

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 6-25-03 What's Up and 6-28 or so Bremerton Patriot) ,
©2005

If you've procrastinated on putting in a vegetable garden it's not too late. Carrots planted after June 21 usually escape the carrot rust fly maggots. Start carrots from seed by sprinkling the seed on top of your garden bed. Lightly press the seeds down so they make contact with the soil and then very lightly sprinkle a very thin layer of garden soil (or sand) over the seeds to hide them from the birds. In a few days you'll notice tiny sets of two narrow leaflets followed in about two weeks by ferny looking leaves. Now all you have to do is wait and in November (or sooner) you'll be eating the fruits (or vegetables as it were) of your labors. You'll find varieties that are only two to four inches long and there are even red, yellow and purple varieties.

Other late fall and winter harvested vegetables to plant now are: beets, Swiss chard, kale, broccoli, Brussel sprouts, turnips, and bush beans. You'll also find several kinds of sugar snap peas that can cope with our hot dry summers as long as they're given water on a regular basis. One year at the Raab Park Youth Garden we used a shade teepee made from two sections of lattice tied together to make a roof shaped tent. We planted runner beans to grow on the lattice and then planted lettuce under the shade of the beans. It worked very well. You might want to try this technique too.

My husband and I found vegetable starts the weekend of June 14 at several of our local nurseries. We put in: both bush and runner beans, Brussel sprouts, red and yellow Swiss chard, purple kale, zucchini squash, acorn squash and crookneck squash. Vegetable starts are still available at Valley Nursery, Savage Plants, Bainbridge Gardens, Country Nursery and Gardens and I'm sure many other nurseries and garden stores. New Zealand spinach and beets can also be started now from seed. All the aforementioned nurseries have vegetable seeds too. Peruse the back of the seed packets and notice the suggested planting times and the days to germination. You'll be amazed by how many vegetables you can still plant and harvest into the late fall and winter.

I know I remind my readers several times a year about Seattle Tilth's "The Maritime Northwest Garden Guide" but I just have to keep mentioning it. This wonderful resource on gardening in our area gives information for every month of the year. It's available at local nurseries and bookstores for the very low price of ten dollars. If you've never tried your luck at growing vegetables this book will answer all your questions and might even inspire you to take the plunge of growing your own food. You'll also find tips on planting, growing and caring for ornamental plants. Remember too the WSU Master Gardeners of Kitsap County are an excellent resource for gardening information and there are twelve clinics all over the County to give gardening resource and assistance.

Classes on gardening art, techniques and information are being offered all summer long at Savage Plants in Kingston, Valley Nursery in Poulsbo, Bainbridge Gardens, Clear Creek Nursery and many other venues in the County. I'll be speaking at Savage Plants on Saturday July 9. Announcements of classes are listed in this newspaper each week.

Bainbridge Gardens and Valley Nursery have newsletters you can request and up-to-date websites you can log onto.

I have a few last words on the tent caterpillars. I received a call from Dr. Sebastian at University of Kentucky Veterinary School with a request for as many caterpillars as I could round up, freeze and mail to him. Monday June 16 we sent him seven pounds and this week we're rounding up even more. If only he'd called in May we could have just gone out and swept up about a ton for him. I'll keep you posted in the future on Dr. Sebastian's research.

I'm happy to report I did indeed see lots of tachanid fly eggs on the caterpillars in my own garden. I even had the privilege of watching a tachanid fly lay her egg on a caterpillar's head. The flies can be identified by their purple-maroon eyes. If you're quick you can go out in your garden with gloved hands and squish lots and lots of cocoons before the moths hatch out. I took great satisfaction in doing that while I was collecting caterpillars.