 State Route 536 (Memorial Highway), which is maintained solely through the efforts of the Master Gardener volunteers. Enjoy a Japanese-style garden, a shade garden, a water-wise garden, a native plant garden, and become familiar with plants that thrive in this area.

If you're looking for solutions to plant problems, the Master Gardener plant clinics are the place to be. Perhaps you have been out and about admiring your garden and noticed that all is not well. Are leaves failing to unfurl, buds remaining stubbornly closed, or strange spots appearing where strange spots have no place to be? For just such occurrences, the Master Gardeners staff plant clinics where you can bring in suspicious-looking materials. Using microscopes and a library of reference materials, Master Gardeners track down the source of the problem and offer advice on the least invasive methods to set things to rights.

There are many reasons your plant may not be thriving. Perhaps it is a tender specimen homesick for warmer climes, or it might just prefer a sunnier or shadier location in your yard. With some soil amendment and a different watering regimen, it might perk right up. Stressed plants are more susceptible to insect attack and disease. A virus or a fungus might have settled in, or small insects might be emerging to feast. The solution could be as simple as picking off the damaged leaves, instituting good winter cleanup practices, or using a handheld sprinkler to wash bugs off leaves.



Skagit County Master Gardeners are trained through WSU Extension. Research scientist Dr. Lindsey du Toit discusses a sample of English ivy with Master Gardener Diana Wisen.
Photo by Bobbi Gustafson



Plant problem diagnosis is part of Master Gardener training. Master Gardener interns Patricia Young, Susan Park, and Pat Hoover use a magnifying loop to examine a conifer.
Photo by Bobbi Gustafson

The Master Gardener volunteers do their detective work by asking you lots of questions about your plant, where and when it was planted, and what attention it gets. And, of course, by examining an example of the damage you have observed. The more clues you can provide, the better able they are to come to a final diagnosis. The clinic form on the web site (www.skagit.wsu.edu/MG/clinics.htm) lists important questions. You can save time by printing it out and filling it in before you visit.

So what should you bring in?

- For vegetables, bulbs, and annuals, bring in the entire plant, including roots.
- For shrubs and trees, bring in both healthy and affected tissues, and include a specimen that shows the margin between healthy and diseased tissues.
- Do not bring in any plant specimens that are completely dead.
- For turf grass, bring in four-inch squares, including roots and soil, and include a sample from the edge of affected area. For best results, bring in samples representing healthy, slightly affected, and severely affected areas of lawn.
- Plants or weeds you'd like identified must be alive, fresh, and undamaged. Include leaves, buds, stems, flowers, roots, and fruits/seeds or as many of these features as possible.
- Butterflies, moths, and bees should be preserved by freezing. Do not submerge in alcohol as this will damage many key features used in identification of these insects.
- All other specimens (including spiders, mites, and ticks) should be preserved in 70% ethyl alcohol (rubbing alcohol is okay), preferably in a clear vial or other glass container.



WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners Janine Smiley (left) and Virgene Link employ a microscope in July 2009 in their investigation of an apple ailment. Photo by Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald

Do not mail in live insects or bring in badly damaged specimens.

The Discovery Garden and plant clinics are free community services, and Master Gardener volunteers look forward to helping you with your plant-related questions.

Clinics with WSU Master Gardeners

Something buggin' ya?

Collect the pest or plant sample, bring it to one of the plant clinics and talk to a WSU Skagit County Master Gardener:

Anacortes

- 9 a.m. to 12 noon, Thursdays, April through September
- Anacortes Senior Activity Center, 1701 - 22nd Street

Burlington

- 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Wednesdays, April through October
- WSU Extension Office, 11768 Westar Lane, Suite A, Burlington
- 360-428-4270, dial 0 on clinic days or 228 to leave a message

Unable to visit during clinic hours? Drop off samples at the WSU Skagit County Extension office 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Master Gardener volunteers will get back to you by telephone or email. Clinic forms to accompany samples can be downloaded from www.skagit.wsu.edu/MG/clinics.htm.



This Silver-Spotted Tiger Moth is part of the Master Gardener insect collection, created by entomologist Dr. Lloyd Eighme and used for insect identification.

Photo courtesy Skagit County Extension

Jane Billingham is a WSU Skagit County Extension certified Master Gardener. Questions may be submitted to the WSU Extension office, 11768 Westar Lane, Suite A, Burlington, WA 98233. 360-428-4270. Except for the Program Coordinator, all MG programs are funded through the efforts of volunteers. Donations to the program are gratefully accepted and can be made through the non-profit Skagit County Master Gardener Foundation (SCMGF), P.O. Box 2801, Mount Vernon, WA 98273.