

Clinics and Classes for Every Gardener

By Valerie Jean Rose
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Signs of spring in Skagit Valley: Traffic is slowed by people admiring tulips instead of trumpeter swans. Ski boots are in the closet; garden clogs and boots are back in use. Master Gardener Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinics are open and ready to help you make informed choices about sustainable gardening.

Everyone can cultivate his or her gardening knowledge. Several recent, “Ask the Master Gardener” columns detailed how to prepare soil, select plant varieties, and start seeds indoors and outside. You can review these columns online at <https://extension.wsu.edu/skagit/mg/archive/>.

To test your gardening knowledge, take this handy quiz:

1. To prepare a garden bed for planting vegetables:
 - a. Select locations that get at least six hours of direct sunlight each day.
 - b. Dig compost into existing soil.
 - c. Avoid queen or king-sized fitted sheets for garden beds. They are so wide you won't be able to reach rows planted in the center.

2. If you have a small yard, or no yard, you can grow vegetables if you:
 - a. Choose varieties that grow well in containers.
 - b. Grow vertically over a trellis or fence.
 - c. Move in with someone who has a well-established garden.

3. Which vegetables grow well in the Pacific Northwest?
 - a. Plants that mature in a short summer ('short season' varieties)
 - b. Leafy greens such as lettuce, spinach and kale
 - c. Sweet potatoes, large watermelons, edamame soybeans, bananas

4. When you see a bug in your garden, reach for:
 - a. A hand lens, to help identify the insect using your copy of *Insects of Skagit County*
 - b. Your camera, to take a picture to the Master Gardener Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinic for identification and advice
 - c. Any spray can, especially paint (Blue is popular. Spray the bug, the plant, the fence.)



Left: THE GOOD ... Without bees, wasps and other pollinators, almost all of our fruit and vegetable crops would fail to produce. Learn how to help and protect these vital pollinators. **Center: THE BAD ...** The European black slug is one of the most destructive invaders in a Northwest garden because of its appetite for tender green growth and blossoms. Learn safe ways to protect your plants from these hungry creatures. **Right: THE UGLY ...** Late blight can reduce a crop of tomatoes to an ugly mess fit only for the garbage can. Learn how to keep your crop healthy and happy. *Photos by Christine Farrow / WSU Skagit County Extension.*

5. When you bring a specimen to one of the Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinics, how should it be prepared?
 - a. Vegetables, bulbs, and annuals: Bring the entire plant, including roots
 - b. Insects: Freeze moth or butterfly samples. Preserve other specimens, including spiders, mites, and ticks, in 70% ethyl alcohol (rubbing alcohol is okay) in a glass container.
 - c. Trees and shrubs: You could bring in samples of both healthy and affected tissues, but why stop there? Dig up the tree or shrub, including several feet of dirt around the root ball. Be sure to include lawn ornaments, especially gnomes and plastic flamingos.

6. How can you attract beneficial insects to your garden?
 - a. Provide food (pollen and nectar) by planting flowers that bloom throughout the seasons, from winter hellebores and spring bulbs to summer coneflowers and autumn crocus.
 - b. Avoid using pesticides. They may kill beneficial bugs, and when you kill beneficial bugs, you inherit their work! Read labels. Does the product harm bees? Do you really want to pollinate your fruit trees by hand?
 - c. Use a clever website to create lots of “buzz” about your garden.

7. Beetles are:
 - a. About 40% of the world’s known 350,000 species of insects
 - b. Often beneficial to gardeners—many kinds of black ground beetles eat slugs, moths and cutworm larvae.
 - c. Never going to reunite. Ringo and Paul singing onstage in February did not equal the “Fab 4.”

8. Tomatoes should be planted outdoors:
 - a. Only when the night time temperature stays above 50-degrees F., usually not until June in the Pacific Northwest
 - b. Where they can grow inside a cage or up a trellis for support.
 - c. At your cousin’s garden in Florida

ANSWERS:

If you chose “a” or “b”, you’re on the right track.
If you chose “c”, see me after class.

RESOURCES:

- “Home Gardening in Washington.” Carol Miles, PhD, WSU NWREC: <https://pubs.wsu.edu/ItemDetail.aspx?ReturnTo=0&ProductID=15566>
- *Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades*, 6th edition, Steve Solomon, Random House, 2007.
- *Insects of Skagit County*, Lloyd Eighme, available at WSU Skagit County Extension office.
- “Beneficial Insects, Spiders, and Other Mini-Creatures in Your Garden: Who They Are and How to Get Them to Stay.” David James, PhD, WSU Entomologist: <https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2064/2017/03/Beneficial-Insects-Spiders-and-Other-Mini-Creatures-in-Your-Garden.pdf>
- *Sugar Snaps and Strawberries: Simple Solutions for Creating Your Own Small-Space Edible Garden*. Andrea Bellamy, Timber Press, 2011.

Note: some hyperlinks in this article have been updated since its initial publication.

Master Gardener Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinics

Anacortes: 9 AM to 12 noon, Thursdays, April through September
Anacortes Senior Activity Center, 1701 - 22nd Street

Burlington: 10 AM to 2 PM, Wednesdays, April through October at the WSU
Skagit County Extension Office, 11768 Westar Lane, Suite A (near Skagit Airport)

If you can’t visit during clinic hours, drop off samples at the WSU Skagit County Extension office. Include a Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinic form with your sample, found at www.skagit.wsu.edu/MG/clinics.htm.

For extension office hours and more information, call 360-428-4270, ext.0.

Skagit County Master Gardeners are holding a series of free classes:

“Everyone Can Grow Vegetables!”

Mount Vernon Library, 315 Snoqualmie Street, Mount Vernon at 6 PM

- April 7: Planning and Preparing Raised Beds and Containers
- April 14: Choosing Varieties, Planting Seeds and Starts
- April 21: Know Your Bugs
- April 28: Integrated Pest Management

