Starting Your Winter Garden

Laura Matter, Lead Environmental Educator, NSB

Why, you might ask, are we thinking about winter gardening when we are still waiting for our tomatoes to produce their first little jewel of sweetness? The short answer is because it is time. The longer answer is that in order for your plants to “overwinter,” you need to give them enough time to grow and become strong enough to survive cold soils and air temperatures. The more complicated answer is that in reality you are not just planting for winter, but also for fall harvests.

With our maritime climate modified by mountains and large bodies of water, we can grow many things to harvest fresh month by month all year. What is better than being able to go out in early February and pick Brussels sprouts right off your plants to put into your oven to roast? To do that, we need to be planning and planting right now. Hopefully you have left some room in your garden! If not, never fear, containers come in handy.

The first step is to decide which foods you want to continue to grow or add to the mix you already have growing. Some vegetables

Chickens are the New Chihuahuas

Carey Thornton, Garden Educator

As more urban people get into growing their own food, raised beds and planting strip gardens are popping up all over, and backyard chicken coops are also becoming more popular than ever before. It seems the city chicken has become our new pet of choice.

In Seattle, city folks have been keeping chickens in their backyards for ages. Many other cities have used Seattle’s experience to get their municipal codes changed to allow chickens. A recent film about getting chickens legalized in Madison, Wisconsin cites Seattle as their inspiration for changing legislation.

Raising a small flock of hens can be a bounty for the backyard gardener. Chickens can enhance an urban homestead by providing, at once, soil rototilling, food waste composting, insect population control and a broad-spectrum herbicide and natural fertilizer from their droppings. All the while, they are producing a high-protein crop of their own.

Many folks consider their hens as pets who are part of the family. Kids love them as entertainment, friends and givers of perfect, oval-shaped eggs. It’s a wonderful way for people to be involved in producing the food that nourishes them.

“I have had chickens since Tilth offered our first City Chickens class and have always enjoyed it,” says Seattle Tilth staff member Lisa Taylor. “I have missed the hens in the time between flocks. The eggs cannot be beat, and do not underestimate how much organic material they can eat and shred up. They are kind of the secret heroes of the urban compost pile!”

Seattle Tilth has classes where you can learn the basics of maintaining a laying flock, raising baby chicks, building a coop for your gals and much more. In the summer, we provide even more inspiration by offering a city-wide tour of chicken coops. Also in our series of urban livestock classes you will also find beginner’s classes on raising goats and keeping honeybees.

Save the date for our Coop Tour!

July 10, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Seattle Tilth will be hosting our annual city-wide chicken coop tour. Chicken families will open their backyards to “Coop Tourists,” showing off the whimsical homes they have built for their flocks. This year, the tour will include folks raising bees, goats & ducks.

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Teaching Peace, Growing Gardens at a Renton Church

Jessica Heiman, Children’s Garden Educator

Nikki Freutel is a mother and a police officer, and she also is in charge of education and outreach for the garden at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Renton. Nikki was an enthusiastic attendee of our recent garden educator workshop, and her passion was infectious.

The garden at St. Luke’s was created with funding from a grant that included the commitment to use the space for education and outreach. The food grown is given to congregants as well as being donated to a local food bank.

The church recently held a kickoff celebration that included their first class for kids in the garden. The event also yielded a valuable connection with the Salvation Army, who will be sending children from their after-school program to the garden every other week.

Nikki is using what she learned at the workshop as well as curriculum from our publication Teaching Peace Through Gardening. She complimented the quality of our workshop, saying it goes beyond reading gardening books by allowing her to directly use the concepts.

Now Nikki is feeling ambitious. Plans include work with middle and high school students in youth development and a kid’s garden class for congregants. She hopes to have a college student intern this summer.

“There’s lots of possibility to make connections about healthy life choices, sustainability, stewardship, mentoring and modeling” in the garden, she says, and she wants to translate the concepts and values of the garden to stewardship and peace.

Starting Your Winter Garden

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etables growing in your summer garden can be sown again for fall and winter use.

The second step is to prepare your beds. Loosen the soil where other plants have been harvested, add some all-purpose organic fertilizer to get the plants off to a good start and get some compost on hand to mulch around the plants when you set them out.

The third step is to understand that not all veggies will withstand our cold, wet winters. Forget about hot-weather crops like tomato, pepper, basil and corn (though basil and peppers could be kept going in a heated greenhouse).

The best choices for fall harvest are going to be quick-growing plants like lettuce, green onions, pac choi, arugula, Chinese cabbage, mustard, spinach and radish. Even beets, carrots, and turnips can provide you with a fall crop when sown by mid-July.

The best choices for over-wintering are collards, Brussels sprouts, kale and over-wintering varieties of broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower. Get best results by starting these indoors and transplanting into the garden. Direct-sow seeds of Swiss chard, winter-hardy carrots, parsnips, rutabagas and beets before the end of July.

The fourth and most important step to a healthy, productive winter garden is to remember the concept of plant rotation. For example, because many of the plants that overwinter well are in the Brassica family, make sure that you are not replacing spring-sown kale with summer-sown broccoli or other Brassicaceae in the same bed.

This can be a bit daunting when you consider all the members of this plant family, but to sort it all out and make a successful plan, call our Garden Hotline or consult the Maritime Northwest Garden Guide. As your tomatoes ripen, you’ll be on your way to a productive fall and winter garden.
Build A Teepee, Create Garden Magic

Lisa Taylor, Education Programs Manager

This summer, create a magical place for your kids in the veggie garden with a teepee trellis. Making a trellis that supports vining plants and doubles as a secret clubhouse is a great family project that adds intrigue to the garden for children.

Bean teepees are excellent hiding spots from which to spy on family members and munch on tasty garden snacks. Spreading out with books and crayons in the shade of a Scarlet Runner bean teepee is the stuff of childhood memories.

Think of it as an edible food fort. After you decide where the teepee will go, figure out what kind of beans your kids will want to eat as well as hide among.

Runner beans generally produce dry beans, and only the very smallest pods are worth eating. However, the delicious flowers are a surprising treat. The scarlet blossoms are sweet, crunchy and beany – like the sweetest of all green beans.

You also could try dry, wax or snap-type pole beans. For classic green beans, look for a snap bean. Blue Lake and Kentucky Blue Wonder are steadfast varieties for an edible fort.

Runner bean vines grow to 15 feet, which to a kid is a magnificent, fairy-tale height. Pole beans make shorter vines, 8-10 feet.

How to make a Teepee Trellis

Materials: You will need three or more poles that are 10’-15’ long, some strong cotton rope (clothesline works great), one or two balls of jute twine, a shovel, a few softball-sized rocks and your bean seeds.

To build it:

• Line up the poles together on the ground. About a foot from the top end, wrap them together with the cotton rope or clothesline. Loop the rope two or three times, then tie loosely (your hand should be able to slip into the loop).
• Use another section of cord to loop around the first cord between each pole, weaving in and around each pole until the first cord is taut.
• Cut 8 – 16 vertical jute lines longer than the poles, and tie them to the top of the structure while it is still on the ground. These will be the lines between each of the legs.
• Stand the teepee up, splay the legs out and position them where you want the outside perimeter. A teepee for one or two children should be about 4 feet in diameter – large enough to crawl in, yet small enough to provide an excellent hiding place.
• Dig small, 12-inch-deep holes for each leg pole.
• Put each leg into the hole and add a few rocks around the leg to give stability, then fill the hole halfway with dirt and tamp it down with a heavy wooden handle (like sinking a fence post). Add more dirt and tamp down, continuing until the holes are full and the teepee legs are solid in the ground. This structure will carry a lot of weight from the vines and beans.
• Spread out the vertical lines so that they are evenly spaced around the teepee.
• Tie a horizontal string around each leg pole about a foot above the ground and tie each vertical string to it, leaving a tail to the ground for young vines to grab.
• Add two or three more horizontal strings, spaced 2 feet apart, going as high as is comfortable to reach. Beans climb like snakes, winding around vertical lines and poles, so these horizontal strings help the teepee keep its shape and prevent the plants from draping into the center.
• Plant bean seeds on the outside perimeter, around and between each pole leg.

Tip: No matter the shape of your trellis, build it on the ground first. Before you stand it up, get all the string on it. It’s easier and safer than climbing a ladder or balancing on a bucket to finish the job.

Send Your Kids to Garden Camp!
Seattle Tilth offers engaging, fun camps throughout the summer that begin this month. There are camps for children ages 2 to 14. See our website for details.

Children’s Garden Fun:
Grow a Scarecrow Skirt

If you build a scarecrow for your garden, use chicken wire to form a small pyramid or teepee around the waist of the scarecrow, extending all the way to the ground.

Now plant cucumber or trailing nasturtium seeds around the bottom and watch the topiary skirt grow!
Plant Sale Feeds Spring Garden Frenzy

Kate Cox, Development Director

Despite the cold, windy weather over the May Day weekend, nearly 8,000 shoppers showed up at our annual Edible Plant Sale to get their summer veggie gardens started. We sold about 52,000 organic vegetable, fruit and herb starts during the two-day sale. Imagine how much food all those plants will be producing this summer!

This year we experimented with timed entry to reduce the chaos inside the sale. Many shoppers commented that the wristband system worked well and moved everyone through the sale faster than in previous years. The timed entry also allowed people to explore all the other activities being offered while waiting for their turn to shop.

Local bands played music throughout the weekend to keep the event lively and festive. Thank you to all the bands who provided their musical talents for free, including: O’Carolan’s Fancy, Sound and Fury Morris, Sarah Funk and David Perasso, members of the Yellow Hat Band, and Triple Shot.

Once again we had the best, hardest-working volunteers helping to make the weekend a huge success. Thank you to everyone who helped!

Finally, thank you to our event sponsors for the generous support: Cedar Grove Composting, New Roots Organics, Treecycle, and WEDesign.
Plant a Cistern, Save Rainwater for Your Garden

Nikola Davidson, Cisterns Class Instructor

How do you keep your garden happy all summer long? With rainwater from your cistern!

A cistern is any vessel used to hold water, usually a reserve of rainwater collected from a roof. Cisterns come in a variety of shapes and sizes, from above-ground cylindrical tanks to soft-sided bladders that can be customized to fit under decks and porches to underground tanks. Cisterns also can be made from a variety of materials.

Consider the many purposes and benefits of cisterns: they conserve water, save money, prevent stormwater pollution and help solve drainage issues. They are especially popular with gardeners because plants prefer rainwater over municipal water. Rainwater is more oxygenated, is naturally pH-balanced and is free of chlorine and additives. Rainwater increases plants’ ability to access nutrients by lowering the soil’s pH.

Reach n’ Teach Job Training Program Gets Rainier Beach Teens Growing

Maren Neldam, South Seattle Garden Coordinator

Teenage leaders in our new gardening program in South Seattle have been finding the inspiration, creating the space and gathering the know-how to help us plant a learning garden at Rainier Beach—and learning that when you garden, you grow.

As a result, the Rainier Beach Learning Garden is growing too.

The garden started in August 2009, when a group of dedicated volunteers came together for a week to build six raised beds. Since then, students and adults in the Rainier Beach community have been getting their hands dirty, learning how to grow good food and making connections with the natural world and with each other.

After school, groups of students relax around the garden beds and watch people playing tennis. “I’m glad we have this garden,” said one fifth grade student. “It’s a relaxing place. I feel peaceful here.”

With the help of a mini-grant from the King County Community Organizing Program, Seattle Tilth welcomed two youth leaders from South Lake and Rainier Beach High Schools to our crew through our “Reach n’ Teach in the Beach” garden program.

Reach n’ Teach leaders build their leadership skills while engaging with the community.

There are four schools within three blocks around the garden, and Reach n’ Teach leaders are helping to knit together the school communities. They assist Seattle Tilth’s garden educators in our after-school garden club and community center garden classes. These teen leaders are learning valuable job and gardening skills while acting as positive role models for children.

“I don’t usually get my shoes dirty,” said Reach n’ Teach leader Jennifer during a recent day at the garden, “I guess I’m proving that I can work…. it’s cool to teach kids about this stuff.” When asked why she was interested in this job, Reach n’ Teach leader Myqyierra explained, “I like giving kids a positive opportunity. I wish I’d had a garden at my school when I was young.”
It was a delicate moment, and it called for a sensitive response from me. I didn’t have much emotional intelligence for the first 60 years of my life, as many who knew me during that time could confirm from experience. But I’m trying, honest.

“No” I answered, breezily. “Not much at all. Been too cold.”

“Yes” he said, relieved, “a very cold spring.” And we attended to our food. The delicate moment passed and we could relax. Of course, the truth of the matter is more complicated. I hadn’t planted much because I felt no motivation to plant.

How’s that? I hear you say. What motivation could you possibly need, beyond the lengthening days and the budding and leafing and the stirring in the earth happening all around you? Where’s your sense of decency, man?

I know, I know. I feel the weight of your accusing questions. My lunch partner felt the same burden. All I can say is—I didn’t feel like it. I felt more like reading, or doing Sudoku or watching a video. And meanwhile the garden languished; growing shotweed, herb Robert, smartweed, fennel, sweet cicely and more. And more herb Robert.

Then, one day (what a wonderful three words they are) I was out there, puttering around, and I found myself weeding. Next thing I knew, I had a fork out and I was clearing one of the weedy beds and considering what I might plant there. Peas, I thought. And some onions and that carrot seed I collected last year. Might as well put out some arugula, lettuce and spinach, too. Oh yes, and cilantro. We’ve really taken to fresh cilantro around here. It sparks up so many meals.

What triggered that change? Was it the mild spring day? Was it the subtle, wind-borne scents of unknown blossoms? I know it was not the mounting sense of obligation. I was pulled, not pushed. I was pulled by the earth, and the sounds of birdsong, and the glances skyward at puffy white clouds scudding overhead. I was pulled by the dazzling pale yellow blooms of so many Neglected Brassicas going to seed together (the Neglected Brassicas are even later than the Late Brassicas, although not as late as the Totally Forgotten Brassicas).

If perhaps you’ve lost your motivation to garden, I would like to encourage you to stay open to the possibility that it will return. Give it a chance. Go to your garden and breathe in the air. Stoop, pull a weed and put your hand into the soil and regard the miracle you hold there. Because your garden, like mine, is at the center of the universe.

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**Garden to Table: Versatile Arugula**

Sharon Lerman, South Seattle Program Manager

Arugula is an all-time-favorite food of early summer. It’s so versatile: sauté it, eat it in salads, or add it to your favorite pasta dish.

My latest favorite is a simple, flexible arugula pizza that mixes tangy arugula, sharp parmesan cheese, and sweet caramelized onions. If you still have any of last summer’s tomatoes (slow roasted or dried) they make a great addition to top it off. Or make this pizza again in the fall and top with fresh figs. It’s a snap to make and a delicious spring treat.

**Arugula Pizza**

Pizza dough for 1 pie
1 large bunch arugula, coarsely chopped
6-8 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded
2-3 ounces parmesan cheese, coarsely shredded
1 medium onion, sliced into ¼ inch rounds

Olive oil
Salt and pepper, to taste
Cornmeal for dusting (if using cookie sheet)
Optional: fresh figs or dried/roasted tomatoes
Preheat oven to 500 degrees, or as hot as you can safely set it. Pizza is best baked fast and hot.

Prepare a cookie sheet with cornmeal dusted on the bottom, or set a pizza stone in the middle of your oven.

Toss sliced onions in olive oil in a heavy pot and sauté on medium heat until onions begin to brown, and then reduce heat to low. Sprinkle with salt. Cook for 10-15 minutes, until the onions are “caramelized” to be browned and translucent.

Mix pizza dough for a single pie (recipe not included here), then roll it out with a rolling pin or stretch by hand. Crust thickness is a personal preference — I roll my pizzas about as thin as possible, but if you prefer a chewier crust, keep the dough a little thicker.

If you’re using a pizza stone, prepare pizza on your well-floured peel and slide into the oven, or precook crust for 5 minutes to ease the transfer. If you’re not using a pizza stone, prepare your pizza on a dusted cookie sheet.

Brush crust with olive oil.

Top with mozzarella cheese, then caramelized onions, parmesan cheese, salt and pepper. If using tomatoes or figs, add them last.

Bake for 7-12 minutes, checking frequently for doneness of cheese and crust.

When pizza is nearly done, take it out of the oven and top with chopped arugula. Return to oven for one minute until arugula is just wilted.

Remove from oven, cool briefly, slice, and enjoy!
Membership and Donations

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Yes, I would like to make a tax-deductible contribution to support Seattle Tilth. $__________
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Order the Maritime Northwest Garden Guide
For an indispensable regional guide to year-round gardening, enclose $19.50 (includes tax and postage) per copy. Please send me _____ copies x $19.50 = $__________

Total $__________

Mail to Seattle Tilth, 4649 Sunnyside Ave N, Room 120, Seattle, Washington 98103

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How to Deal With Too Much Fruit

Laura Matter, Manager, Natural Soil Building Program

Q: I have a plum tree that bears so much more fruit than I can ever use. Do you know of groups that can use this fruit and how can I make sure they get it?

A: You have come to the right place for information about fruit tree harvesting!

Seattle is a great place these days for folks who want to share fruit from their over-abundant fruit trees. There are groups that help people harvest their fruit and donate it directly to food banks and meals programs throughout the area.

You can start by calling the Garden Hotline; we take requests for harvest help for Solid Ground’s Fruit Tree Harvest program. This program provides help picking the fruit and donates extra fruit harvest to those in need. You can also volunteer to help pick other people’s fruit trees around the city. For more information about this program please visit the Programs and Services page at www.solid-ground.org and click on the Hunger Action Center.

City Fruit’s website, www.cityfruit.org, also offers much information. It lists people doing fruit tree harvests in the area, including Solid Ground, and has resources for fruit tree care and fruit preservation.

To maximize your harvest and make sure it is the best quality for donation, call in advance of harvest time. Don’t wait until the fruit is falling, because it takes time to mobilize volunteers to pick the trees. In the case of pears, for instance, it’s best if they ripen after picking; once they start falling off the tree, they are too ripe to use. To sign up early, call us at (206) 633-0224 or email help@gardenhotline.org.
Enjoy Summer –
Take a Tilth Class

Enjoy your summer gardening more with a class at Seattle Tilth. June and July offer summer camps for kids, a Garden Educator’s Intensive and many fall and winter gardening classes for adults.

Classes are held either at:
- Good Shepherd Center, 4649 Sunnyside Ave. N., in north Seattle (listed as GSC)
- Bradner Gardens Park, 1733 Bradner Place S., in southeast Seattle (BGP)
- St. James Annex, 9421 18th Ave. S.W., at the southern border of West Seattle (SJA)
- Pickering Barn, 1730 10th Ave. N.W., Issaquah (PBI)

Other locations as noted

Lower price listings are exclusively for Seattle Tilth members, higher prices for the general public. Advance registration and payment are required. Class details and registration forms are found on our Web site, www.seattletilth.org under the Learn tab, or can be gained by calling the Tilth office at (206) 633-0451, ext. 101.

Summer Camp at Seattle Tilth’s Children’s Garden, June through August, cost varies by camp, GSC

Container Veggie Gardening, June 4-25, 7-8 p.m., $35, VACC

Summer Vegetable Gardening in Containers, June 6, 10 a.m.-noon, free, Counterbalance Park

Composting for Apartment Dwellers, June 10, noon-1 p.m., free, Victor Steinbrueck Park

City Chickens 101, June 12, 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m., $30/$40, GSC

Summer Vegetable Gardening in Containers, June 13, 10 a.m.-noon, free, Belltown Cottage Park

Summer Vegetable Gardening in Containers, June 17, noon-1 p.m., free, Victor Steinbrueck Park

Dealing with Summer Pests, June 19, 10 a.m.-noon, $25/$35, SJA

Container Herb Gardening, June 20, 10 a.m.-noon, free, Belltown Cottage Park

Container Herb Gardening, June 24, noon-1 p.m., free, Victor Steinbrueck Park

Be Cistern Savvy!, June 24, 6-7:30 p.m., $18/$25, BGP

Dealing with Summer Pests, June 26, 9-11 a.m., $25/$35, GSC

Simple Techniques for Preserving the Harvest, June 26, 12:30-2 p.m., $18/$25, GSC

Grow Fruit in Containers, June 27, 10 a.m.-noon, free, Belltown Cottage Park

Seed Starting for Fall & Winter Gardening, July 1, 5:30-7:30 p.m., free, Cal Anderson Park

Seed Starting for Fall & Winter Gardening, July 7, noon-1 p.m., free, Occidental Park

Herbal Tea Gardening, July 8, 5:30-7:30 p.m., free, Cal Anderson Park

City Chicken Coop Tour, July 10, 11 a.m.-4 p.m., $25/$30, in neighborhoods throughout Seattle

Container Herb Gardening, July 14, noon-1 p.m., free, Occidental Park

Fall & Winter Veggie Gardening in Containers, July 15, 5:30-7:30 p.m., free, Cal Anderson Park

Fall and Winter Gardening, July 17, 9-11 a.m., $25/35, GSC

Summer Garden Educators Intensive, July 19-23, 8 a.m.-3 p.m., $200/$225, GSC

Fall and Winter Gardening, July 20, 6-8 p.m., $25/$35, BGP

Fall & Winter Veggie Gardening in Containers, July 21, noon-1 p.m., free, Occidental Park

Composting For Apartment Dwellers, July 22, 5:30-7:30 p.m., free, Cal Anderson Park

Summer Fruit Tree Pruning, July 22, 6-8 p.m., $25/$35, GSC

Fall and Winter Gardening, July 24, 9-11 a.m., $25/$35, SJA

Pest & Disease Control in the Organic Garden, July 25, 9-11 a.m., $25/$35, GSC

City Chickens 101, July 28, 6-8:30 p.m., $30/$40, GSC

Container Garden Care and Harvesting, July 29, 5:30-7:30 p.m., free, Cal Anderson Park

Saving Seeds: Perpetuating a Tradition, July 31, 10 a.m.-noon, $25/$35, GSC

Spring Web Cleaning: New Format Organizes Class Listings

We have reorganized the Adult Classes page of our website to make it easier to find a class that’s right for you.

Classes are now sorted by topic, location and month. If you prefer seeing all the classes chronologically, like we used to have it, that format is still available too.

To review upcoming classes, click on “Adult Classes” in the blue upper left column under our logo, or find them in orange Learn tab.