

MG Plant Fair

By Valerie Jean Rose

April 29, 2011



Visit the Master Gardener Plant Fair: find everything you need for your garden

Well, it's that time of year again—time to get out into the garden and plant. Soils are warming up and drying out and we're all itching to get growing. You will have a chance to peruse a wide selection of well-priced plants at the Skagit County Master Gardener Plant Fair on May 7 at the Skagit County Fairgrounds in Mount Vernon. The event starts at 8:00 am, so come early for the best selection.

Skagit County Master Gardeners began preparing for the Plant Fair last fall, when they potted up perennials to overwinter in the hoop house. There's a great selection of hellebores, which put on such a wonderful display in the spring; several varieties of roses donated by Christianson's Nursery; red-twig dogwood and California lilac for shrubby delight (the California lilacs smell heavenly when they flower); astilbes for woodland gardens; hydrangeas for a punch of late-summer color; and many more.

Earlier this year the Master Gardeners got busy in the greenhouse with seeding starts. There are annuals and also lots of vegetable starts this year, including squash, broccoli, and onions. Herbs include 'Berries-and-Cream' mint (a great addition to summer drinks), thyme, borage, and parsley. And if you do have a sheltered spot with lots of heat, there are many varieties of basil to choose from.

Master Gardener plant selections will be in the big red barn and there will be Master Gardeners available to help you choose plants suitable for your needs—groundcovers for hard-to-mow slopes, vines to climb up deck supports or plants for vibrant color all summer long.

But what about the tomatoes?

Also in the barn will be the tomatoes. Everett Chu of *Azusa Farm and Gardens* on Highway 20 generously donated greenhouse space for the 2500 tomato plants the Master Gardeners grow for the Plant Fair. This year's selection includes the cherry tomatoes that do so well here in containers on a sunny deck, including 'Gold Nugget' and 'Sungold'. There's also a selection of Roma tomatoes, which are great for sauces because of their meaty flesh, low moisture content, and low seed count.

Larger tomatoes include Brandywine, once described by *New York Times* food writer Anne Raver as “a pink heirloom ... so heavy and juicy, it’s likely to burst its thin skin before you can lug it to the kitchen table”; Big Beef, an early ripener for its size with good disease resistance; and Stupice, a cold-tolerant, ultra-early tomato that continues to produce throughout the summer.

GARDEN ART, TOOLS, FOOD AND ADVICE

There’s more to the Plant Fair than just plants, however. The Master Composters/Recyclers will have their pot recycling station out in the parking lot. Outside the barn, Master Gardeners will staff a Plant Diagnostic Clinic. Feel free to bring along plants you’d like identified or samples of plants that are not thriving. Or just stop by to chat with general landscaping and cultural questions.

There’s a lot of talk about vegetable gardening these days, and this year might be a great year for you to experiment if you haven’t put in a vegetable garden before. Master Gardeners can give you tips on how to convert unused lawn into fertile planting beds. They can discuss the benefits of raised beds and soil amendments. They can also advise you which vegetables are easiest to grow here and how and when to plant them. Look for our Vegetable Information Station outside the barn if you would like to talk veggies!



(Above) Anacortes volunteers Cherry Dennis (left), a master gardener, and Ginny Sharp, who is training to become a master gardener, transplant tomato starts in preparation for the Master Gardener Plant Fair on May 7 at the fairgrounds in Mount Vernon. **Photo by Scott Terrell/Skagit Valley Herald** (Right) Bob Bryan (left) and Everett Chu, both master gardeners, show two First Lady tomato plants, started last December inside the greenhouse at Azusa Farm near Mount Vernon. Behind Bryan and Chu are more tomato plants — Chu donated space for 2,500 — that will be sold at the Master Gardener Plant Fair in Mount Vernon. **Photo by Frank Varga/Skagit Valley Herald**



There will be a number of vendors offering specialty plants, garden art, garden tools, cedar garden items, and food. Wheelbarrows are available but if you bring a wagon or wheelbarrow of your own, you will have a great way of getting your purchases back to your car. Come out and make a day of it. Select your tomatoes and then browse the other plant selections. Take time to see what the vendors have to offer, learn something new about gardening, and—we hope—sit for a while and enjoy a snack or a rejuvenating cup of coffee in the sun.

Master Gardener Program – it’s more than just a plant fair

Skagit County Master Gardener volunteers grow the plants and the Skagit County Master Gardener Foundation organizes the Plant Fair; our major fundraiser for the year. All proceeds go to support the local Master Gardener Program.

Our public outreach events are free and open to the public. They include the Discovery Garden on Memorial Highway, which showcases plants that do well here in the Pacific Northwest and hosts Dig-It, our gardening program for local schoolchildren. They hold the monthly *Know & Grow Workshops* at the WSU Mount Vernon Northwestern Research and Extension Center auditorium with expert speakers on a variety of gardening topics; a monthly radio spot on KSVR-FM, Skagit Valley College radio; the Friday “Ask the Master Gardener” column in the *Skagit Valley Herald*; and educational displays at the Home Show and County Fair. They have speakers ready to come out to your club or organization to talk about research-based, environmentally friendly gardening and hold weekly Plant Diagnostic Clinics in Burlington and Anacortes from April to October.

In addition they started a new program, Growing Community Gardens, which provides assistance for start-up community gardens. For more information about Master Gardeners and their programs visit <http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG>.

Skagit County Master Gardener Plant Fair

When: Saturday, May 7, 2011
Time: 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM
Where: Skagit County Fairgrounds, Building F
Mount Vernon (enter from Virginia Street)
Questions: Call the WSU Skagit County Extension office at 360-428-4270 ext. 0