

When I stopped at the grocery store this week the first thing I saw was daffodils, primroses and tulips grouped together in single pots. My first thought was “how delightful,” followed by “some novice gardener is going to think all these plants will grow in their garden every year just like this.” Not true. In real-life, primroses start blooming in mid January continuing through May and sometimes longer if we have a cool summer. Daffodils start popping up in January and February and bloom brightly from late February through March. And, tulips bloom in April and sometimes May. But unless you’re a magician, they won’t all grow at the same time in the same month in our gardens.

To discover more about bulbs Roozen Gaarde Bulb Growing Company in Mount Vernon, Skagit Valley, has an excellent web site at www.roozengaarde.com. You can learn about the bulbs they sell and also read and print out a four-page information fact sheet answering questions about bulbs. If you’ve never visited Skagit Valley for the Tulip Festival (usually the first two weeks in April) you might want to put the date on your calendars.

February is the time of year when people start itching to start vegetables and flowers from seed. It would almost take a book to tell you everything you’d need to know about starting seeds. I need to confess that I started my own seeds indoors several times but for years and years now I’ve merely driven to my favorite nursery or grocery store and bought starts that were already nurtured on their way in some plant grower’s greenhouse, or I direct sow them outdoors when the weather warms up.

Our start of warm summer weather is so unpredictable and fickle that it’s quicker and easier to buy plants already started; especially if last year is any indication of the summers we will be having. Most seeds need temperatures of 60-80 degrees to germinate. They then need those same temperatures to continue growing successfully. So if you start plants inside and put them outside when temperatures are lower they just stand there in a semi-dormant stage until the weather warms up. Or worse yet they sometimes die from rot or mildew in our sometimes very damp rainy May through July.

Everyone should try his/her luck sometime though. I heartily recommend three great handouts on seed starting from the King County Cooperative Extension Office. You can call their office at 206-296-3900 or FAX 206-296-0952. Their mailing address is 700 Fifth Avenue, 37th Floor, Seattle WA 98104-5037. You’ll want to ask for Factsheet #8 (Starting Garden Crops), Factsheet #25 (Recommended Vegetable Cultivar Descriptions), and Factsheet #40 (Frost Dates/Climatic Data). Fact Sheet #8 gives seed starting information plus which plants are best started inside or outside. It also provides transplanting information. Fact Sheet #25 has eight pages of information on the best varieties of vegetables to grow in our maritime northwest climate. Fact Sheet #40 features concise, pertinent information about our particular climate zone.

Our own Kitsap County Extension Office is an excellent resource. You can call or visit Monday through Friday during the hours of 8 AM to 4 PM. The phone number is 337-7157. The office is at 614 Division Street in Port Orchard. Parking is usually ample. Information is free or costs very little. Master Gardeners are there in person to answer your gardening questions. A Master Gardener program called Weather Watchers has compiled records of daily temperatures and rainfall so you can find out when the first and last frost dates are each year. Our county encompasses several climate zones. Temperatures can differ by 10 degrees from one end of the county to the other in any direction.

Excellent sources for seeds for our climate are: Renee’s Garden, Nichols Garden Nursery, Territorial Seed Company, and Ed Hume Seeds. Renee Shephard (formerly of Shephard’s Seeds) only sells to nursery or garden centers. You can call 888-880-7228 to find a retailer near you. She has a Website at www.reneesgarden.com. Ed Hume Seeds toll free number is 800-383-HUME. Territorial Seed Company can be reached at 888-657-3131 and www.territorial-seed.com. Nichols Garden Nursery’s number is 541-928-9280 or visit their web site at www.gardennursery.com. Territorial and Nichols are in Oregon. Ed Hume is in Kent, and Renee Shephard is in Felton, California. All four brands can be found locally at garden centers and nurseries.

I’ll end this column where I began. At the grocery store last week carrying out some bags of food I was suddenly eye to eyes with two small bees (honey I think). I know they weren’t Orchard Mason Bees even though they usually emerge before the honeybees. Start checking your plants (especially *Pieris Japonica*) for these creatures. Next week’s column we’ll talk about Mason Bees and bee expert Brian Griffin.