

If you've always wanted to start composting and didn't know how to begin here's your chance. This Saturday, August 26, from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. you can visit the North Mervyn's parking lot at the Kitsap Mall in Silverdale and pick up a compost bin for the bargain price of \$38. The bins retail for \$85 but Kitsap residents can buy them Saturday at the special price. The event is sponsored by Kitsap County Public Works, Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, Kitsap County WSU Cooperative Extension, the Kitsap County Master Composters and the Kitsap Mall.

Composting is a cool thing to do for the earth, your garden and ultimately your family. Two years ago Dave Peterson, Kitsap County Public Works Recycling Coordinator, and Patt Kasa, Kitsap County Master Gardener Coordinator, started a Master Composter Program in Kitsap County. Two groups of dedicated Master Composters have completed the training and give back a minimum of 60 hours each year to their community.

Compost demonstration sites are maintained by Master Gardeners and Master Composters at the following locations throughout Kitsap County: Bainbridge Library, Northwest College of Art (entrance is across from the George Fireworks Stand by Milepost 8 on Highway 305), Raab Park Youth Garden (Caldart Avenue in Poulsbo), and Anna Smith Children's Garden (Tracyton Beach Road) and Anderson Cove Park (2220 Anderson Avenue, drive north on Bloomington from 15th Street in Bremerton). To obtain further information and publications about composting call Dave Peters at 337-4898. Master Composters will come speak to groups about composting. To line up a speaker for your group call Patt Kasa at 337-7157.

"Compost Happens" is a truism. Everything on earth will eventually biodegrade. We gardeners can help it along in many ways and reap the benefits of good tilth for our gardens. Two inexpensive books about composting are "Worms Eat My Garden" by Mary Appelhof (ISBN 0942256034) and Backyard Composting by Harmonious Press, Sebastopol California (ISBN 0962976830).

You can get a free publication called "Down to Earth" from Kitsap County Public Works. The publication includes information on mulches, composting yard waste, composting does and don'ts and worm composting of food waste. Additionally you'll find plans for building worm bins, wire mesh composting bins, and a 3-bin system using wood and wire. It's an invaluable publication.

Speaking of invaluable things. My sister Jackie Aitchison was my gardening angel this week. My husband and I just returned from a two week vacation to see our kids and grandkid in Colorado. While we were gone a forest of weeds sprang up in our garden and all along and through our gravel path that wends through the back yard. Jackie helped me weed and the garden is now looking quite lovely again. Thank you, thank you sweet sister.

While in Boulder I noticed all the flowers (surprise, surprise). A great combination at the Boulder Library used gigantic (4-5 foot tall) white nicotiana up against a brick wall. Next was a row of tall purple grass called Pennisetum setaceum 'Purpureum.' In front of the purple grass were several rows of huge gold and yellow marigolds, and finally a row of magenta petunias. I'm writing this combination down in my garden journal so I can remember it for next year. All of these plants would work well in our Northwest. The huge nicotiana is found locally at Poulsbo Market Thriftway and reseeds itself in mild winters. Check your local nurseries in late spring, it's a stunning plant and works well in borders or in huge containers.

Be sure to visit your favorite local nursery and purchase some plants for fall color in your garden. Annuals and perennials are available now with blooms that will last through at least November. One of my favorite fall rhizomes is Schizostylis coccinea (crimson flag, Kaffir lily). The flowers are crimson but can range from hot salmon-pink to a deep orangey red. Give it lots of room in your garden or plant it in a pot. It's well behaved but tends to run and can take over a bed. The long-stemmed flowers make beautiful bouquets just as they are. Schizostylis coccinea thrives in shade or sun, she's not fussy. Another favorite is rudbeckia which comes in all sizes. You've probably seen them and heard them called black-eyed susans. Rudbeckias are easy to grow and also make great bouquets. They prefer sun but I have a huge clump that has thrived in nearly full shade for four years now. Treat yourself to some autumn color in your garden.

You can email comments to Peg Tillery at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.