

Greenhouses – Know & Grow Workshop

By Valerie Jean Rose
November 12, 2010



Greenhouses provide many benefits for gardeners:

- ❖ Sunny location to grow starts from seed
- ❖ Protection for tender perennials and potted plants when autumn's rain and wind sets in
- ❖ An area to 'harden off' starts before transplanting them into the garden
- ❖ Solar-powered extra heat for tomatoes, chiles, eggplants and other solanums (heat-loving plants)
- ❖ Handy hiding place to stuff all the broken tools, tangled irrigation tape and other items waiting to be taken care of.

Well, that last item should actually be focused on basements and garages. Why waste all the glorious solar energy gathered in a well-sited greenhouse on leaky hoses and a wheelbarrow with a flat tire?



(Left) Bob Hart, a fourth-generation Skagit Valley farmer, tends to cuttings of arborvitae Wednesday in his big La Conner Flats greenhouse. Beside him, trays of previously picked tomatoes continue to ripen. (Right) Bob Hart uses sturdy steel hoops covered with plastic for seasonal greenhouses at this La Conner Flats garden. **Photos by Frank Varga/Skagit Valley Herald.**

Without a greenhouse, where do you start your seeds or grow starts to transplant size? Kitchen tables and windowsills become staging areas for your starts, with trays and pots leaking water and soil onto the floor. Providing enough heat for seeds to germinate can be challenging if, like me, your frugality keeps the household thermostat very low. A greenhouse provides a designated area for dirt and plants, with lots of room to grow, according to Master Gardener Nancy Rusher. "You can start lots more seeds, and don't have the mess in the house," she said. Rusher also noted that greenhouses extend the growing season. "A greenhouse lets you plant your starts in the fall and get plants, such as perennials, large enough to flower the next spring. And in the spring, vegetables such as broccoli and tomatoes get a good head start too."

Rusher is one of the presenters featured at this month's Master Gardener **Know and Grow Workshop** on 'Ways to Use and Care for Your Greenhouse'. (See Infobox for details.) Bob Hart, a fourth-generation Skagit Valley farmer, uses greenhouses extensively when growing

beautiful vegetables for sale on his family farm, La Conner Flats. I asked him what kinds of greenhouses are good for a home garden, as compared to a farm or commercial nursery? “The types of greenhouses for home owners run the gamut”, Hart said. “Available funds, life style, desired results all are part of the choices. Normally I recommend garden rooms or attached greenhouses to out buildings for the novice. The smaller the greenhouse, the more the temperature fluctuates, unless you have automated controls.”

BUILD YOUR OWN, GROW YOUR OWN

For the handy home gardeners who want to build their own greenhouses, Hart recommends polyethylene films over a frame to make a lean-to addition to an existing building, or film over bent hoops placed over the ground or a raised bed. “These are the quickest, and least expensive,” he noted.

Once a greenhouse is built, “Regular maintenance [is] essential with the high humidity present in growth structures,” said Hart. “Using quality materials in construction is also essential.” A well constructed, properly maintained greenhouse can enhance warm-season crops like tomatoes, while protecting these plants from disease. “Daytime temperatures in the 75-80 F area are easy to regularly achieve in a greenhouse, but not outside in our marine climate. The cover over the tomatoes also stops late blight from wiping out your crop.” This welcome heat comes from sun-warmed air held in the greenhouse, without using electricity or fossil fuels. “We regularly use unheated structures for year round production of vegetables,” Hart said.

Reliable heat is necessary for some structures. “Greenhouses with plumbing need to be heated to prevent rupture of pipes,” Hart advised. “The crops growing in the houses determine the minimum temperatures that need to be maintained. If you are growing orchids, you need a full heat system. If you are going to start seedlings in the spring, maybe a grow mat is sufficient.”

Consider a greenhouse for starting, growing and protecting your plants. With a greenhouse, you won’t need to wait for perfectly warm, dry spring weather for planting many of your vegetable and flower starts. And leave the tools with cracked handles next to the broken plant pots in the garage – better yet, recycle the pots and repair the tools. Happy gardening!

Valerie Jean Rose is a WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener. 360-428-4270, <http://skagit.WSU.edu/MG>, “WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners” on Facebook.

Know & Grow Workshop

What: Master Gardener Know & Grow Workshop
‘Ways to Use and Care for Your Greenhouse’

Presenters: Bob Hart of La Conner Flats and Master Gardener Nancy Rusher

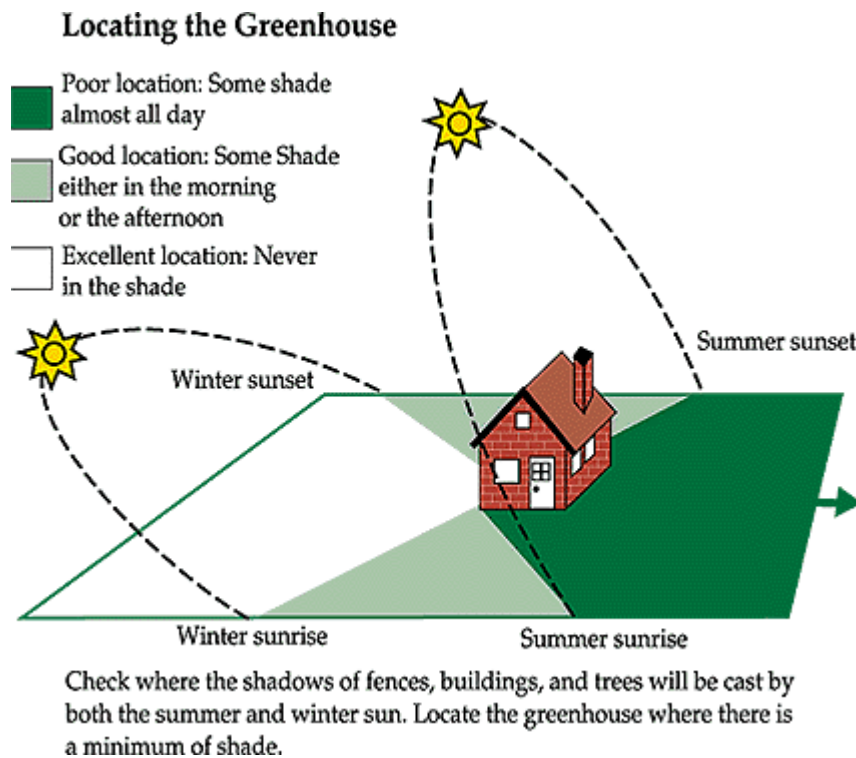
When: Tuesday, November 16th

Time: 1 PM to 2:30 PM

Where: WSU Mount Vernon NW Research and Extension Center
16650 State Route 536 (Memorial Highway)

For more information call the WSU Skagit County Extension: 360-428-4270 ext. 0

Diagram for Greenhouse Location



Courtesy of Charlie's Greenhouse & Garden

Choosing a site for your greenhouse is critical for successful growing. According to the Charlies' Greenhouse & Garden website, "... locate the greenhouse where it will receive at least 6 hours of direct sunlight during the winter months. A good site would also be sheltered from high winds, close to water and electricity, and easily accessible from your home and garden. Avoid a site that is boggy, soft landfill, near a children's play area, or shaded by buildings or trees during the winter. The best orientation is to position the greenhouse with length running east and west. This will provide more heat gain from the sun during the winter. If the southern exposure is restricted, but open to the east, southeast, southwest, or west, turn the greenhouse to the winter sun. Remember that the sun is much lower during winter."



Bob Hart checks on the Swiss chard growing in a smaller, seasonal greenhouse. Photo by Frank Varga/Skagit Valley Herald.

Resources:

- Greenhouse Growing – Ag and Natural Resources Fact Sheet #528.
<http://king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/documents/Greenhouse.pdf>
- Solar Greenhouses; <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/solar-gh.html>
- Portable Field Hoopouses, Carol Miles, PhD, and Pat Labine, PhD, WSU Extension Manual ES 015; <http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/em015/em015.pdf>
- The Seed Starters Handbook, Nancy Bubel
- Greenhouse Gardener's Companion, Shane/Smith.
- Four Season Harvest: Organic Vegetables from Your Home Garden All Year Long, Eliot Coleman, Chelsea Green Publishing, www.chelseagreen.com