

The Master Gardeners

By Sacha Buller

September 27, 2013



Cultivating plants, people, and communities

What Is Our Purpose?

Our mission is to promote sound gardening practices and environmental stewardship in Skagit County. Master gardeners do this in many ways. You're probably most familiar with our weekly "Ask the Master Gardener" column each Friday. We also offer free "Know & Grow" lectures each month on all sorts of gardening topics. At our weekly plant clinics in Anacortes and Burlington, we diagnose plant problems and provide recommendations on managing various gardening-related problems.

Master gardeners mentor community gardens, school gardens and rain garden projects. Our speaker bureau is available to talk to community and school groups about a variety of garden and plant-related topics. We will visit your home and provide recommendations on plant placement and other garden improvements.

At the WSU Discovery Garden on Memorial Highway in Mount Vernon, master gardeners demonstrate different styles and types of gardens including an herb garden, vegetable garden, small fruit garden, rose garden, and children's garden among many others. The naturescape corner creates a beautiful natural landscape for quiet reflection with native and non-native plants. Our youth education program, Dig-It, brings elementary students to the garden for an all-day field trip that includes planting a vegetable patch that they can visit all summer long. The enabling garden shows many different ideas for people who need alternative gardening methods due to physical limitations. Our demonstration garden is maintained to inspire and inform the public. The garden is open to the public 7 days a week.

WSU Skagit County Master Gardener education programs are financially supported by the Skagit County Master Gardener Foundation. The Foundation's main fundraiser is the annual Spring Plant Fair the second Saturday in May. Seeds and cuttings start going into the soil in the fall. Throughout all four seasons, master gardeners work long hours to grow thousands of tomatoes, as well as other veggies and herbs, annual and perennial flowers, and hanging baskets.

Who Are We?

The WSU Skagit County master gardeners are volunteers who work hard to educate the public and have fun doing it. Tuesday mornings from April through October, master gardeners gather to work in the Discovery Garden, pulling weeds, pruning trees and shrubs, propagating new plants and spreading wood chips on pathways, to name a few of the weekly tasks. Amid this flurry of activity, there is much laughter, talking and sharing stories—and many a gardening friendship takes root. Recently, early bird master gardeners have been limbering up for the morning work with yoga in the garden. At noon, the lunch bell rings, the tools and wheelbarrows are set down, and everyone gathers for a delicious potluck lunch.



Left: Master Gardener Intern Debbie Martin shows second-graders at Mt. Erie elementary School in Anacortes how to install a pollinator garden. **Right:** Master Gardener Diana Wisen, also a local farmer, shares her love of the valley with visitors from around the globe as part of Step On Guide, a service the Master Gardener Program offers to tour groups during the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival in April. *Photos by Christine Farrow/WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners.*

We now have 140 active master gardeners in Skagit County. There are more than 3,000 master gardeners serving in 28 of the 39 counties in Washington State. They are also active in 46 states and 4 Canadian provinces.

How Can You Become A Master Gardener?

The master gardener program in Skagit County is now accepting applications for our 2014 training. This is your chance to become a master gardener! If you can't keep your hands out of the dirt, if you love to talk about gardening, and if you are one of the many enthusiastic and talented gardeners in Skagit County, please consider joining our ranks. This is a great opportunity to help your community, expand your horticultural know-how, and grow new friendships with fellow gardeners.

The term "master gardener" may sound intimidating to the home gardener or gardening enthusiast. But don't think these boots are too big for you. Our primary focus is on educating the public, practicing sound gardening practices and embracing a habit of life long learning. All new trainees go through a 10-week gardening course. This includes an online course with WSU faculty lectures as well as weekly lab sessions each Tuesday from 9 AM to 4 PM. Trainees then complete 60 hours of volunteer work by the end of the year to become certified as a master gardener. They learn by helping out with program activities and working side by side with veteran master gardeners. Once certified, master gardeners are required to keep learning about gardening by attending lectures, trainings and garden-related tours.

How to Apply

Share your gardening enthusiasm with Skagit County. Become a master gardener. Cultivate gardening in Skagit County. More information and application forms are available at our website <http://skagit.wsu.edu/mg> or request an application be mailed to you by calling the WSU Skagit County Extension at 360-428-4270, ext. 0. Applications must be received by October 30, 2013.

If You Can't Learn With Us, Learn From Us!

Many people are looking to learn more about gardening but don't have time to volunteer. This October, Skagit County master gardeners are teaching a basic gardening course series at Skagit Valley College. Learn how to create and maintain a beautiful, healthy yard to fit our climate and your lifestyle. The fall session, **Skagit County Successful Gardening: Building Blocks for a Healthy Yard**, will be offered October 8 through October 22 at Skagit Valley College, Mount Vernon, on Tuesdays from 6-8 PM. We will cover how to build soil and use fertilizers; lay out a yard that is easy to maintain; fill it with plants that love to grow here; plant well, water efficiently, and make the most of mulch to ease your gardening chores. The second session in winter will cover pest management, lawn care, pruning and growing edibles in small spaces. Taught by WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners. To register, call [360-416-7638](tel:360-416-7638) or go to www.skagit.edu/communityeducation.



Left: Emily Aaron enjoys shopping for herbs, veggies and other garden delights at the Spring Plant Fair. **Right:** Master Gardener Gloria Ellsworth investigates a plant sample for insect damage at the Burlington Plant Clinic. *Photos by Christine Farrow/WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners.*