

# MG Plant Fair

By Valerie Rose

May 7, 2010



Find inspiration, plant starts and expert advice at Master Gardeners' annual fundraiser.

Manitobas, Juliet and Principe Borghese, oh my! These are just a three of the varieties of tomatoes you'll find at this year's Master Gardener Plant Fair, along with vegetables, flowers, herbs, garden art and more, from area growers and artists.

As Chair of the Master Gardener Plant Fair, Al Call's busy season starts in January. Creating this big, fun sale means that Call coordinates the efforts of over 150 Skagit County Certified Master Gardener volunteers. Al modestly claims, "My role is easy, but they have the more difficult task of growing the starts and making sure our all of our plants are healthy and ready for sale. These dedicated volunteers always make it happen."

Then it's the Big Day. "What I like the most is that hour between 7 and 8am on the day of the Fair," Call says. "People are lining up early with their little wagons or carts, baskets and totes, anticipating the opening at 8am. Everyone is excited about the vast variety of plants for sale, and all have different opinions about the best, the really best tomatoes to buy this year. The line usually extends out several hundred yards but everyone is soon inside the gate, merrily choosing plants, garden art and other supplies."



**Photo by Frank Varga / Skagit Valley Herald** - Plant Fair chairman and master gardener Al Call admires one of the hundreds of tomato plants to be sold tomorrow during the Skagit County Master Gardeners Plant Fair. Call is in the Skagit Valley greenhouse of Judy Callahan, a master gardener who grows tomato starts for the annual sale.

Tomatoes are popular with many fans of the Plant Fair. Ray Mitchell, an elder in the Swinomish Tribe, says, "I want to make sure I come back to the Master Gardener Plant Fair again. Last year's tomatoes were the best ones I've ever grown! I'll be there with my wagon." Mitchell is right – it's smart to bring a wheelbarrow, cart, pack mule or other way to carry home your many garden treasures. And don't forget to pack a pen for writing down the names of plants and cultivation information. Bring your gardening questions to the Master Gardeners who will be staffing the Plant Clinic table.

Gardening expertise and the commitment to community education are the special features of this annual plant sale. “What makes our plant fair so special is that all plants are grown by highly qualified master gardeners from our area,” Call notes. “The proceeds from our sale go directly to our local community through gardening clinics, workshops, demonstration gardens, hands-on activities for kids, and much more.”



**Photo by Jason Miller / Skagit County Master Gardener -**  
A determinate variety, this Legend tomato is just the right size for sandwiches.

### **Some of the Tomato Varieties Available at the Plant Fair**

**Standard Size:**

**Indeterminate:** grow vertically, stake or trellis.

- |                     |                   |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Beef Steak          | Super Beefsteak   | Brandywine       |
| Burgess Trip-L-Crop | Crimson Carmello  | Delicious        |
| Early Girl          | 4th of July       | Jubilee          |
| Juliet              | Momotaro          | Northern Delight |
| Stupice             | Yellow Perfection |                  |

**Determinate:** spread laterally, very little or no staking.

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|--------|---------------|-------------------|
| Legend | Oregon Spring | Principe Borghese |
| Roma   | Willamette    |                   |

**Cherry Type:**

**Indeterminate:** grow vertically, stake or trellis.

- |               |                  |             |
|---------------|------------------|-------------|
| Sun Gold      | Super Sweet 100  | Sweet 100   |
| Sweet Million | Large Red Cherry | Yellow Pear |

**Determinate:** spread laterally, very little or no staking.

- Gold Nugget

A special feature of this year’s Plant Fair is the ‘Cut Flower’ table. You’ll find flower starts that are perfect for growing flowers you can cut and gather into bouquets for vases and arrangements. Selections include: delphinium, feverfew, short and tall godetia, tall Siberian iris, lady’s mantle larkspur, peonies and more. Oh my!

In addition to buying plants for their own gardens, some folks will also find gifts for Mother’s Day, which is conveniently scheduled for the day after the Plant Fair. Why give another box of calorie-laden candy or a bouquet of flowers that will fade in a week, when you can buy a basket full of blooms Mom can enjoy all summer? She’ll also appreciate a gift of garden art or starts of her favorite vegetables, flowers and herbs to grow.



Photo by Valerie Rose / Skagit Master Gardener - A child admires some garden art during the 2009 Skagit County Master Gardeners Plant Fair.

What if you (or your Mom) live in an apartment, condominium, or another situation without a lawn to tear up and turn into a garden? Call notes, "Many gardeners these days are looking for plants they can grow in confined spaces. Container gardening is ideal for balconies, window ledges and small yards." The Master Gardener Plant Fair has a large array of vegetables, flowers and herbs that will thrive in containers. Yes, even apartment-dwellers can slice fresh-picked tomatoes onto their homegrown salad greens.

Judy Callahan, aka 'the Tomato Queen,' is a veteran Master Gardener, overseeing the legion of tomato growers who supply the fair with vigorous starts. For gardeners without a yard, Callahan has these recommendations: "Cherry tomatoes such as Sun Gold, Sweet 100, and Large Red Cherry are great for containers. And no one should be without a Gold Nugget tomato!"

Look for dwarf or bush varieties of vegetables and ask any of the Master Gardeners for help choosing the best varieties for containers. Don't forget a windowsill herb garden! Whether you use a half-barrel, a bucket or a lustrous ceramic pot, container gardens allow everyone to grow a succulent salad.

So, on Saturday - May 8<sup>th</sup>, remember: bring your gardening questions, wagon or basket, and your friends to the Plant Fair. See you there!

### **Resources for Container Gardening:**

Container Vegetable Gardening, WSU Extension, [www.pierce.wsu.edu/mg/resources/ContainerVegetableGardening\\_RS004-2010.pdf](http://www.pierce.wsu.edu/mg/resources/ContainerVegetableGardening_RS004-2010.pdf)

Healthy Harvests from Small Spaces, University of Minnesota Extension Service: Container Gardening video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBljMj1Mho](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBljMj1Mho)

Growing Vegetables in Containers, Oregon State University Extension, <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/grow/grow/container.html>

Container Vegetable Gardening, University of Maryland Extension Service, [www.hgic.umd.edu/content/documents/hg600.pdf](http://www.hgic.umd.edu/content/documents/hg600.pdf)

WSU Skagit County Extension  
**Plant Fair**

Saturday – May 8, 2010  
8:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Same new location:  
**Skagit County Fairgrounds, Building F,**  
Mount Vernon

2,500 Tomatoes (more than 25 varieties),  
vegetable starts, peppers, herbs, annuals,  
perennials, and more

WSU Master Gardener Clinic: for questions  
and answers to home-gardening problems

Demonstrations, garden art & food vendors.  
Educational displays. Recycle used pots

<http://skagit.wsu.edu/MG/plantfaire.htm>