

# Plant Fair Chat

By Claire Cotnoir & Hank Davies  
May 6, 2022



## Have a conversation on how to choose the right plant for you

What makes the Skagit County Master Gardener Plant Fair great? The plants are lovely. The deals are terrific. The vendors are varied. There's food for sale, there are animals and vintage tractors to see, and more. But what makes the event special is something else. It's the conversations.

Master gardeners love to talk to customers about how to choose plants and how to care for them. This year's Plant Fair at the Skagit County Fairgrounds is bigger than ever, with a whole separate building for tomatoes alone and another building just for perennials and veggies. You'll have plenty of space for those impromptu chats.

When you walk into Building D and see thousands of tomato plants, probably some varieties you've never heard of, how do you decide which to buy? Ask a master gardener! "MG" volunteers are knowledgeable about which plants bear fruit the earliest, which plants keep bearing the latest, which heirlooms yield the best tomatoes for salad, and which are best for making sauce. They can explain what a hybrid is and why it matters. Or why you might want an open-pollinated variety.

Tomatoes are popular, but maybe you're in the market for other plant varieties, which you'll find by the thousands in Building F. But how do you know if your yard is the right place to grow a beautiful Charles Burgess peony? What if you want to buy a plant as a Mother's Day gift—would that frilly, color-bomb *Coleus* do well as a houseplant? Which herbs will thrive on a windowsill? There are so many kinds of ferns, all calling to you. Which varieties will be happiest in your space? Master gardeners will be on-hand to answer all these questions and more.

Did you know that planting a variety of annual and perennial plants is a good strategy for attracting pollinators to your garden? A mix of plants with different bloom times will lure bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds nearly year-round.

Now, what is all the fuss about native plants? Ask an MG at the Plant Fair. You can learn why native plants are important and get details about the native plant species available at the sale.

Master gardeners are not the only experts you'll meet at the Plant Fair. Chat with vendors selling hand-crafted wares like jewelry, glass/metal art, wood sculptures, and yes, more plants. After buying yourself something nice, visit the information-focused booths to learn about noxious weeds and how to eradicate them; local farmer's markets; how to support the local bat population, even how to share all those garden photos on your cell phone.



Master Gardeners tending tomatoes for the Plant Fair. *Photo by Nancy Crowell / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners.*

And don't forget to attend classes! Every half-hour, a master gardener will give a short instructional talk about a gardening topic. Look for them in the Pavilion building at the north end of the fairgrounds.

When you get your plants home, the conversation doesn't end. Master gardeners are available to give advice and support all year. Meet some of our Plant Clinic experts at the Plant Fair booth, and then keep them in mind whenever you have a plant question or problem. They have office hours in Burlington and Anacortes as well as at area Farmer's Markets, and they are always available by email or phone. Events such as Ask A Master Gardener Day on June 25 at the Discovery Garden provide more opportunities.



Master Gardeners propagating perennials at the Discovery Garden. *Photo by Claire Cotnoir / WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners.*

Between conversations, MGs offer informative Web pages to help you tend your tomatoes, care for your perennials, and grow your own food. Check out <https://www.skagitmg.org/>. Master gardeners work in partnership with WSU Extension, which provides publications for gardeners on a wide range of topics. MGs can help you find and interpret the science-based information you need.

Although the Plant Fair features thousands of hardy plants for sale, the master gardener mission is not to sell plants. It is to support Skagit County home gardeners by promoting science-based gardening practices and education. The Plant Fair,

sponsored by the non-profit Skagit County Master Gardener Foundation, generates funds to make these goals possible. Come support the gardening community that supports you.

Check this space again soon. Master Gardener Diana Wisen will explain how to care for your Plant Fair living treasures when you get them home.

## **MASTER GARDEN PLANT FAIR CLASSES**

Master Garden Plant Fair classes will be held every half-hour May 7 at the Skagit County Fairgrounds Pavilion Building, at the north end of the fairgrounds.

Classes are free, and subjects include proper tool sharpening, planning your fall garden now, success with hardy succulents, pollinators, garlic, love those bugs/beneficial insects, pruning, proper planting for new plants, and slug and snail control.

## **RESOURCES:**

- 2022 Skagit County Master Gardener Plant Fair, <https://www.skagitmg.org/home/plant-fair/>
- Master Gardener Program 2022 Events, <https://www.skagitmg.org/events/>
- Diagnostic Plant Clinics, <https://extension.wsu.edu/skagit/mg/clinics/>
- Grow Your Own Food, <https://www.skagitmg.org/home/food/>
- WSU Skagit County Master Gardener Discovery Garden, <https://www.skagitmg.org/home/discovery-garden/>