

Master Gardener Plant Fair

By Lin Hoisington
May 4, 2012

Planter baskets to augment customary plant sale

Mark your calendars for the 2012 Master Gardener Plant Fair, Saturday, May 12th. Master gardeners have been busy all winter and spring in the greenhouse starting vegetables, herbs, perennials and annuals. Weather this year has proved much more hospitable than last year, and because of that, plants are larger and more robust.

Al Call, Plant Fair Director, is enthusiastic with the selection and size of the plants being offered. “We will have a record number of tomato plants this year,” he said, “well over 2500.” New varieties suited for Northwest gardens are being developed each year, giving hope to even the most faint hearted home gardener.

At the Plant Fair, you can also bring your gardening questions to the Master Gardeners' mini-Plant Clinic. This is an excellent opportunity to sort out what's wrong with your treasured plant AND do some shopping—all in one location.

In addition to the usual selection of vegetables, herbs, perennials and annuals, master gardeners have a large variety of grasses including drought tolerant varieties like zebra grass and feather reed grass (also known as ‘Karl Foerster’ grass). Ornamental grasses can add zing to your garden by bringing in vertical texture and color. Sedges and mondo grass are garden stalwarts that are at home in borders, beds or containers.

Native plants are more and more popular, and the Plant Fair offers such gems as red osier dogwood, western bleeding heart, yellow- and blue-eyed grasses, elderberry, red flowering currant, high bush cranberries and wild columbine. For shaded areas needing a bit of freshening up, try *Astilbe*, *Hosta* or Solomon's seal (also used as a medicinal herb).

Garden favorites are plentiful with lilies, lupine, *Penstemon*, *Crocasmia* ‘Lucifer,’ old fashioned bleeding heart, tree mallow, honey suckle, St. John's wort, bachelor button and hardy fuchsia. Looking for evergreen plants? You can't miss with *Bergenia* (also called “Pig Squeak” for the noise the leaves make when rubbed together), low mounding *Heuchera* for its range of colors, *Lithodora* for its deep green foliage and brilliant blue blossoms or *Ceanothus* for its waxy leaves and bee-loving blue flowers.

New to the Plant Fair This Year—Three new *Hebe* (‘Ritt,’ ‘Patty's Pride’ and ‘Blue Mist’) will make their debut at the fair. (Hebes are indispensable evergreen shrubs for year round foliage.) Also added this year are John Scheepers Dutch irises and lilies (some varieties are scented.) Other perennials include American cranberry viburnum (attracts butterflies, other pollinators, and birds), *Rosa glauca* (outstanding mauve-blue-gray foliage), *Weigela* (a variegated one plus cultivars ‘Bristol Ruby’ and ‘Red Prince’), hollies (non-invasive and non-noxious), sedum (several varieties) and spirea (‘Snowmound’ and “Little Princess’.)

Along with the usual vegetable starts (celery, onion, cabbage, broccoli, etc.) you can find hot and sweet peppers and kohlrabi. Herbs run the gamut from basil, chives, cilantro, oregano, parsley, rosemary and thyme to lesser well-known ones like salad burnet, summer savory, borage, sorrel and stevia.

Also new this year is an assortment of planter baskets, bowls and wreaths:

- salsa baskets with chives, cilantro, oregano, parsley and tomatoes
- herb baskets of chives, oregano, rosemary, thyme
- salad bowls ready the kitchen are filled with mixed leaf lettuces, leeks
- vining tomato baskets
- shade baskets of *Coleus*, *Fuchsia*, *Impatiens* and *Tradescantia*
- sedum bowls and wreaths
- centerpieces with hurricane lamps

Vendors make up an important component of the Plant Fair. Some return year after year, others less frequently. New ones are always coming on board. This year vendors will be offering garden art, trees, hanging baskets, bouquets, veggie starts annual and perennial flowers, garden supplies, hot food, snacks and coffee.

Master gardeners are all about recycling and repurposing. Be sure to stop by the “gently used” Gardening Book Sale table at the Plant Fair. You can also drop off your used nursery pots at the Plant Fair or drop them off any time at the Discovery Garden on Memorial Highway

WSU Master Gardeners Week

May 13-19, 2012, has been proclaimed by Governor Christine O. Gregoire as Washington State University Master Gardener Week. Celebrating its 39th year, the WSU Extension Master Gardener Program has a rich history, beginning in 1973, and spreading to the majority of counties in Washington to many states in the United States.

The WSU Extension Master Gardener Program provides public education in gardening and environmental stewardship generated from research at WSU and other university systems. Certified Master Gardener Volunteers are trained by WSU faculty and staff to be community educators about issues of importance in their local communities that enhance natural resources, sustain communities and improve the health and wellness of WA residents.

Last year, nearly 3,800 Certified Master Gardener Program Volunteers reported a total of 231,862.10 hours. Locally, our Skagit County Master Gardeners contributed 11,765 volunteer hours to our communities.

For more information see the full report for 2011
<http://mastergardener.wsu.edu/documents/2011MGFullReport.pdf>

WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners Plant Sale

What: WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners Plant Sale
When: Saturday, May 12, 2012
Time: 8 AM – 3 PM
Where: Skagit County Fair Grounds

Admission and parking are free with access through the **south gate** of the fairgrounds.

For more information, call (360) 428-4270, ext. 0, or go to
<http://skagit.wsu.edu/mg/plantfair.htm>

See you at the fair!



Left: A visitor to last year's Master Gardener Plant Fair examines a bouquet of "May Flowers" made with metal from a discarded appliance. **Center:** Succulents tucked into tufa pots will be available at the fair. **Right:** Master Gardener Cindy Juel shows a "salad bowl" with greens and chives, one of many container garden mixes that will be available at the Plant Fair on Saturday, May 12. Photos by Master Gardener Valerie Rose.



"Jewel-toned glass glows in these sunny metal sculptures from Freeborn Metal Arts, one of the many vendors at this year's Master Gardener Plant Fair." Photo by Master Gardener Valerie Rose.