



GROUNDED

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<http://county.wsu.edu/grant-adams/Pages/default.aspx> · ga.mgvolunteers@wsu.edu

From Seed to Table: Cultivating Sustainable Gardening Success

On April 18, 2026 gardeners from across Grant and Adams counties will gather at Big Bend Community College in Moses Lake for the **9th Annual Columbia Basin Eco-Gardening Symposium: From Seed to Table**, a free, half-day event designed to help backyard growers and small farmers cultivate healthier, more productive gardens.

Hosted by the WSU Extension Grant-Adams Master Gardeners and the Columbia Basin Conservation District, the symposium blends research-based education with real-world experience. From soil health and composting to irrigation efficiency, pollination, and food preservation, the event offers practical solutions for sustainable gardening in the Columbia Basin’s unique climate.

There are two keynote speakers. Isaac Lnenicka will speak at the beginning while Judy Conlow is the featured speaker toward the end of the program.

In between, attendees can choose from multiple breakout sessions covering irrigation, composting, pest management, herbs, bees, food preservation, and funding opportunities for small farmers. A lively panel discussion – *“The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Vegetable Gardening”* – brings local Master Gardeners together to share honest lessons learned.

Vendor Alley will be open throughout the day, offering plant starts, soil testing, composting tips, pollinator resources, and a Master Gardener Plant Clinic where gardeners can get expert advice tailored to their own challenges.

For many participants, the event is as much about community as it is about cultivation. “This symposium creates a space for learning, sharing, and connecting,” organizers say. “Everyone leaves inspired – and better equipped to grow food sustainably.”

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

From Seed to Table Symposium

Plant Clinics

Blueberry Growing in E Washington

Planning and Prepping Your Garden

New Master Gardener Training

Washington Green School

New MGs Certified

Announcements



Isaac Lnenicka

Opening keynote speaker **Isaac Lnenicka**, a Soap Lake-based farmer and certified arborist, brings firsthand experience working with soil health and environmental stressors. Farming intensively on just a quarter acre, Lnenicka will share strategies that help gardeners grow more food with fewer inputs.



Judy Conlow

The day concludes with **Judy Conlow**, a Master Gardener and engaging storyteller whose presentation, "*Lemurs and Wolves*," explores pollination in a way that is informative, entertaining, and inspiring.

Breakout sessions are also planned and will include 20-30-minute talks on bees, bugs/pests, winterizing the garden, irrigation, composting, assistance to urban and small farmers, container gardening, herbs/native herbs, and preserving home grown food. Breakout session speakers and panelist are attached.



Mary Love



Marylou Krautscheid



Erika Rattray



Indiri Kulkarni



Susan Franck



Griffen Hansen



Lisa Robinson



Rae Ann Apodaca

All photographs provided by the speakers

The Eco-Gardening Symposium takes place April 18, 2026 from 8:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the ATEC Building on Big Bend Community College’s campus in Moses Lake. Admission is free, but registration is required https://extension.wsu.edu/grant/gardening/master_gardeners/

Use Plant Clinics to Get Gardening Questions Answered...By Mark Amara

An elite cadre of training Master Gardeners quietly answers gardening questions all year long. Last year there were 46 in person clinics and our group staffed a daily on line clinic through Grant County Extension accepting questions every day of the year.

Types of clinics where MGs were visible last year included: the Othello Sandhill Crane Festival, Grant County Fair, Othello Fair, Moses Lake and Quincy Farmers Markets, Moses Lake Winter Markets, Othello Emergency Preparedness Workshop, NW Spring Festival in Moses Lake and the Eco-Gardening Symposium in Moses Lake. These same events will certainly be staffed again in 2026 so bring your gardening questions to these places. In addition, the on-line plant clinic allows the public to send in gardening questions every day (ga.mgvolunteers@wsu.edu). Samples may be brought to the Grant County Extension Office at 1525 E. Wheeler Road M-F, 8-5 pm in sealed containers or the public can call the extension office at (509) 754-2100 Ext 4301 to leave gardening questions for the Master Gardeners.

Master Gardeners are again offering opportunities to interact with and provide gardening expertise to the public. In January 2026 for example, Deb Russell, Terry Rice, Linda Crosier and Glenn Martin staffed the Moses Lake Farmers Market Winter Market in Moses Lake. Glenn Martin and Marylou Krautscheid then conducted another plant clinic at the Columbia Basin Home and Garden Show in Moses Lake in late February while Mark Amara and Mary Love staffed a plant clinic at the ML Winter market in early March followed by George Roper, Carol Roper and RJ Lembcke’s plant clinic effort at the Othello Sandhill Crane Festival on March 21, 2026.



Deb Russell, Terry Rice, Linda Crosier and Glenn Martin staffed the January 2026 plant clinic in Moses Lake. Photo credit: Glenn Martin.



Left picture: Terry Rice offered three short demonstrations on winter sowing. Photo credit: Glenn Martin.

Middle picture: Glenn Martin and Marylou Krautscheid staffed a plant clinic at the Home and Garden Show in Moses Lake in late February 2026. Photo credit: Glenn Martin.

Right Picture: RJ Lemcke, Carol and George Roper staffed a plant clinic at the Othello Sandhill Crane Festival on March 21, 2026. Photo credit: Mark Amara

Growing Blueberries in Eastern Washington...By Mark Amara

Though blueberries do well in western Washington with a minimum of soil preparation, growing them in eastern Washington can be quite a daunting challenge because the soil often needs to be intensively prepared before planting.

In western Washington soils are naturally acidic, often having a pH below 6. PH must be adjusted in eastern Washington to ensure a healthy and productive blueberry crop. What the heck is pH you may ask? Well, pH is reflected as a measure of hydrogen ion concentration in soil solutions. As the hydrogen ion increases, soil pH decreases. Soil pH's range from 0 to 14 and pH is expressed as a number on that scale. Soils with pH below 7 are classed as acidic while soils with pH above 7 are classed as alkaline or basic. A pH of 7 is considered neutral.

In rainfall limited areas like much of eastern Washington, carbonates which are salts accumulate because there is inadequate moisture to flush calcium and magnesium from the soil surface below the rooting zone of most plants. Here in eastern Washington these inadequately flushed zones may appear as caliche or other carbonate rich soil horizons. In these situations, if pH is not at an optimum level for the intended crop(s), then nutrients may not be available and soil microorganism activity necessary to good plant growth may be ineffective. Vegetable gardens seem to be able to produce well in soils with pHs in the 6.5-8 range which is a reason they do so well in eastern Washington. Blueberries are another story because if the pH is not within a tolerable range, iron, manganese or other nutrients become unavailable and show up as iron chlorosis or yellowing of the plant.



Elemental sulfur is the preferred material to add to the soil in eastern Washington to adjust soil pH. The sulfur comes as pea sized pellets that must be incorporated into the soil. Photo credit: Mark Amara

For blueberries to thrive, soils need to have a pH in the 4.5-5.5 range, as well as being planted on deep well drained sites in full sun. Eastern Washington soils especially here in the Columbia Basin are typically neutral or alkaline between 7-8 pH which means they need to be copiously amended before planting to bring the pH to within tolerable pH levels for blueberry plants to be successful. If the soil is not amended ahead of time, adding sulfur late may be ineffective in lowering pH, there will not be optimal growth and the ability of plants to extract iron, manganese, zinc and other nutrients is limited.

The ideal way to prepare the ground for planting is to be proactive and conscientious and plan ahead before any berries are planted. In the year before planting soil should be tested to determine the pH level, weeds should be controlled, and compost and/or mulch added to improve organic matter. After these aforementioned steps are taken, adequate time is necessary to decrease soil pH in Grant County soils to desired levels. This can be done by adding elemental sulfur pellets to acidify it. Planting blueberries and adding sulfur at the same time is not recommended. Other alternatives might include using sulfuric acid but this acid is dangerous to use and requires special equipment not available to most gardeners.

According to OSU/WSU research, add sulfur depending on soil type and current pH. So, for the soil type at my property outside of Moses Lake, which is a (gravelly) sandy loam, the recommendation is to apply 1-3 lbs of sulfur per 100 square feet at least a year before planting to allow the soil to acidify. The goal is to get the soil pH to 5.5, the upper end of the suitable range for blueberries. I will soil test again in the fall and then in the following year right before I plant in the spring to determine how much the soil pH has decreased and to determine if additional sulfur is needed. In some of the sandier soil textures, soil pH will creep up (become alkaline again) after planting, even if you modify the soil pH properly prior to planting. This means it may be necessary to continue to apply sulfur as a granule or powder, which is more expensive than pellets but works more quickly to affect pH to ensure it stays in the acid range.



Blueberry bushes vigorously growing. WSU Small Fruit Horticulture Research & Extension Program, Mount Vernon NW Washington Research and Extension Center

https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2073/2021/01/114_GrowingBlueberries.pdf

Since blueberries prefer soils that are well drained and in sunny locations, those conditions should be identified and used. Blueberries do best in soils that are relatively high in organic matter. Having organic matter percentages above 4% is desirable and soils should be amended with low pH organic matter. Using plant-based compost or animal manures common here in eastern Washington is NOT recommended. Instead, using peat moss in combination with other low pH materials like pine needles or saw dust (preferably from Douglas fir, pine, or most hardwoods) is recommended and should be incorporated into the soil. Adding 2-3 inches of mulch to the soil surface at planting is also a wonderful way to reduce weeds, conserve soil moisture, and add organic matter and nutrients to the soil. After the first year, 4-6 inches of mulch can be added over the next 5 or 6 years and may be replenished as it decomposes. Having a relatively thick mulch layer on the surface may also help prevent soils from freezing and thawing. Other ways of controlling weeds are to apply a 1-2-inch-thick layer of sawdust and then top it with a weed mat fabric barrier. However, using this method also requires that the fabric can be easily removed so that additional compost, mulch or fertilizer can be applied.

My plan is to first amend, compost, soil test and plant a couple of different blueberry cultivars to ensure optimum fruit set and sizing. Planting one variety can produce satisfactory crops but planting at least 2 varieties creates conditions whereby pollen spread amongst the cultivars usually results in increased yield, larger berries, and earlier ripening. Stay tuned.

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Planning and Prepping Your Garden ...By Sue Franck

There's nothing more satisfying than stepping into the garden and harvesting dinner straight from the vine. Seasoned gardeners know this bounty doesn't happen by accident—it's a labor of love, rooted in patience and rewarded by steady, attentive care. If you're planting your very first vegetable garden, pause and ask yourself: Am I ready to nurture tender seedlings, stay ahead of relentless weeds, water wisely (not too much, not too little), and tend to the countless details that turn sprouts into supper?

Whether you're a veteran grower or digging in for the first time, success begins long before the first seed hits the soil. Planning and preparing your garden space is where the harvest truly begins.

If you live in an apartment, don't let limited space discourage you. A sunny porch, balcony, or deck can become a thriving mini-farm. Vegetables can grow beautifully in containers—provided you match the right crop and variety to the right pot size and use quality soil. Think ahead to the plant's mature size and root depth; cramped roots mean stunted growth. (Wolfe K., 2020, May 1). With the proper setup, container gardens can be surprisingly productive.

Raised beds are another excellent option, especially for gardeners with mobility challenges or yards with poor native soil. With a modest investment, raised beds offer improved drainage, warmer soil in spring, and an extended growing season—allowing you to plant earlier and harvest later than traditional in-ground gardens. (Wolfe, K. 2020, May 8).

Pierce County's Master Gardeners website: <https://extension.wsu.edu/pierce/mg-home/educational-outreach/demonstration-gardens/> The picture is of the Master Gardener edible demonstration garden.

If you're working with an established garden space, you'll face an important choice: to till or not to till. Tilling can break up compacted soil and eliminate existing weeds, but it may also bring dormant weed seeds to the surface, inviting a new wave of growth. Leaving soil undisturbed helps preserve beneficial microbes, maintain natural soil structure created by earthworms and old root channels, and encourage a gradual release of nutrients from last season's mulch. (Wolfe, K., 2012). Each approach has its place; understanding your soil's condition will guide your decision.



Speaking of soil, testing it provides a valuable snapshot of fertility and pH levels—especially when establishing a new garden plot. While soil tests come with a cost, they can prevent wasted time and money on unnecessary amendments. Contact your local soil testing laboratory to learn what services they offer, whether they provide amendment recommendations, and how to properly collect a sample. Sampling is simple but must follow specific guidelines to ensure accurate results. (WSU Whatcom County Extension. 2010).

If you choose to fertilize without testing, most vegetable gardens benefit from a balanced blend of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium (Sideman, B. 2019)—the essential trio that fuels leafy growth, strong roots, and abundant fruit.

Understanding your soil type is equally important for proper watering. The three primary soil types—sand, silt, and clay—each behave differently. Loam, a balanced mixture of all three soil textures, is the gold standard for vegetable gardening. Think of soil as a sponge filled with pores. Sandy soils have large pores that absorb and release water quickly, often requiring more frequent watering. Clay and silt soils have smaller pores that hold moisture longer but may drain slowly (Cogger, C. 2014, Revised 2020). Many home tests—readily found through reputable gardening publications and instructional videos—can help you estimate your soil’s composition.

Finally, crop rotations should be part of your garden plan. Though it requires forethought and record-keeping, rotating crops offers powerful benefits. Different plants use and replenish nutrients in varying ways, helping maintain soil balance over time. Rotation also disrupts disease cycles and reduces the risk of pest populations taking hold year after year (Wolfe, 2020 March 13). And fewer pests? That’s a harvest everyone can celebrate.



Photo credit: Stock Image from Pixabay.com

A thriving vegetable garden doesn’t happen by chance. It grows from preparation, knowledge, and a willingness to tend both soil and plants with intention. Put in the work now, and when you carry that first basket of fresh vegetables into your kitchen, you’ll taste the reward in every bite.

MARCH TIP BOX

~ **Start with Smart Planning and Preparation.** Carefully evaluate your garden space, choose the right vegetables for your space, and decide whether tilling or no-till practices best suit your soil.
 ~ Interested in learning more? Online searches offer many options, but research-based gardening information is most reliable when found on .edu and wsu websites, including WSU Master Gardeners. You can also get personalized local advice by emailing WSU Grant-Adams Master Gardeners at ga.mgvolunteers@wsu.edu.

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Training to Become a Grant-Adams Master Gardener

If you're interested in learning more about sustainable gardening practices and care of the environment, the Grant-Adams Master Gardeners are offering in person training the fall of 2026 for those who want to become a Washington State University (WSU) Extension Master Gardener volunteer.

Our program might be just right if you want to expand your gardening knowledge, meet new people, and make a difference in the community. We can provide the knowledge and understanding to help you learn about science-based research and approaches to solve yard and garden challenges that matter to you, your friends, and neighbors and also benefit your community.

WSU Master Gardener volunteers are a diverse group of individuals. We have a wide range of ages, skills, interests, and backgrounds. But the one thing we all have in common is the desire to share gardening knowledge and experience with other gardeners. We are the go-to resources for the community seeking research-based, innovative gardening solutions. And we are committed to the stewardship and sustainability of our natural resources in the Columbia Basin.

Knowledge gained during the Master Gardener training program includes how to:

- Create resilient landscapes that are adapted to our changing climate and ways to reduce risk of loss due to wildfires.
- Use integrated pest management and provide options to controlling pests
- Use water-wise gardening and landscaping practices to conserve water.
- Build healthy soils to prevent loss and degradation and ensure the long-term viability of local food security and natural resources.
- Help native bees and other pollinators thrive in home and community landscapes.
- Use sustainable techniques for growing local food to improve individual and community health and wellness.

The Requirements:

- Applicants must be at least 18 years of age, have access to email and a computer, pass a federal background check and agree to a volunteer code of conduct (<https://greenschool.extension.wsu.edu/home/grow-with-wgs/become-an-extension-master-gardener/agreement/>).

The Training:

WSU Extension Master Gardener training is offered online through WSU as well as in person. Online training walks trainees through lessons on topics like botany, soils, food gardening, plant diseases, and entomology. Online training can be taken in any year even though the in-person training is only offered every other year. The in-person training is hands-on and teaches trainees how to apply what is learned online to real world situations that WSU Extension Master Gardener volunteers may encounter. Certified Master Gardeners will be assigned to each trainee to guide them through the training process and answer any questions.

The training fee is \$390, which includes online and in-person training, a downloadable copy of the Master Gardener Manual, and a background check.

The Internship:

After successfully completing the online and in-person training and successfully passing online tests, students become interns starting in January 2027. Interns volunteer alongside certified WSU Extension Master Gardeners during the year to further develop their knowledge and skills and to become comfortable

working as community educators and participating in our varied programs. At a minimum, interns must volunteer at least 50 hours during 2027 to earn WSU Extension Master Gardener certification.

The Commitment:

Then once you become a certified WSU Extension Master Gardener, you volunteer each year at least 25 hours of approved time and earn at least 10 hours of continuing education to maintain your Master Gardener certification. At the end of each year, if you've met these minimum requirements to maintain your certification, your continued commitment is confirmed for the following year by submitting a simple reapplication form. There is no fee for the yearly reapplication.

If you're interested in this program, please go to ga.mgvolunteers@wsu.edu to request an application and leaflet.

You can email your completed application to ga.mgvolunteers@wsu.edu. Or you can either mail or hand deliver your application in person to the Master Gardener Program at the WSU Grant Extension office, 1525 E. Wheeler Road, Moses Lake, WA 98837. The deadline to submit your application to the Master Gardener program is **July 31, 2026**.

Washington Green School



Over the past 50+ years, Washington State University Extension has provided guidance and instruction to the gardening public along with training to those who have been certified as Master Gardeners. WSU has developed new options for anyone who wants to learn gardening principles through the Master Gardener program or for anyone who wants to take gardening classes. Signups for this training can be done starting August 17, 2026 through September 30, 2026. Training starts in October 2026 and runs through February 2027.

Training may also apply to those who want to learn more about gardening in Washington but may not want to serve as Master

Gardener volunteers. Some gardening professionals may be only seeking a gardening endorsement for their resumes but might not want to be obligated to volunteer annually, which is a requirement for all Master Gardeners. The new program is called Washington Green School, and it offers lots of options to explore. The attached website link explains the program, options, schedules, and fees and is quite comprehensive: It is <https://greenschool.extension.wsu.edu>.

New Master Gardeners Certified ...by Mark Amara

Three of six interns who started new Master Gardener training recently completed the intensive WSU Extension Grant-Adams Master Gardener training program and were awarded badges and certificates for their efforts. The training included a comprehensive online segment of topically selected chapters and quizzes, classroom instruction and field tours, and volunteer hours which took place between August 2024 and the end of December 2025. Two of the three recipients were present for their awards and included Joyce Stauffenberg (left) and Susan Franck. Not pictured is Leyla Lyman.

To maintain the certification, all Master Gardeners annually take at least 10 hours of continuing education classes and volunteer at least 25 hours in a wide range of community activities.

The Master Gardeners maintain demonstration gardens in Othello and Moses Lake, put on an annual gardening symposium, produce a quarterly newsletter, teach classes, hold in person and on-line plant clinics, propagate plants and sell them to name some of the activities the group is involved with.

Joyce Stauffenberg and Susan Franck. Photo credit: Mark Amara



New Gardeners are sought to help perpetuate the group as it is small and in need of interested individuals. Joining the Master Gardener program is a wonderful way of giving back to the communities we live in, making new friends, and is a learning experience gardeners seem to thrive at. Check out the training program offered above for more information or Ask a Master Gardener.

Announcements

9th Annual Columbia Basin Eco-Gardening Symposium in Moses Lake, BBCC. April 18, 2026.

Annual Master Gardener Plant Sale, Moses Lake Farmers Market, McCosh Park, May 2, 2026, 8am-1pm.

In Person Plant Clinics, Moses Lake Farmers Market, McCosh Park, Third Saturday of each month, May-October, 8-1 pm.

Ask Master Gardeners questions 24/7 on line. Go to ga.mgvolunteers@wsu.edu

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