GROUNDED

A Quarterly publication of WSUE
Grant-Adams Master Gardeners

Newsletter March 2021
Volume 10 Number 1

Grant-Adams Counties Master Gardeners, 1525 E. Wheeler Road, Moses Lake, WA 98837
http://county.wsu.edu/grant-adams/Pages/default.aspx · ga.mgvolunteers@wsu.edu

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Master Gardeners Eager to Engage Public

Despite COVID in-person limitations currently in place, the WSU Grant-Adams Master Gardeners welcome the opportunity to engage with the gardening public and offer several ways to answer your plant, insect, and other horticultural or garden issues remotely.

1. Questions can be asked and/or samples can be photographed and described in detail and then sent by email or text to our year-round email account ga.mgvolunteers@wsu.edu. A dedicated Master Gardener checks this account almost every day of the year to service requests for urban and rural gardeners.
2. The public may also leave messages for the Master Gardeners at the WSU Grant County Extension Office by calling (509) 754-2011 x 4312 or 4313.
3. Additional resources are available for you to investigate on our website: https://extension.wsu.edu/grant/gardening/master_gardeners/.
4. WSU Master Gardener Volunteers are also available to serve Grant County and Adams County communities by making presentations virtually(limited to Zoom at this time) and soon we may even be able to offer small group demonstrations at one of our three demonstration gardens.

The Grant-Adams Master Gardeners provide information on common sense science-based gardening and pest management principles and conservation and protection of water quality, including composting of kitchen and yard waste and identifying and providing solutions to plant and pest problems. Our volunteers also inform and encourage the public to be an 'early warning system' for identified new threats to home and gardening and commercial agriculture. Plants or insects that we cannot identify are sent to WSU or WSDA specialists for analysis.

The public is encouraged to view our specialty gardens that serve as teaching tools, are examples of plant selections that do well in our area, and illustrate sustainable gardening practices. The Master Gardeners maintain both native-plant and drought-tolerant demonstration gardens. These gardens are located on the grounds of the Old Hotel in Othello, at the edge of Civic Park at the Moses Lake Public Library, and at the Healing Waters Garden on the edge of the East Beach Park in Soap Lake. They are all available to view year-round.

The WSU Extension Office is not yet open to the public and that may continue into the foreseeable future until COVID restrictions are

relaxed/lifted and plans are approved for safe reengagement. Updates will be provided as the season progresses as it is the WSU Grant-Adams Master Gardener Program goal to again provide clinic help through farmers markets, the Extension Office or other venues.

IS IT TIME TO PLANT YET? . . . *By Kris Nesse*

Some of us are gardening gamblers. We start onions, cabbage, broccoli, inside very early each new year. Peas are sprouted in damp newspaper to tuck into the garden mid-February! Is this wise? Well, it may not be as risky as it seems. Relying on average temperatures and soil temperature, we can make informed decisions about planting times.

In 2012 the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map (PHZM) changed for the first time in 30 years. Data from 1976 to 2005 showed most areas an average of one-half zone warmer. The Arbor Day Foundation illustrates this startling change in an animated map found at http://www.arborday.org/media/mapchanges.cfm. It indicates at least a five degree change over much of Grant and Adams counties, leaving most gardeners in Zone 6B, with smaller pockets of Zones 6A and 7A. (You can check your own backyard using the USDA's interactive map:

http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/InteractiveMap.aspx or through Washington State University Extension's website http://county.wsu.edu/grant-adams/Pages/default.aspx)

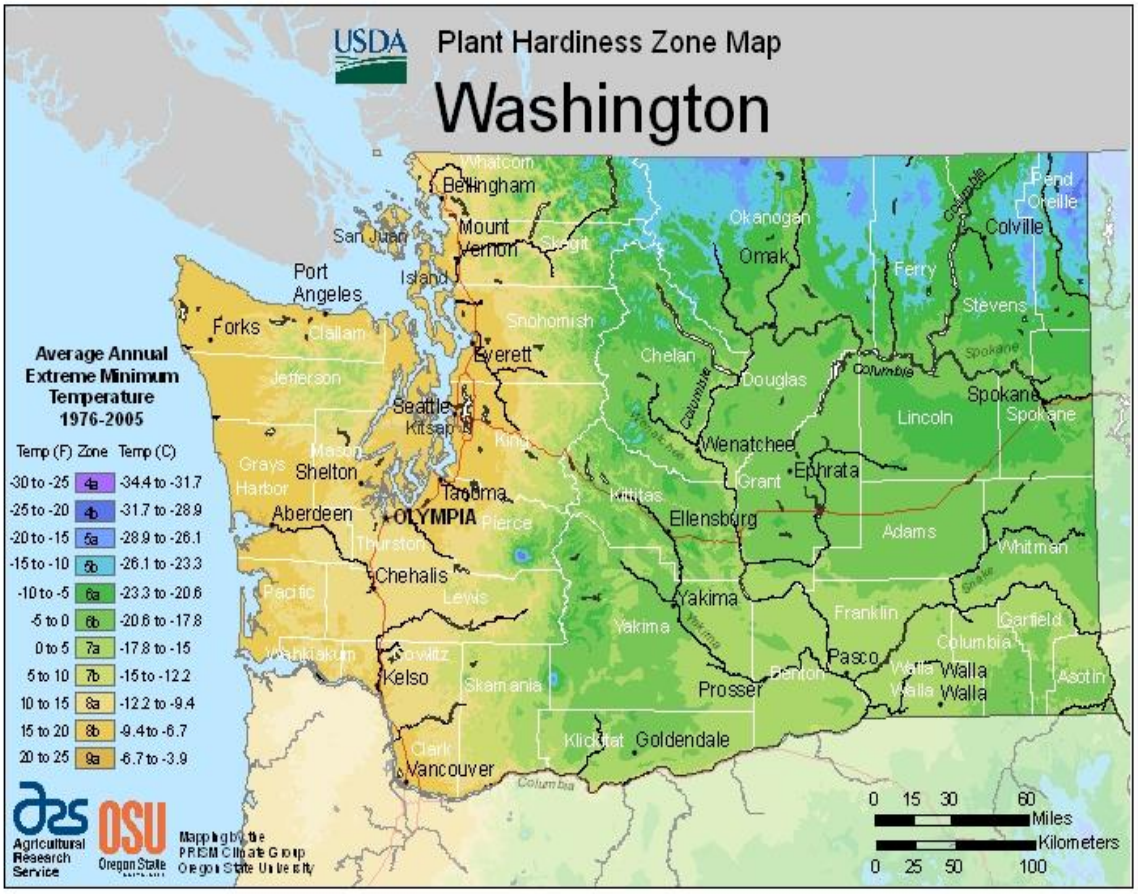
So, what does all this zone business have to do with gardening? While many plants will tolerate light frosts, the true warm weather lovers won't survive temperatures in the 30s. The PHZM indicates statistically when first and last frosts occur. It used to be that Master Gardener volunteers would advise clients that our local last frost date was May 15. As you can see from the chart below, that is no longer true.

USDA Hardiness Zone	First Frost Date	Last Frost Date
1	July 15th	June 15th
2	August 15th	May 15th
3	September 15th	May 15th
4	September 15th	May 15th
5	October 15th	April 15th
6	October 15th	April 15th
7	October 15th	April 15th
8	November 15th	March 15th
9	December 15th	February 15th
10	December 15th	January 31st (sometimes earlier)
11	No frost	No frost

Gardeners need to remember, any PHZM is simply a guide. They are based on average lowest temperature, not the lowest ever. Seed starting calculators based on the PHZM are available from many sources including several at http://awaytogarden.com/when-to-start-what-vegetable-seed-calculators/.

In addition to frost dates, soil temperatures factor into decisions about when to seed or transplant various vegetable crops. Beets, carrots, peas, radishes, spinach and others will germinate in 40-degree soil (common in my Soap Lake raised beds in February), while beans won't germinate unless the soil temperature is at least 60 degrees. A soil thermometer is a gardener's best friend in the spring! Vegetable seeding schedules are available from many sources including: http://ext100.wsu.edu/spokane/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2015/02/C103-Vegetable-Seeding-Schedule-14.pdf; http://www.ext.colostate.edu/mg/gardennotes/720.html.

So, check your zone, take the soil's temperature, and get planting.



Some Pruning Tips for Fruit-Bearing Plants . . . *by Duane Pitts*

Spring waits for no man or woman. It also does not wait for COVID-19 to leave or care how tired you are from COVID distancing and other restrictions. It calls fruit-bearing plants to issue forth buds and blossoms, and the plants obey.

If you did not prune in January or February, then March is the last time to do that, and the sooner the better. Temperatures are rising and buds are ready to blossom forth.

I have Concord and Himrod grapes, black currants, plum trees, Japanese flowering quince, gooseberries, blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries (with thorns and without). They all need pruning or cleaning up! I did not know what I was getting myself into with all these plants, but I do now. Work! So, to work we go with pruning.

I transplanted these raspberries in the fall. I will wait to prune them when I see new shoots.

- Cut back to the ground the oldest canes for raspberries and blackberries. With raspberries, the oldest canes have peeled bark, making them easy to

identify. Cut those to the ground. For blackberries, cut back the canes that produced last year – they may still have the tiny stems that held the berries for easy identification. Trim them back to any new shoots that formed in the late summer. They will be the ones to bear fruit this year.

Then we have blueberries:

- Cut out the 2 oldest and least productive canes (yes, they are canes, not branches). Trim back dead or damaged wood to the closest bud. Open up the center for air flow and sunshine by snipping off the canes that would block light and air.

In fact, you will want air flow for all your plants and plenty of sunshine to reach into the plants, not just on the outer leaves. Pruning produces more fruit and prevents a lot of disease affecting the plants.

Gooseberries can be left with one each of 1-, 2- and 3-year-old canes for best production. Since these are newer plants, next year I will prune the gooseberries, as they are all 2nd-year bushes.

Trimming a blueberry bush.

For flowering quince:

- Just remove any dead wood. Quince does not need to be pruned; removing dead wood, though, can be a hazard to your fingers, hands and arms. Their longish thorns seem to go through anything I have on, including my shoe soles! Winter jacket – pierced! Flannel shirt – pierced! Bare skin – pierced! I bleed a lot when I come in from clearing out dead growth in the quince.

For currants:

- I cut back the oldest and thickest canes. That may be about 1/3 to 1/2 of all the canes. It may seem counter-intuitive to cut this much out, but the new canes will produce more fruit than you and the birds can eat! Oh, to keep the birds off, I cover the black currants with a fine netting and leave the red currants uncovered, for the birds to eat at will – and they do! All day long they will "raid" the red currants and eye mightily the black currants.

Pruning out the majority of the older black currant canes will produce more fruit this year.

The plum trees are easy. Last year I was scared to death I would kill them with the pruning shears! Nope. Just my imagination a'working overtime! They survived and produced enough fruit for eating fresh plums and for making jam!

As with everything else, prune away the interior limbs and growth to open up the tree to air and sunshine. Also, remove limbs that want to brush against each other, removing the weakest, smallest, or shortest ones. Or remove the one limb that is closer to the main body of the tree.

As for my grapes, I was severe with them in January. I snipped away all but two or three main branches on each grape and trained them to the wire, one to the

left and the other to the right. They are not quite long enough to rise up to the next level. The small vines at the base were entirely removed as well as other weak and small vines. I expect the grapes to double their production this year. Last year I made Concord jam and we had plenty of green Himrod grapes to eat.

If you want fruit to eat – and a lot of it – and fruit to freeze and to make jams and jellies, prune the fruit-bearing plants to about 1/3 to 1/2 the canes (except quince unless you like to bleed a lot). That may seem like such "severe" pruning will kill the plants, but it makes them grow better and produce an abundance every year. It is a lot of work, but you will taste the results and smile!

This Concord grape will (fingers crossed) produce more grapes this year.

Italian Plum produces a wonderful fresh fruit.

Mirabelle Plum makes a delicious jam.

Photos by Duane Pitts

References:

Fitzgerald, Tonie (compiler). Raspberries. C116. Spokane County Extension, Washington State University. 2017.
https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2076/2017/06/C116-Raspberries-16.pdf

King, J. Pruning Grapes in Home Gardens: Some Basic Guidelines. Washington State University – Mount Vernon.
https://extension.wsu.edu/maritimefruit/grape-research/pruning-grapes-in-home-gardens-some-basic-guidelines/

Kohlhauff, Tim (compiler). Keys to Good Pruning. C109. Spokane County Extension, Washington State University.
https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2076/2015/07/C109-Keys-to-Good-Pruning-14.pdf

Kohlhauff, Tim, Therese Harris, Ray Maleike, and Timothy Stiess. Reasons to Prune Trees and Shrubs in Home Gardens. FS182E. Spokane County Extension, Washington State University. September 2015.
https://www.vmghoa.org/file/document/2793309369/GFx4hW7ZeXJMrHp1.pdf

Hortus Mustus—Dinner Plate Hibiscus . . . *By Lisa Villegas and Diane Escure*

It's been a while since we have featured in our newsletter a special plant recommended by one of our Master Gardeners, and this delightful dinner-plate-sized flowering Hibiscus plant is definitely worthy of highlight by our Grant-Adams Master Gardener Lisa Villegas, who stocks many of its varieties at her Seed Cupboard Nursery in Royal City. In fact, all varieties of Hibiscus are considered economically important ornamentals. They rank third highest in the sales of deciduous shrubs within the U.S. and have an annual estimated wholesale value of 23.2 million dollars.

Proven Winner Sumerific© "Summer Berry" Hibiscus. Photo: Provenwinner.com

Lisa highly recommends the dinner-plate perennial plant for our area because of its huge flowers that can bloom up to 9 inches in diameter from mid-summer to fall. She calls it a real showstopper in the landscape. Depending on its variety, this plant can grow 3 to 6 ft tall and wide and comes in a variety of colors: pink, red, blue, violet, and variegated colors.

Hibiscus is also known as rose mallow (H. moscheutos) and is either a determinate plant, which grows to its full height before setting flowers at the tips of its branches, or an indeterminate plant, with large circular flowers blooming throughout its branches.

Proven Winner "Holy Grail". Photo: Provenwinner.com

Lisa recommends the indeterminate varieties for a dazzling display of flowers lasting nonstop for months. The dinner plate hibiscus is a hardy perennial (Zones 4-9) that withstands wind once established and doesn't need staking. It does need a lot of sun and water, particularly as it is getting established. It has wildlife value for nectar-feeders and birds. Lisa, however, finds in her area (on the Royal Slope portion of the Columbia Basin) that hibiscus seems to have reduced attractions for deer and rabbits.

A few of Lisa's hibiscus favorites are Proven Winner "Holy Grail" for its black leaves and deep red blooms and "Spinderella" for its two-tone swirling colors. She also likes "Jazz-berry Jam", which she calls "Pepto-Bismol pink-colored" flowers that look like balloons on a plant that grows 6 ft tall. One unique characteristic about dinner plate hibiscus is that it is one of the last perennials to show signs of life in early spring. Once it starts growing though, it will grow about an inch a day and start to bloom in midsummer. It can be used as a temporary summer screen or hedge. It can also be grown in very large containers like a whiskey barrel, Lisa says.

Proven Winner "Jazzberry Jam". Photo: Provenwinner.com

Proven Winner "Spinderella. Photo: Provenwinner.com

In the fall after the plant has gone dormant or in early February, it is a good idea to take a strong pair of loppers or pruners to cut down all of the woody stems to about 6 inches tall. The new growth will appear from the base of the plant, not on the brown stems, so it's a good idea to remove them before new growth occurs. When the new growth appears, apply a balanced slow-release plant food to the surrounding soil which will continue to feed it for several weeks. Then give it some water-soluble fertilizer in early summer just as its flower buds are beginning to form to help the plant have energy to produce lots of flowers.

References:

PW Proven Winners. The #1 Plant Brand. https://www.provenwinners.com/

Lupien, S.L., Dugan, K.M., Ward, K.F., O'Donnell, K. 2016. Wilt, crown, and root rot of common rose mallow (Hibiscus moscheutos) caused by a novel Fusarium sp. Plant Disease. 101(2):354-358. November 23, 2016

Hibiscus moscheutos. https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/hibiscus-moscheutos/

Hibiscus | Home & Garden Information Center (clemson.edu). Factsheet HGIC 1179. December 27, 2004.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hibiscus_moscheutos#cite_note-winters-5

Row Covers for Spring and Fall Gardens . . . *by Mark Amara*

In a year like 2021, floating row covers can provide ways to jump start the outdoor gardening season or extend it later in the fall. Season extenders come in all shapes, sizes, materials, and thicknesses. They are used for frost protection, insect barriers, or help control critters like birds, squirrels, or rabbits. Row covers are also used as a passive heat source and to maintain more uniform growing conditions in erratic weather. They can be used early in the spring or even in the fall. The products best suited to temperature variations or extremes may provide some protection from freezing, are good heat insulators, and may help keep insect pests from plants. Row covers are typically made of synthetic polypropylene or woven polyester that allows water and air to move freely through them. Plastic may also serve as a passive heat cover. However, plastic does not breathe nor does it allow air or water in unless opened on the ends or in using an irrigation system like drip that provides water under it.

With the exception of plastic, materials mentioned above come in different thicknesses and weights which vary in the amounts of light and heat they may transmit. If row covers are carefully handled, they can be reused for many years. Light-weight row covers allow 90% light through and are often advertised as insect barriers, but are not intended to serve as frost protection. These materials are very thin and may rip easily so are generally not reusable after they rip. Medium-weight row covers allow 85% light and frost protection to 28˚F. Heavy weight row covers allow 35-50% light through and may provide frost protection in the 24-28˚F range. Any type of row cover should be cleaned or hosed to keep soil from adhering to it which tends to break and weight it down. These materials should be thoroughly dry before storing to keep them from molding or breaking down further.

Row covers are usually sold in 5-ft to 50-ft widths and may be up to 1000 feet long. They are laid directly over plants or over support structures like aluminum, PVC or plastic hoops and anchored with soil, rocks, or other heavy objects. If using for insect protection, check to be sure insects are not present on plants before and after covering to reduce infestation issues. For example, in my Moses Lake vegetable garden, I often use both the lighter-weight insect covers and heavier-weight frost protectors supported by wire hoops for different situations. I anchor the fabric to the ground with wood or steel posts rather than with soil so it can be easily removed . Row covers are generally resilient when it comes to irrigation. Ideally, drip irrigation works the best, although overhead sprinkler irrigation works fine too since materials are permeable. Once plants are established in the warmth of spring, the covers can be removed. Alternatively, they can be left on or over plants later in the fall when cold temperatures threaten.

References

Anderson, Elaine
No date. *Row Covers for Vegetable Gardens*. Community Horticulture Fact Sheet # 19. Washington State University King County Extension. http://county.wsu.edu/king/gardening/mg/factsheets/Fact%20Sheets/Row%20Covers%20for%20Vegetable%20Gardens.pdf.

Chassen, Fran
2010 *The Use of Floating Row Covers*. Colorado State University Extension. Master Gardener Program. http://www.colostate.edu/Dept/CoopExt/4DMG/VegFruit/rowcover.htm.

Fitzgerald, Toni and Mark Stiltz, compilers
2005 *Row Covers*. Washington State University Extension, Spokane County Master Gardener Program. C187. http://county.wsu.edu/spokane/gardening/Documents/C187%20Row%20Covers%2009.pdf.

Ophardt, Marianne
2015 *Floating Row Covers in Gardens*. Garden Tips prepared for the Tri-City Herald newspaper. April 9. http://ext100.wsu.edu/gardentips/2015/06/25/floating-row-covers-in-gardens/.

Parker, Joyce, Carol Miles, Todd Murray, and William Snyder
2012 Washington State University Extension Fact Sheet FS089E. *How to Install a Floating Row Cover*. http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/FS089E/FS089E.pdf.