

## A flotilla of houseboating gardeners

Article and photos by Jean Johnson

*The groundedness of the garden provides an important balance to the fluidity of life in a floating community*

Rectangular structures located next to each other along a shared central corridor...a friendly local community where neighbors leisurely stop to chat or pitch in on community projects...exquisite views of nature. These scenes are found at the picturesque houseboat docks located on Lake Union off of Fairview Avenue and Portage Bay, as well as at the Eastlake P-Patch, located several blocks north of the Fairview houseboats and around the corner from Portage Bay.

Whether on solid ground or on the water, the houseboat and P-Patch communities share a deep connection to nature. As houseboat resident Barb Donnette says, "the city goes away when I go to my dock."

Life on a houseboat is similar to being on a Venice canal. Waterways separate the docks that are home to kayaks, sloops, motorboats and canoes found tethered along almost every floating home. Space is generally limited, with neighbors living just a few feet away from each other. During strong wind and rain storms, homes rock and things can easily break.

Given the primacy of community spirit that must be maintained in order to live under these circumstances, houseboaters are used to communal collaboration, perhaps more so than most urban

residents. Therefore it is unsurprising that longtime houseboat residents are also some of the most active and long-standing leaders of the Eastlake P-Patch. Houseboat residents Barb Donnette and Lois Loontjens were among the original small group who helped carve the Eastlake P-Patch out of a mass of blackberry bushes and buried trash on Shelby Street and Fairview thirty years ago. And more than a third of current Eastlake gardens are occupied by houseboat residents, despite there being only 500 houseboats total, which represent a small—albeit colorful—part of Eastlake's population.

Another houseboat resident, Mary Jones, was a major driver in the current expansion project that will double the size of the Eastlake P-Patch (to be completed this summer). Mary says "it feels good to know that something I have worked on will be there for the community to enjoy after I'm gone."

Mike and Tom Naylor fell in love with a "worse than funky" 40-year-old houseboat that they purchased in 1994 and proceeded to refurbish and beautify over the course of many years. In 2010, after having finished their long-running home renovation project (which was featured on the "Funky to Fabulous" 2010 Floating Homes tour), they turned their talents to the ambitious P-Patch expansion project. They were major contributors there, spending many hours building rubble walls and raised beds.

Other active members of the expansion effort have been Claudia



Houseboat gardeners: Jim Donnette, Barb Donnette, Mary Jones, Mike Naylor, and Jonathon Ezekiel

and Tom Dreiling, who recently became houseboat residents. As Claudia described it, "working together on the P-Patch has been a very binding experience that weaves people together...and that will be there for others to enjoy."

The groundedness of the garden provides an important balance to the fluidity of life in a floating community. As Lois Loontjens says, the P-Patch offers "a play space to be like two-year olds digging in the dirt and creating things, while also offering a peace of place."

Houseboats originated as housing for loggers and fishermen in the early 1900s. Their number peaked at 1000 in the 1930s during the Depression. Houseboats were considered places "where nice people didn't live" when Barb Donnette moved into her houseboat 44 years ago. At that time, the docks housed a diverse community of blue-collar workers and students seeking low-cost living, as well as bohemians, artists and others seeking social freedom.

The population dwindled to about 500 in the 1950s, when the city began serious "urban renewal" efforts to eradicate the scruffy houseboat community. In the 1960s, the houseboat community began to organize to defend its way of life and establish regulation and protection for its populace. Today houseboats represent quintessentially hip Seattle living and even include luxurious large new floating homes costing into the millions.

Most of the current floating homes date from the houseboat heyday in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as the ones in which Barb and Lois live. Floating homes from that era represent true rustic living. Lois recalls how at one point her bathroom wall had separated and bowed away from the floor, offering natural air ventilation.

Given its beautiful lakefront setting next to a park, the Eastlake P-Patch is popular and consequently has had a long waitlist for plots, which will now significantly decrease with the expansion. Expedited plot access will be offered to participating volunteers based on their "sweat equity" hours, allowing them to jump to the top of the waitlist.

With lovely views of Lake Union and beautiful vegetation, the houseboat docks and the Eastlake P-Patch are popular stopping places for local visitors and tourists. Both share a history of being created and strengthened by caring and resourceful individuals who collaborated to create a better neighborhood for themselves and a legacy to pass on to others. Eastlake has greatly benefited as a result of these thriving communities.

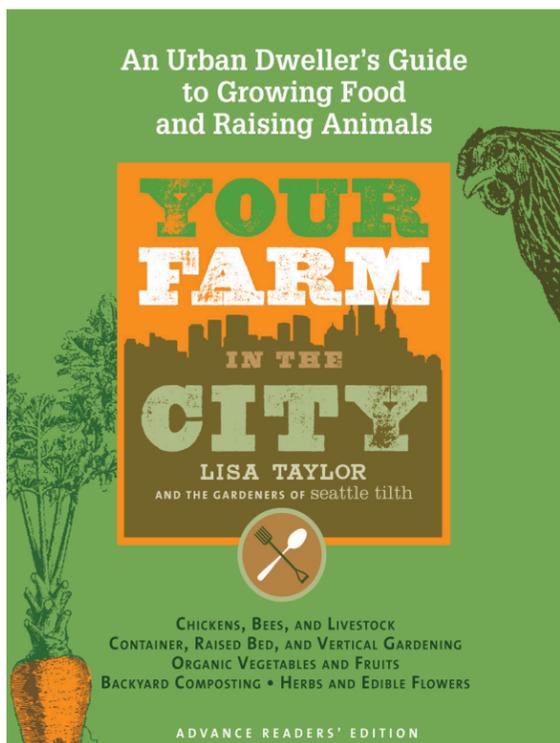


Houseboat docks on Fairview Avenue

# Your Farm in the City:

## An Urban Dweller's Guide to Growing Food and Raising Animals

Imagine your front yard with herbs and blueberries, grape vines growing over the carport, beds bursting with salad greens, a sunflower fence along a boundary line, and an herb spiral filled with vegetables. Maybe your backyard has a vegetable garden, chicken coop and a beehive tucked back in a corner. In place of the blocks of cement or patchy grass is an abundant, productive landscape that provides good food and healthy activities for you and your family. At the end of each season, your cupboards are filled with beautifully canned food and your freezer loaded with ready to eat veggies from the garden. This, my friends, is the dream of city farming. Learn how to turn your city lot into a thriving urban farm with Lisa Taylor from Seattle Tilth. Explore growing your own vegetables, integrating edibles into your landscape and keeping urban livestock.



Now Lisa Taylor and the gardeners of Seattle Tilth bring locavores *Your Farm in the City: An Urban Dweller's Guide to Growing Food and Raising Animals* (March 2, 2011; ISBN: 978-1-57912-862-3; PB Original; \$18.95), the perfect all-in-one compendium of everything you need to know to start growing your own food and raising city-friendly livestock.

*Lisa Taylor and the gardeners at Seattle Tilth are dedicated to teaching people to garden organically and conserve natural resources. For those who have considered a windowsill herb garden, a balcony brimming with edible flowers, green beans and tomato plants, or beehives and chickens in your urban backyard, Your Farm in the City is the most complete guide available.*

Written for city and suburban dwellers who may have little experience and/or space, the book covers all topics relevant to urban agriculture throughout the United States and beyond. Readers will learn about:

- The best, easiest-to-grow, high-yield fruits and vegetables
- Breeds of chickens, goats and rabbits that thrive in small spaces
- The thrill of creating compost from food scraps and dozens of hungry red wigglers
- Organic gardening techniques (including outwitting urban pests without poisons)
- How to keep the lead and other toxins out of your garden & home (one tip: "use border plants along the perimeter of your garden to absorb particulates") and how to deal with sites that might be contaminated
- Preparing and preserving fresh food from your garden
- Innovative organization profiles from across America that have changed the face of urban farming

Additional information particular to gardening in a city or suburban space are also included, such as planning and maximizing limited spaces, building healthy soil, managing irrigation, winter gardening, gardening with kids, extending the harvest, and being a considerate farming neighbor.

### About the Authors

**Lisa Taylor** is the Education Program Manager for Seattle Tilth. She is a co-author of the *Maritime Northwest Garden Guide* and a frequent speaker on soils, compost, edible landscaping and children's gardening. She facilitates trainings for teachers and others interested in schoolyard gardening, and is passionate about teaching children and their parents where their food comes from and how to care for living things.

**Seattle Tilth** is a nationally recognized non-profit organization that cultivates a healthy urban environment and community by teaching people to grow organic food and conserve natural resources. Programs include classes for adults, children and families, community learning gardens, green jobs training, compost education, a free *Garden Hotline*, community events and an active volunteer corps.

## Spring into Bed!

### Seattle garden celebration grows

By Stephanie Selega

Seattle's city-wide garden build day and celebration, Spring into Bed!, is gaining momentum for its second year. Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011, when Spring into Bed! will build and celebrate our thriving local food system throughout all of King County. On that day, more than 500 volunteers at over 30 sites will tally over a square mile of food-growing space. We plan to raise over \$30,000 to build free and subsidized gardens for low-income families. You are an essential element of this celebration!

This time last year, Spring into Bed! was a dream. Community meetings and volunteers brought forth a vision and got to work. By the second Saturday of May, Spring into Bed! was an outstanding success. We built nine free gardens for low-income families, organized over 250 volunteers throughout Seattle, tallied over 18,000 square feet of food gardens and raised over \$8,000 in cash and in-kind donations. These gardens and celebrations are a testament to what happens when we put our minds, money and movement in the service of our hearts and our future.



EMILY GOOCH



EMILY GOOCH

*Soil was donated by Cedar Grove at the United Indians All Tribes Foundation, Labateyah Youth Home*

Thanks to fiscal sponsorship by Seattle Tilth, a grant from the United Way of King County and a partnership with Cedar Grove Composting, the annual Spring into Bed! Celebration has now grown into a year-round project—the Just Garden Project. The Just Garden Project builds free and subsidized gardens for low-income and marginalized people throughout King County. These gardens provide families and communities with self-sufficient access to highly nutritious, organic food. In 2011, the Just Garden Project will build 30 free/subsidized gardens throughout King County. All of our funding to date has come from within King County.

*Two volunteers at Cascade People's Center marvel at the display of abundance*

For more information, e-mail [food@justgarden.org](mailto:food@justgarden.org), or call (206) 633-0451, ext. 611.

# A weed in time saves nine *and* no weed left behind....

## A new p-patch gardener's first steps

By Jane Boone

Finally! You made it off the long waiting list for a P-Patch plot, you've read and signed the contract, paid your annual dues and have your plot assignment in hand. Congratulations! Or is congratulations the right sentiment? It is not a coincidence that "congratulations" is the hearty cheer heard by parents upon the arrival of a long-anticipated baby. However, as any parent with more than one child knows, some babies adjust to the world quickly; others take a little more time, attention, and creativity before settling into a somewhat predictable routine. All babes require sustained care, nurturance, and feeding. Similarly, each one of Seattle's many P-Patch plots is unlike any other; some are ready to go with relatively little preparation, while others require quite a bit of work before a single seed can be planted. No matter the condition of your inherited plot, the more attention you give to preparing your new garden spot, especially the soil in the first precious days, weeks, and months after receiving your assignment, the more likely your garden will be healthy and productive for seasons to come. To help you on your way, here are a few suggestions for what to do when you are expecting—and your plot has finally arrived.

### Step 1: Go see!

As soon as you can arrange a visit to check out your new plot, do so. The more quickly you can dig in and do the prep work, the sooner you can plant. You might make the first visit a brief trip, just a glance to discover whether your assigned garden spot is a weed-infested nightmare worthy of a Tim Burton film, or a pristine jewel of fluffy, weed free loam passed on to a very fortunate you from a conscientious gardener. If you have time, gear up for a longer first visit, bring along a sandwich, a thermos of tea or soup, maybe a camp chair, camera, sketch pad, and measuring tape. Consider taking a "before" photo—it will never look quite this way again. You might want to measure the length and width and make a rough sketch of the dimensions of your plot, noting the southern, western, eastern, and northern exposure points. This will come in handy in Step 3 when you are considering what variety and quantity of garden plants you have room to plant this year. Locate the nearest water spigots, the tool shed and the easiest path for a wheelbarrow. The more time you spend at your new plot, the greater the chance your P-Patch neighbors will wander into the garden and you will have a chance to say hello and introduce yourself. By becoming a P-Patch participant, you are now a resident of an interesting gardening microcosm of Seattle, and chances are you will soon know your P-Patch neighbors as well (if not better) than the folks in your home neighborhood.

### Step 2: Create a weed-free plot of garden soil

For those of you inheriting a nutrient-rich, weed-free garden plot from a gardener who consistently weeded and dug in compost and mulched and put the garden to bed under thick blankets of burlap, well, congratulations truly *is* the right word. Consider yourself the luckiest Green Jeans in town and skip happily over Step 2 to Step 3. For those of us assigned a plot reminiscent of a sci-fi film depicting a world taken over by weeds, work is ahead. Rest assured this second step is "one time only" work. If you maintain your garden in weed-free, garden-ready condition, you will never again experience this arduous first toil in the soil. The work involved in reclaiming a garden spot from weeds will take time, but can be a highly satisfying endeavor. Depending on how thick the weeds are, you may find yourself wondering if you will ever "get there from here." A garden plot long neglected, not properly winterized, and infested with deeply rooted noxious weeds will take upwards of 40 hours of work to become garden ready, but the results are well worth the effort. In fact, in Step 3, if you plant lettuce or other quickly maturing greens, you will soon be eating your first results while waiting for sugar snap peas to fatten up enough to pluck them off the vine for supper. Also, remember that once your garden plot is completely weeded and properly mulched, it will be a simple matter of maintaining it as a weed-free zone and just pulling the occasional weed that pops up in your garden.

How does one achieve the nirvana state of a weed free garden plot? Well, as Will Rogers once said, planning gets you into things and hard work gets you back out. If you inherit your garden in the winter, cover everything in burlap to slow weed growth and prevent the spread of more weeds until the soil is no longer frozen or wet and can be worked and weeded in the late spring or early summer. If you get your new plot assignment in the spring, summer or fall, at a time when the ground has dried out enough to work the soil, it is still a good plan to cover the garden. When you're ready to begin pulling weeds, peel back the cover section by section. If you get rid of *every* single weed from day one, you will enjoy years of easier gardening.

Unless you have a crew working with you (this is a great time to draw on your favor well and ask a few friends or family members to help you—ply them with the promise of new potatoes), it may be a natural response to become a bit overwhelmed at this stage. Pace yourself, you will get there. If it helps, make a game of it. Tell yourself you will pull off just one burlap sack of space and weed a small rectangle of ground. That's all, just a small area. If you have more energy left, you can do more, or you can stop to admire

your work, call it good, and come back later. But if the sight of a garden-ready bit of ground is inspiring, great, weed a little more, maybe just another 12-inch square. Keep that up and in time the whole plot will be weed free and you will be ready for Step 3.

To be certain you cover every square inch of the plot, you might consider a methodical approach, starting in one corner and working in 12-inch rows from the top of the plot to bottom. This leaves you with weed free sections of your plot ready for digging in compost. Everyone has their own weeding style. If the methodical row-by-row approach is not for you, you may be more comfortable diving into the garden randomly and weeding wherever the spirit moves you. Whatever your approach, be thorough. All weeds are fertile and quite friendly and will most assuredly be married with children by the time you next visit your garden plot. A weed in time does save nine.

Remove each weed by the root. Pull out the entire root—don't leave any root bit in the ground. This is where the tough and tender part comes in: you have to be tough enough (and have the right tool) to dig into your soil, but gentle enough to avoid breaking off the root and leaving any part of it in the soil. It takes a bit of finesse, but you will get the hang of it since you will undoubtedly have lots of opportunity to practice. Gently but firmly dig down and around each weed until you find the bottom tip of the weed root and ease it out. Plan to get up close and personal with each weed and you will soon learn a lot about root systems. The more you understand the nature of the root system, the easier it will be to figure out how to work with the weed root to pull it out. For example, bindweed (also known as morning glory) has long, winding tendrils of roots that meander randomly and unevenly below the ground's surface, and you will need to dig around the root system and tease out the roots gently. Dandelion roots are quite the opposite from bindweed. Dandelions have strong, straight, fat, stubborn roots that dive straight down into the earth, similar to a carrot root, but are much tougher to pull. Each weed will quickly teach *you* how to pull it out by showing you what works and what doesn't. Be aware that the roots of many weeds break off easily—they really want to stay "rooted" right where they are growing. No weed left behind, even when it takes an individualized weeding plan to achieve that status.

The use of tools and gloves is completely a matter of personal preference. Any weeding tool that works well for you is the best tool. Some folks do their best weeding work in bare hands, but it is essential to wear gloves when tackling blackberries, thistles, and nettles. Given the profusion of prickly weeds, it is a good idea to take a pair of gloves with you each time you visit your garden. It is also helpful to have an array of different weeding tools to try out on different weeds. If you are a brand new gardener and do not have any tools, look around at what your neighbors are using and ask them about their favorite tool. You will soon find a personal favorite. Garden tools are available at yard sales and thrift stores and some P-Patch sheds provide tools. It is fun to try out different tools—honestly. When you find the tools that work well for you and make your weeding life easier, you'll want to keep them with you whenever you visit your plot.

### Step 3: Compost, plant, mulch, water, and maintain a happily-ever-after weed free plot

Almost time to plant! Once your garden is weed free, here comes the fun part—you get to choose what you want to plant. Once you have made your choices, dig in the compost and the other soil amendments that your unique selection of garden plants need to thrive. Different plants flourish in different soil conditions, but every plant does well in a well mulched and properly watered garden.

Welcome to your P-Patch—harvest time will be soon upon you. Plucking a pea from the vine, tugging a strawberry from its nest of greenery and releasing a new potato from the earth may be the most rewarding congratulations of all. Congratulations are also in order for taking the time and patience required to initially dig in and get started. May your plot reward your work for seasons to come with a cornucopia of flavors, aromas, colors and joy, and may you long enjoy the challenge and privilege of being a Seattle P-Patch plot holder.

### P-Patch 2011 Discount Coupon

**This is your P-Patch discount coupon, good for 10% off on purchase of garden-related merchandise only at the following participating merchants. Present your coupon before the cashier rings up the sale. Happy Gardening!**

- City People's Garden Store  
939 East Madison, 324-0737
- City People's Mercantile, Sand Point  
5440 Sand Point Wy, 524-1200
- Emerald City Gardens 206 789-1314  
4001 Leary Way NW 98107
- Eny Grows, LLC 206-588-2498  
2425 E Union
- Furney's Nursery  
21215 Pac Hwy S, 878-8761
- Greenwood Hardware  
7201 Greenwood Ave N, 783-2900
- Indoor Sun Shoppe  
160 Canal St., 634-3727
- Langley Fine Gardens  
Selling at U-D, Phinney, & W. Seattle farmers markets
- Magnolia Garden Center – P-Patch Plants Only  
3213 W Smith #284-1161
- Sky Nursery  
18528 Aurora Ave N, 546-4851
- Swanson's Nursery  
9701 15th NW #782-2543
- West Seattle Nursery & Garden Center  
5275 California Ave SW #935-9276
- Urban Earth  
1051 N. 35th St. #632-1760

P-Patch Program, 700 5th Ave, Ste 1700 P O Box 94649, Seattle WA 98124-4649, (206) 684-0264

# Insects: pests and allies

Laura Matter, Seattle Tilth Program Coordinator, Garden Hotline

*She sat down in a weed patch, her elbows on her knees, and kept her eyes on the small mysterious world of the ground. In the shade and sun of grass blade forests, small living things had their metropolis.*

- Nancy Price

With the advent of lush growth in our vegetable gardens comes the influx of garden creatures looking for their next meal, breeding ground, and shelter for pupating. When we create our food gardens we also create habitat for all manner of insect life in the garden. This is an indisputable fact of garden ecology. And whether or not we have healthy and productive garden ecology depends on us, the garden managers. Being a P-Patch gardener means that we are gardening organically, of course. But what does it mean to be an organic gardener when we are confronted with chewing or sucking herbivorous insects eating tonight's dinner? Does it mean turning to the product shelf and applying that certified organic spray guaranteed to kill the culprits marring our beautiful cabbage heads? I think not.

Even certified organic products will harm beneficial insect life in the garden. In areas where ponds and creeks are present, these products can also be harmful to amphibious and aquatic life. Though useful for extreme pestiferous cases, they are oil and soap based and not selective to the particular insect we are trying to rid from our veggies. Even *Bacillus thuringiensis*, selective to Lepidoptera, is not selective to only vegetable pest larvae but to all moth and butterfly larvae. So instead of reaching for sprays, let's spend our time creating habitat for our insect allies, including the carnivorous, parasitic, and, most importantly, the pollinating insects to ensure the health of our gardens.

When we think of habitat we think of wild spaces, forests and alpine meadows where native fauna roam free. In a garden setting the native fauna are the beneficial insects that control plant pests and pollinate our fruiting plants. And our vegetable gardens are miniaturized habitats where flying things roam free. Envision the garden as an exotic jungle full of productive flowering plants and a forest litter made of garden mulch. Provide the right habitat and the beneficials will find our gardens. They will come. Soon we will be hosts to syrphid flies, predaceous ground beetles, lacewings, lady beetles and parasitic wasps conducting their lives and business in our gardens.

To make our gardens attractive to beneficial insects, we need to include three major plant families in our plots. First, the mint family, or Lamiaceae, which includes almost all of the Mediterranean herbs such as lavender, oregano, thyme, rosemary, and mint as well as some flowering perennials like *Monarda* and *Agastache*. The flowers in this family are so attractive to winged insects that on any given summer day, when the lavender is in full bloom, we are able to walk up to a plant and see it vibrating with the multiple species foraging on the flowers.

The carrot family, Apiaceae, is also a big one in the vegetable gardener's palette. It includes parsley, dill, lovage, angelica, and cilantro. Perennials such as *Eryngium* and *Astrantia* are also in this family. These plants have showy umbrella-shaped flower umbels at the tops of their stems. Some members of this family are highly poisonous, such as poison hemlock. Common fennel and Queen Anne's lace are considered noxious weeds by the weed board of King County, so we need to know our plants before placing them in the garden. Remember that the blooms make the plants attractive, but for culinary use, harvest herbs before they bloom. Just be sure to have some placed judiciously for insect use only. If we plant a patch of cilantro that flowers and goes to seed, we get the added boost of harvesting coriander seed!

Last but by no means least is the daisy family, or the *asteraceae* kin, who cheer up our gardens and provide many medicinal plants for us. These include *echinacea*, *rudbeckia*, *eupatorium*, *calendula* and many of the common garden flowers like chamomile, sunflower, marigold and cosmos. Including these colorful, fragrant and useful plants in a garden setting is not a difficult task at all. In fact, we probably already have many of them in the garden already.

So how else can we help the process? Make sure that these plant hosts are not all in separate beds but are integrated throughout the vegetable garden. In my raised bed I intersperse flowers and herbs where the lettuce, carrots and squash are growing. This creates a convenient roaming habitat for flying insects, ensuring that they will visit the riotous bloom of lavender and then go on to the Blue Hubbard squash flower next. Yum.

To learn more about the particulars of beneficial insects, including how to identify them, their prey, and their life cycle, contact the **Garden Hotline at 206-633-0224** (9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday) or email [help@gardenhotline.org](mailto:help@gardenhotline.org). For a great plant list showing what plants attract which beneficial, visit Farmer Fred's radio program website from Sacramento, California: [http://www.farmerfred.com/plants\\_that\\_attract\\_benefi.html](http://www.farmerfred.com/plants_that_attract_benefi.html). Seattle Tilth will offer classes later this summer on how to manage pests organically.

Visit the Seattle Tilth website to fill your calendar this spring

[www.seattletilth.org](http://www.seattletilth.org)

for classes, workshops, events  
and invaluable gardening resources



save the date:

July 13, 2011

Tom Douglas will be  
Chef in the Garden

## Save your back!...and wrists, hands, knees and feet.....

By Brenda Matter PT, P-Patch Trust board member

As the leaf buds swell and primroses and snowdrops start to bloom, we are beginning to wander out into the garden – sometimes with many layers on - and to think about what we soon want to do there. Now is the time to plan the structure of our garden beds and the planting dates for the coming growing season. Soon we will be planting peas and potatoes!

The tools we use, the garden beds we work in and the timing and duration of our gardening sessions have a big impact on our physical bodies. Backs, necks, knees, wrists and hands are all at risk of injury from overuse, use of poorly designed or poorly maintained tools, and prolonged postural strain from working in awkward positions. Shorter days can make it hard to get out and do small amounts of gardening daily. This makes it challenging to gradually build up endurance, strength and flexibility and increases the chances of physical injury. We can enjoy gardening to our heart's content with less chance of injuries by considering a few simple tips:

### Energy conservation and strategies for injury prevention

- Limit lifting. Divide the task into smaller loads, get help or hire it out. A lifting injury will cost you more time and trouble than the longer time to finish the task.
- Strategize watering. Think about where you need to water and how you will do it. A gallon of water weighs eight pounds, and hoses are heavy and awkward to pull around. Seek out information on watering efficiently with less time and physical demand.
- Vary the tasks. Change position frequently to give your joints a break. Prolonged or repeated postural stress from stooping over, leaning forward with a load, or twisting are common causes of serious, debilitating injury.
- Use good body mechanics. Let your leg muscles help your back; bend your knees! If your knees are bad and your back hurts, get help!
- Prevent falls. Look over your garden and find the unfilled holes, the uneven ground or slippery slopes, the muddy or loose material surfaces. Change what you can and be careful of the rest.
- Time your plantings. Think through what you hope to be able to do through the growing season, what your available time will be each week, what days and weeks you may not even be available, and plan your plantings accordingly. Gardens have a way of not following our plans and instructions, but you can at least try to avoid overloading your schedule and your body.

### Raised beds

Raised beds are commonly used for improving soil drainage and allowing the early spring sun to warm up the soil faster so we can get our crops started sooner. To protect our backs, we need to be able to reach the middle easily from all sides. The height of the bed will vary depending on our tolerance for leaning forward for long periods.

Building a raised bed takes a certain amount of strength and ability – get some help from your friends. Before you put raised beds in place consider if they will need to be replaced someday. Wooden raised beds will usually start to rot in five to seven years. More permanent materials last longer, some indefinitely. Also take into account whether there are nooks and crannies in the sides of the raised beds in which weeds can become established. You'll want to protect your garden from this as much as possible.

### Tools

Gone are the days of one traditional design for most garden tools – now when you type “ergonomic garden tools” into any internet search engine you will find a variety of sites with many products to review and consider. Whether you need a shovel, hoe, pruners or garden hand tools, the choices and claims for injury-free gardening are many. The internet is a good way to see what products are available, and you can check the local garden and hardware stores to see if they carry the tools you are interested in. If you order tools online, check the return policy. Handle the tool inside your house, where it won't get dirty, to ensure that the height, weight, and fit are appropriate for you. Check the diameter of the handle, the angle and leverage of tool handles and cutting surfaces, the design of spring loaded and self-opening features, and the quality of the cushion on seats and knee pads to make sure that they are right for you.

### Footwear

In the Northwest, we appreciate waterproof garden shoes that don't mind the mud. Be sure they have good arch supports or insert an insole into those mud boots, as arch support and cushioned soles will protect the weight bearing joints, especially your feet, while you are shoveling, standing and walking on uneven ground. Look at the bottom of the shoes before you buy - do they have a sturdy base with good traction? Fall prevention starts with footwear.

Hopefully, these ideas will help you enjoy a long, injury free growing season. Enjoy the return of the sun!

# Square foot gardening

By Diane Zebert

*The square foot system lets you make the most of your garden space to conserve the amount of water, soil conditioners, and labor needed to produce a maximum amount of food in that space. A square foot garden takes only one-fifth the space and work of a conventional single-row garden to produce the same harvest.*

—Mel Bartholomew

The holidays are over. All of a sudden you notice the sun is out a little more and maybe just maybe it isn't quite so dark when you leave work in the evening. Spring is coming and that means one thing to me. It's time to get busy planning this year's garden. As much as I look forward to gardening again, I dread getting started. It always seems that there is so much to do. I especially remember feeling overwhelmed my first year at the P-Patch. If you have ever felt like I have, I'd like you to consider "Square Foot Gardening." I used this method exclusively my first year and was amazed at how many vegetables I could grow in a 10 X 10 plot.

Square Foot Gardening (SFG from now on) is a simplified, scaled-down version of "intensive planting." Intensive planting methods go back to the ancient Mayans, Chinese and Greeks. There is a French version of intensive planting and another version called "Grow Biointensive." Intensive planting features planting "a band of plants" instead of the typical "row of plants." These bands, situated in raised beds, are one to four feet in width. SFG has come into popular use by Mel Bartholomew, who had a gardening program on public television and has a book of the same name. As with other intensive planting methods, the goal of SFG is to have more crop production in less space.

In SFG, you divide your P-Patch plot into beds that are easily accessed from every side. Your path should be wide enough to comfortably work. Each of the beds is divided into approximately one-square-foot units and marked out with sticks, twine or sturdy slats to ensure that the square foot units remain visible as the garden matures. I have two plots that are 2' x 4' and two plots that are 3' x 4' in size. I have used twine as my dividing method.

Each square contains one type of vegetable, and as we know, plants have different spacing requirements. Typically, large plants are planted one plant per square (cauliflower, cabbage, peppers); medium large plants are planted two plants per square (basil, potatoes); medium plants are planted four plants per square (lettuce); medium small plants are planted nine plants per square (onions, beets, spinach); small plants are planted sixteen plants per square (carrots, arugula). Planting in this fashion saves

seeds. It also saves you time as you will never have to thin seedlings. I have only deviated from SFG spacing with tomatoes because one tomato per square foot, especially with indeterminate varieties, was too cramped and the plants tended to grow into each other. Keep in mind that with one to four-foot-wide bands of plants, our smaller P-Patch beds will have just a few types of plants in them.

Space-hogging plants with runners can be grown vertically on sturdy frames that are hung with netting or string to support the developing crops. My best experience with vertical growing was in my first year with cucumbers. I have also grown squash vertically. With squash, I added extra support for the fruit when it devel-



*Young squash plants growing vertically with green beans in the background*

oped by making slings that I tied to the netting that supported the vines. Of course, we all are used to growing peas and beans vertically, as they are climbers.

Since the beds are weeded and watered from the pathways, the soil in the growing area is never compacted. With the intensive planting, a unique microclimate is created in your plot in which less water is needed. The plants form a "living mulch," which lessens evaporation. With adjacent square foot growing spaces, companion plants are much closer to each other, as are pest-reducing marigolds closer to the plants they are intended to protect.

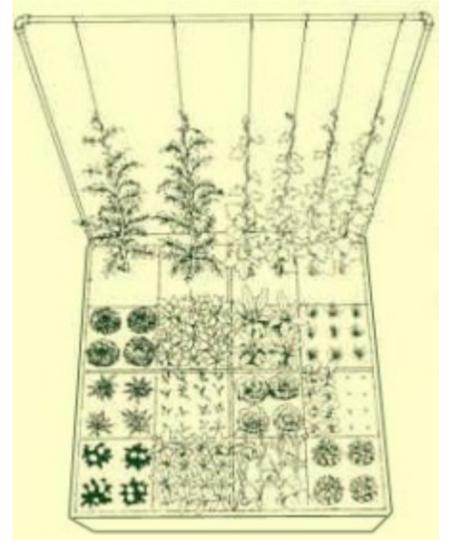
Mel Bartholomew has employed SFG in a variety of regions, including deserts, mountain plateaus, cramped urban locations, and in areas with polluted or high-salinity soils. The method can be used for growing flowers, vegetables, herbs and some fruits, in containers, raised beds, on tabletops or at ground level, in only 4 to 6 inches of soil. He has taught this method all over the world and has a foundation that teaches SFG so that all can grow their own fresh organic food.

Mr. Bartholomew claims that SFG will produce 100% of the harvest compared to an old-fashioned single row garden, and takes only:

- 40% of the cost
- 20% of the space
- 10% of the water
- 5% of the seeds
- 2% of the weeds
- 0% of the work

I don't agree with "0% of the work." That is advertising! However, many of the hard, time-consuming gardening chores are decreased. SFG gave me structure and kept me organized.

SFG seems to be popping up all over. For example, there is a neat online garden planner on the "Gardener's Supply" website ([www.gardeners.com](http://www.gardeners.com)) that contains some pre-planned "themed" gardens, or you can customize your own layout. You can put your printed layout in a notebook which will help you when planning your crop rotation for future gardens. I've seen some people use the SFG plan in their plots without making the raised bed. This makes sense to me as the soil in the P-Patches is mostly in great condition when you start. I've chosen to make raised beds, so I had a fair bit of work with my initial set-up. But after that set-up, I have found that the system works as described. I hope that this short introduction to Square Foot Gardening will spur you to give it a try.



*Example of an SFG plan, similar to Gardener's Supply web tool*



## Another essential micro-nutrient

By Helen Gabel, P-Patch Trust

Most Northwest gardeners are aware of the need to add calcium to our winter-drenched soils. Calcium is one of those micro-nutrients that must be present for plants to flourish. As my father used to say, "Don't need much, but if you ain't got it, the garden don't grow."

Similar to the micro-nutrients in soil, the human system that supports and tends the P-Patch Program has essential requirements as well. A certain amount of administrative support and money is required to organize the program. We do a heck of a lot with volunteer labor, but cash is also needed. P-Patch Trust is the organization that raises much of that critical cash. Many of us send a donation with our registration forms. But our annual donations are only part of the story.

More than twenty years ago, P-Patch Trust (then Friends of P-Patch) linked with five local food banks to form a federation called Food Resource Network, whose goal was to raise money through workplace giving. In 2010, Food Resource Network raised a total of over \$88,000. That's a lot of meals for a lot of hungry families. A river of generosity flowed from those concerned employees toward the most vulnerable of our fellow citizens. Of that substantial amount, \$15,256 was contributed to P-Patch Trust. These funds were used to support Lettuce Link and other food security programs, to supplement low-income gardener fees, and to support the city-wide initiative on urban agriculture.

Volunteer labor was needed to harvest that \$88,000. Historically, the P-Patch Program has staffed the Food Resource Network treasurer position. The treasurer is responsible for posting deposits and expenses, meeting with the bookkeeper, and attending quarterly meetings of the Network. That position currently needs more support. We're looking for two or three volunteers who would be willing to assist or apprentice with the current treasurer. This would involve picking up mail and making bank deposits, or learning about the accounting system.

If you'd like to play a part in moving that critical micro-nutrient (money) into our gardens and toward alleviating hunger in Seattle, please consider becoming one of our key volunteers. To find out more, call Helen Gabel, 206-781-1225.

# Raisin's bad day

...or...

## why we must resist the urge to use pesticides and herbicides

Article and photos by Melinda Epler

*We have all had the urge...fed up with a season full of mildew, tired of spraying aphids with water one too many times, and sick of bending over to weed that darn pickweed...Yes, at one time or another we've all entertained the thought of using pesticides or herbicides.*

*I hope this article will give you a few reasons to resist the urge. It's just not worth it.*



Three years ago, my husband Matt, our pup Ellis and I lived on a vineyard in Northern California wine country. It was gorgeous and relaxing and exactly what we needed at that stage of our lives. Matt worked at a local vineyard and I wrote and worked in our 2,000-square-foot garden.

As we settled into our new home, we heard scurrying sounds on our roof and occasionally wailing sounds in the bushes. We soon realized we had a cat living beneath our porch. Our neighbor said she'd been abandoned by a previous tenant.

She was wild and beautiful. We gave her a name—Raisin—as she came out of the vines in the heat of the summer. Then we started feeding her and spending time with her, slowly gaining her trust. After a few months, she was happily snuggling next to us in our bed every night, right beside our dog Ellis.



*Raisin was a happy indoor/outdoor cat for many months.*

### What Happened on a Wednesday Afternoon

One Wednesday as I was working in my office, I heard Raisin scratching at the door. Usually she pushed the door open, so it was a bit strange. As I opened the door, she fell into my office convulsing, with little control over her muscles. Her face was ticking and twitching wildly, she was licking her mouth very strangely... it was scary, to say the least. I ran through a list in my head of all the things it could be: scared by a hawk or truck? Bit by a snake or scorpion? Or maybe she ate something bad? But I didn't ponder for long—I wrapped her in a blanket and dashed to the vet.

As I drove I held her in the blanket in my lap, and she crawled into the smallest possible ball. Her body was hot hot hot. She was terrified. When I pet her, lots of fur fell out. She was becoming increasingly limp. I stepped on the gas a little harder.

I pulled up to the Humane Society and rushed her in. The technician came in and took her vitals. She was running a high fever, breathing rapidly, and her whole body was now shaking out of control. Not two minutes later the vet dashed in, did a quick check



over, and scooped her up. She quickly said, "I'm taking her in the back. She has all the signs of being exposed to pesticides."

"Ah," I said with a quivering voice, remembering, "they were spraying in the fields today." With that confirmation, off she went with Raisin, saying behind her, "I'll call you in 45 minutes. We're going to give her an IV, medicine to calm her down, and a thorough bath. I'll let you know if it doesn't work." And she was gone.

I left the office in a panic, called my husband, and we waited. And waited. An hour later the vet called, saying she'd been able to lower Raisin's temperature, slow the convulsions, and she was no longer very worried. She'd give her a break, then try a thorough bath to remove the pesticide. We could come get her later. We both let out a huge sigh of relief!

When we picked her up, the veterinarian said that the pesticide was working on Raisin exactly the way it is designed to work on insects. Basically, it makes the muscles twitch so that the body heats up to the point of death. It happens to dogs and cats, and, I assume, to the birds, frogs, toads, jack rabbits, coyotes, wild turkeys, and beneficial insects—all found outside our home and in the vineyard. I felt anger creeping into my soul.

Raisin came home wet and mad as heck. She couldn't go outside anymore, and we had to keep drugging her with muscle relaxants...But she was alive!

After confronting our neighbors, we learned the pesticide they sprayed was Roundup.



*Raisin is doing well as an indoor cat. This is one loved and lucky kitty! She plays with toy mice, watches bugs and people from her window perch, and loves her brother, Ellis (our dog).*

### Ten Other Reasons Not to Use Pesticides

The term pesticide includes insecticides, herbicides, and "any substance intended to control, destroy, repel, or attract a pest" (Centers for Disease Control).

1. YOU DON'T NEED TO! In a backyard garden or P-Patch there is no reason to use them. None. It's not worth the consequences to you and your family, your pets and your neighbors, your soil and your food.
2. You're killing your soil. There is a saying, "feed the soil, not the plant." The soil is the essence of your crop; it's where matter is eaten by macrobes and microbes (there are 1 billion microbes per gram in good soil) and pooped out in a form that your plants can consume. When you spray a pesticide, you kill all those macrobes and microbes you've worked hard to nurture.
3. You're risking your own health. I had a terrible itchy rash on my neck and face from holding Raisin, who had pesticide on her fur. The pesticide burn left a mark on my skin for months. But that's just the minor, short-term issue. Long-term issues include neurological problems like tremors, depression and fatigue, respiratory problems, cancers, degeneration of the retina, longer-than-average menstrual cycles, and reproductive issues (*Journal of Pesticide Reform*, Summer 2006). The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 10,000-20,000 physician-diagnosed pesticide poisonings occur each year among U.S. agricultural workers. The agency also believes that these are serious underestimates. The Centers for Disease Control has found pesticides in the blood and urine of 100% of the people it studied. The average person carried 13 of the 23 pesticides analyzed (Organic Consumers Association).

- You're risking your family's health. In 2004, an estimated 71,000 children were involved in common household pesticide-related poisonings or exposures in the United States (EPA). Children are especially sensitive to pesticides, as they have a small body weight and their organs are still developing. And don't forget that often these incidents happen inside your home: a Dallas study of children poisoned by pesticides at home found that 15% had absorbed pesticides through their skin from contaminated carpets and linens (Texas Center for Policy Studies & Environmental Defense).
- You're risking your pet's health. According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, over 30,000 pet poisonings related to pesticides are reported to poison control centers each year. Dogs that live in homes with pesticide-treated lawns are more likely than others to develop bladder cancer, according to a Purdue University study.



- They harm wildlife. Herbicides can kill and contaminate the food and shelter for many wild animals. Additionally, they have been found to cause reproductive harm in frogs (*Science News*) and genetic harm in fish (*Journal of Pesticide Reform*).
- They contaminate your food. One study showed that 70% of non-organic fruits and vegetables were contaminated with at least one pesticide (*Journal of Pesticide Reform*, Summer 2006). It showed contamination in 95% of certain fruits and vegetables like peppers and apples, and 100% in milk samples.
- They contaminate our water. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, 30-60% of wells were contaminated with at least one pesticide. By that same study, 14.1 million people routinely drink water contaminated with five major agricultural herbicides. None of these is removed by treatment plants. Additionally, runoff from farms and lawns can contaminate rivers, streams and watersheds.
- They contaminate our air. As you walk across your lawn and into your house, you pick up particles that then adhere to the dust in your home. Furthermore, pesticides can remain in the air and on surfaces in the home up to several years. Pesticide particles can also be sucked into homes, offices and schools via ventilation systems (Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides).
- They don't work. More than 500 species of insects and mites and more than 150 types of fungi (a 50% increase over the past decade) are now resistant to some pesticides. By spraying pesticides, you are treating the symptoms rather than the root cause of the problem. If your plant has aphids, for example, it may be vulnerable because it isn't getting enough nutrients or sunlight. And without addressing the problem, you will have to continue to apply pesticides during each life cycle of the pest (sometimes several times per year).



#### Ten Alternatives to Pesticides

- Let it be. Society tells us bugs are bad. But you know what? You can create your own ecosystem right in your backyard or P-Patch if you let your creatures come into balance. One summer my garden had a bad case of aphids. I wanted to spray, but I decided to wait and see what happened. Lo and behold, one day I saw a ladybug. A few days later I saw another. Over the next several weeks, I saw many more, and one day the aphids were gone. In their place I had ladybugs, soldier bugs, and all sorts of beneficial creatures in the yard.
- No really, let it be. I had a zucchini plant with powdery mildew. For months. Yet with two plants, I harvested a total of 166 pounds of zucchini that year! I'm sure it made the plant less productive. But do I care? What would I have done with more zucchini?!
- Treat the soil. A healthy soil makes for a healthy plant. Make sure you give your plants some black gold compost every year. Compost tea can bring back beneficial root microbes, increasing a plant's resistance to disease. And if you haven't done so, get a soil test to see just what is deficient in your soil—and then replace that nutrient.
- Plant the correct distances apart. When plants compete with one another for light, water, and nutrients, they become stressed. Believe me, I have a lot of aphid-covered Brussels sprouts out there right now because I planted them too close together and I didn't thin them well enough.
- Weed. Ok, I'm not an avid weeder. I think sometimes weeds can be beneficial. For instance, in the vineyard, my epazote weeds kept my tomatoes warm through a couple of mild frosts. But weeds will compete with your crops if they're too close, and they may bring pests with them too.
- Rotate your crops. Don't plant tomatoes in the same place every year, as you will end up breeding a hefty population of pests that can rely on a steady supply of tomatoes year after year. Mix it up a bit. You can find a crop rotation diagram in most good gardening books, but essentially you want to rotate like-crops together (i.e., don't plant cucumbers where you planted zucchini last year). Make sure to do a three-year rotation at least.
- Interplant different crops together. You don't want to have a big feast waiting for a pest by planting a bunch of one crop all in one place. Confuse the pests by interplanting. For instance, I've planted scallions and carrots together, beans and radishes, herbs and flowers... the list is endless. Try planting herbs and native flowers with your veggies to draw beneficial insects, too.
- Research your pests and alter your planting schedule accordingly. For example, carrot rust flies lay eggs in the spring. If you can delay planting until after that time, you will have rust-fly-free carrots. Also, by germinating seedlings indoors, you will plant hardier plants that can withstand a few bites from pests (whereas a seed planted in situ will be vulnerable with just one or two leaves).
- Pick, spray (with water), prune, shake. Do the easy things first. Find a cucumber beetle? If you can't stand that it's going to cut a little hole into your leaves, pick it off the branch and squish it. Cucumber beetles too high to squish? Shake 'em down and then squish 'em. Got spider mites or aphids? Spray 'em with a forceful spray on your hose nozzle (be careful not to damage your plants with too hard of a spray).
- Other organic controls: trap, use row covers, mulch, bag fruit... I particularly love *The Organic Gardener's Handbook of Natural Insect and Disease Control*. It walks you through different crops, what pests they have and what you can do to combat them. It also has a great insect identification guide that I've found incredibly useful.



*Ellis and Raisin*

#### If You or Your Pet are Exposed to Pesticides

Time is of the essence. Don't delay, go to an emergency room or veterinary hospital right away. When in doubt, just go!!!

#### Other Resources:

- American Poison Control Center: <http://www.aapcc.org/>
- Animal Poison Control Center (\$65 donation, but worth it for your pet if you can't get to a veterinary hospital): <http://www.aspc.org/pet-care/poison-control/>
- Herbicide and Pesticide Exposure Checklist: <http://www.nwk9.com/pesticides.htm>

# Tips for Giving Gardeners

By Molly Woodring, Harvest Coordinator/AmeriCorps\*VISTA

In *Growing Vegetables West of the Cascades*, Steve Solomon calls them cabbage years—those years when the weather doesn't cooperate, when the tomatoes refuse to ripen, and when you find yourself harvesting almost exclusively greens. It certainly doesn't sound like the kind of growing season that lends itself to much sharing or abundance. But last year, a prime example of a Northwest cabbage year, in 37 P-Patches around the city, gardeners were still able to raise 20,889 pounds of fresh, organic produce for local food banks and meal programs.

In the face of three straight years of double-digit increases in the number of families visiting food banks around the city, this is huge. So thank you to all those gardeners who worked with Lettuce Link to grow, harvest, and deliver food for low-income families this past year.

Emergency food services are bracing for another year of increased demand and decreased funding, so 2011 is a great year to get involved in your P-Patch's food bank garden, or to "grow a row" in your own plot. Here are some tips for novice and experienced Giving Gardeners alike:

- Keep it simple. Streamline your efforts by growing just a few high-yield crops at a time. This allows you to get the most out of your gardening time and gives food banks the benefit of larger quantities to work with. Having a limited number of tasks can also help avoid confusion if many gardeners are helping at different times.
- Get others involved. Encourage community involvement in the food bank plot at your P-Patch. There are plenty of gardeners who may not have a plot of their own (and may be on the waitlist for one!), but who have the know-how and time to help out.
- Be a little picky. Part of the charm of garden-fresh food is its lack of uniformity, but donate only the best-looking produce. It holds up a food bank's distribution line if clients need to sort through blemished produce and adds to costs if the food bank needs to compost wilted lettuce or wormy cabbage. It is especially important to wash the produce well and to make sure you don't have any stow-away insects!
- Time it right. If you can, deliver your donations before the food bank opens so that there is time to process your donation. Food bank directors and volunteers are busy, so try to work with their schedule as much as possible. See the *Where to Donate Guide* for an up-to-date list of food banks, their schedules, and what they can most use: <http://www.solid-ground.org/Programs/Nutrition/Lettuce/Documents/WhereToDonate.pdf>.

Here at Lettuce Link, we're looking forward to the upcoming growing season and to supporting your food bank gardening efforts. We provide seeds, vegetable starts and help for Giving Gardeners. If you're interested, please come to our Giving Gardener Gathering at Bradner Gardens on April 5th or give us a call at 206-694-6751. You can see what Lettuce Link and our fabulous volunteers are up to and learn about local and national legislation that affects our food system at: <http://lettucelink.blogspot.com/>.

## 2011 Food Bank/Giving Gardener Gathering

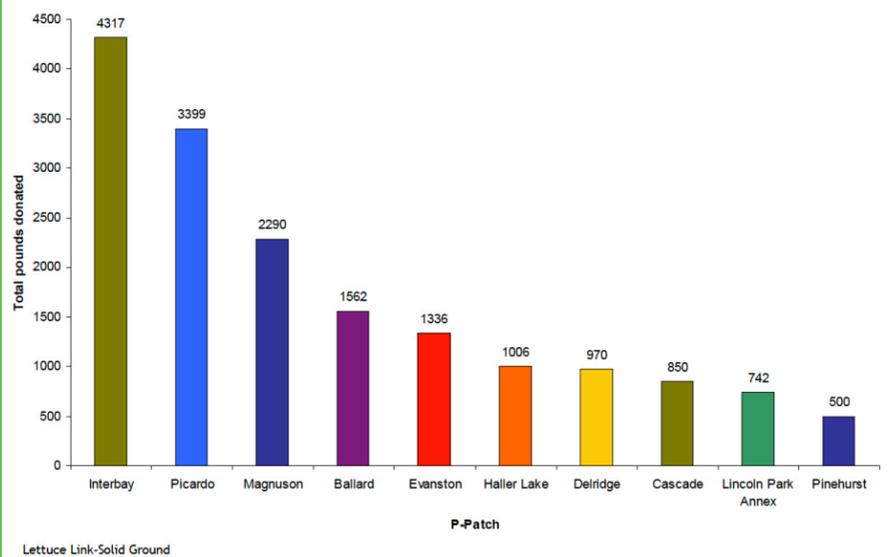
Please join us for a conversation about food bank gardening  
(and share some tasty food provided by  
Homegrown Sustainable Sandwich Shop!)

Tuesday, April 5, 6:30pm – 8:30pm Bradner Gardens Park  
Community Room 29th Ave S and S Grand Street

Please RSVP to Molly Woodring:  
[mollyw@solidground.org](mailto:mollyw@solidground.org)  
or 206-694-6751

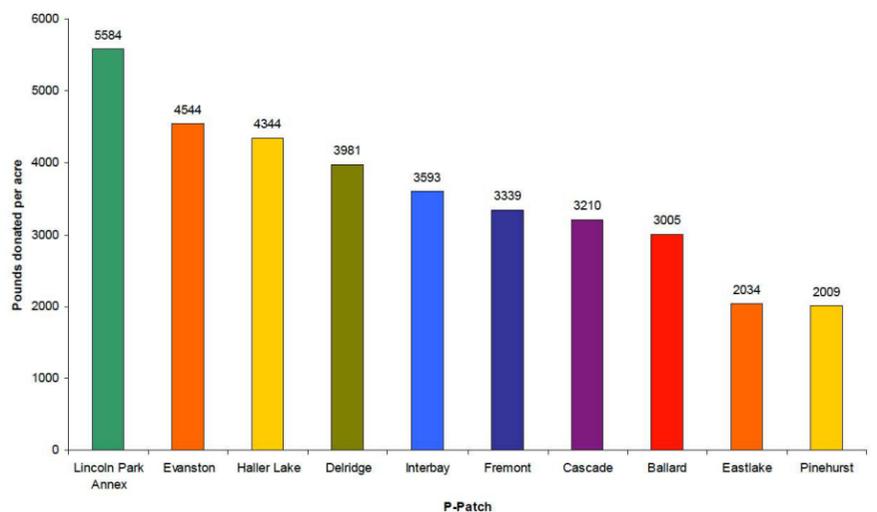
*Lettuce Link envisions a city where people have equal access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food. We work in solidarity with communities to grow and share food that is fresh and nourishing. Molly Woodring is a VISTA member working with Lettuce Link for the 2011 season. You can contact her at [mollyw@solid-ground.org](mailto:mollyw@solid-ground.org) or at 206-694-6751.*

Top 10 Giving Gardens by Total Pounds Donated (2010)



Lettuce Link-Solid Ground

Top 10 Giving Gardens by Pounds per Acre (2010)



Lettuce Link-Solid Ground

## 2010 P-Patch Giving Garden Donation Totals



Lettuce Link, an innovative food and gardening program of Solid Ground engages community in growing, gleaning and sharing garden fresh organic vegetables, fruit, seeds, and gardening information with Seattle residents living on limited incomes.



<http://www.solid-ground.org/Programs/Nutrition/Lettuce>  
<http://lettucelink.blogspot.com>

1501 N. 45th St. | Seattle, WA 98103 | 206-694-6754

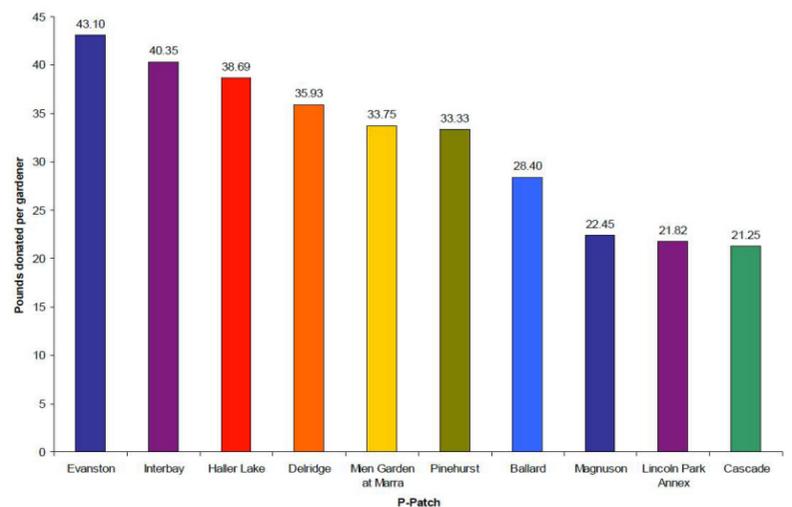


# 20,889 Pounds



Lettuce Link-Solid Ground

Top 10 Giving Gardens by Pounds per Gardener (2010)



Lettuce Link-Solid Ground

# News from the P-Patch office

By Rich Macdonald

Gardeners understand that change is constant. This truth has helped me navigate the ups and downs of the last few weeks, when Stella Chao, our department director and a tireless advocate for community gardening, stepped down along with her deputy director, Kimberly Archie, who was especially helpful with fighting term limits last year. Fortunately, the mayor has brought back an old friend, Bernie Matsuno, as interim director. Bernie has worked with the Department of Neighborhoods through much of its history, helping build the Neighborhood Matching Fund to its present position and watching over the P-Patch Program.

Bernie arrives at a time of great departmental transformation. The city budget is currently stable but fragile; we wait to see what the next six months will bring. P-Patch hopes to finally launch its community strategic planning effort that will guide the future of our program. With 73 gardens and no increase in staff for the foreseeable future, the strategic plan will help us realign staff duties to accommodate the 10 new gardens that are in the planning stages. The strategic plan will also help answer questions about P-Patch's role in the city's rapidly growing urban agriculture movement.

In addition, P-Patch staff met with P-Patch Trust member Joyce Moty to discuss trainings for gardeners and site leadership. Next week P-Patch staff meets with Seattle Tilth and Seattle Public Utilities about holding

master composter trainings at New Holly P-Patch. This will be a fabulous opportunity to foster composting leadership among our richly diverse south-end gardens. We anticipate a letter from the American Community Gardening Association requesting Seattle to host the 2013 conference. This conference, which would coincide with the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of P-Patch, will be a superb opportunity to showcase our program and revel in the substantial community gardening and urban agriculture activities throughout our region. We are currently participating on an interdepartmental food system team to gather community input for a Seattle Food Policy Plan. Staff also participates on a planning team to open city land for urban agriculture. And our intern is pursuing a project to examine the importance of food in sustaining the cultures of immigrant families.

Besides processing more than 2,100 renewal applications, recruiting new gardeners, helping new sites get started, and compiling last year's more than 1,600 P-Patch gardener surveys, P-Patch staff is also focused on internal improvements. We continue to develop and refine guidelines for plot management that create more transparency and support future P-Patch management changes. One area of focus is the P-Patch site leadership system, the backbone of our community gardens. In addition to supporting site managers, we want to encourage all gardeners to participate in site leadership.

That's it for now. Have a happy and slug-free start to the gardening season.

## P-Patch 2011 Harvest Banquet—It's Up to You!

Is the P-Patch Harvest Banquet one of your favorite P-Patch events of the year—all that food, and the pictures, displays, and gardeners from the huge variety of P-Patches? Are you itching to bring your finest ideas to this creative venture? Or have you never been, because it's just too darn far and inconvenient?

If you've had any of these thoughts, then 2011 is your year! Because of the P-Patch staff's over-extended workloads, the staff is passing banquet organization to gardeners, with staff assistance. Over the years, the banquet has taken different forms and has been held in various neighborhoods. Typically, 90 to 150 gardeners attend, representing over 20 gardens. The banquet, held at the end of September, usually includes ever-popular photo-boards and digital displays, a short program, and a theme. Planning typically begins with reserving the venue in late winter. Event planning occurs in late spring, outreach for photo displays in June, and volunteer solicitation in August.

So, gardener-organizers, it's up to you! Contact P-Patch ([rich.macdonald@seattle.gov](mailto:rich.macdonald@seattle.gov); 206-386-0088) and we'll put you volunteer banquet-mavens in touch with each other. What kind of Harvest Banquet will you create?

### P-Patch Trust Mission Statement

P-Patch Trust, a nonprofit organization, works to acquire, build, preserve and protect community gardens in Seattle's neighborhoods. Through advocacy, leadership and partnerships, the Trust expands access to community gardening across economic, racial, ethnic, ability and gender lines; promotes organic gardening and builds community through gardening. We seek to break urban isolation by providing opportunities for people to garden together, learn from each other, develop a sense of neighborhood and create a more livable urban environment.

### From the Editors

We would like the *P-Patch Post* to reflect the diversity of gardeners in the Seattle P-Patch Program. We welcome stories about P-Patch gardeners who bring techniques and crops from all parts of the world, individuals who have stewarded the P-Patch Program over time, novice gardeners and their adventures, etc. Please contact us at [p.patch.post@ppatchtrust.org](mailto:p.patch.post@ppatchtrust.org) with ideas, gardener profiles, information about crops, recipes and photos. The whole community will benefit from this wealth of experience.

The P-Patch Post is published quarterly—in March, June, September and December—by the P-Patch Trust. Approximately 2400 copies are distributed each issue. Please submit articles or story ideas to the editors at [p.patch.post@ppatchtrust.org](mailto:p.patch.post@ppatchtrust.org).

The submission deadline for the Summer issue is May 1.

*The P-Patch Post is published by the P-Patch Trust. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the P-Patch Trust or the P-Patch Program.*

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**YES!** I want to help the P-Patch Trust acquire and advocate for community gardens, and preserve and protect our existing community gardens.

Here is my contribution as a:

**FRIEND: \$25-\$34** (pays the fiscal agency fee for one garden for one month)  
**GARDEN HELPER: \$35-\$49** (pays the plot rental fee for one low-income gardener)  
**SUPPORTER: \$50-\$99** (pays one year of liability insurance for one garden)  
**CONTRIBUTOR: \$100-\$249** (funds a Trust tool grant for one garden)  
**BENEFACTOR: \$250-\$499** (pays a portion of the property taxes on the Trust's gardens)  
**PATRON: \$500-\$999** (pays a significant percentage of the annual support for Lettuce Link)  
**GARDENING ANGEL: \$1000 or more** (pays for printing one edition of the P-Patch Post)

You may be able to multiply your contribution through your employer's matching gift program. Please check with your Human Resources Department for information and the necessary form. Adobe, Amgen, Bank of America, Boeing, Microsoft, Starbucks and Chase Bank are among the major local employers that match contributions to non-profit organizations.  
*An acknowledgement of your contribution will be mailed to you.*

My contribution is \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Check here if you want to remain anonymous.

Make your check or money order payable to: "P-Patch Trust" and mail it to P.O. Box 19748 Seattle, WA 98109.

You can also use a credit card (VISA or MasterCard) to make a contribution to the Trust via our secure website: [www.p-patchtrust.org](http://www.p-patchtrust.org).

Thank you! For more information contact us at [p.patch.trust@ppatchtrust.org](mailto:p.patch.trust@ppatchtrust.org) or call 425.329.1601

P-Patch Trust is a nonprofit, 501(c) (3) organization and donations are tax deductible to the full amount allowed by law. Our federal tax identification number is 91-091819.



# P-PATCH TALKING POINTS

By Rich MacDonald

Has a visitor to your P-Patch ever asked you whether plots ever open? Has anyone said, “Hey, if this is a community garden why can’t I pick anything?” or “Why do some people get to keep their plots forever?” Well, here is your handy guide to P-Patch talking points.

## National Context

- Community gardening is a nation-wide movement—most major metropolitan areas host community gardens
- Seattle is recognized as a leader and has one of the largest programs
- Programs throughout the country are generally like Seattle’s, in which gardeners lease a small plot of land to grow for themselves

## Basic Program Statistics

- 38 years old
- 73 P-Patches distributed throughout the city (85% on public land)
- Approximately 23 Acres
- 2165 households

## Program Areas

- **Community Gardens**—50 neighborhood-based community gardens
- **Food security**—20 gardens focused largely on low income and immigrant communities; 38 food bank gardens and other giving opportunities
- **Youth Gardening**—Support youth gardening in P-Patches city-wide
- **Market Gardening**—3 market gardens offer low income people supplemental income

## Public Access—All community gardens are open to the public—P-Patches provide:

- Perennial and demonstration areas
- Orchards
- Wildlife habitat and Native planting areas
- Passive educational signage
- Space for public events and education
- Food bank “giving” gardens.

## Plot Assignment and Turnover—Signed yearly agreement by gardeners includes:

- Plot fee \$25 plus \$12 for each 100 sq ft.—Plot fee assistance is available by request
- 8 volunteer hours
- Full plot utilization—Staff with volunteer leaders monitor plots to turn over underutilized plots

## Criteria for plot assignment—Staff create guidelines to manage plot assignment.

### Tools include:

- Waitlist
- Balance for underrepresented communities
- Balance for neighborhood representation
- Standard plot sizes depend on the circumstances of each garden (In each P-Patch a few members may have more than the standard size plot)

## P-Patch Community Gardens Give Back

- Public use—Gardeners hold community events (Interbay plant sale, Bradner Concert above the City)
- Gardeners actively engage the community—P-Patchers report that one to two non-gardeners are always visiting the P-Patch, and gardeners answer questions from the public

## Food Bank Donations—more than 20,000 lbs of produce to food banks and hot meal programs in 2010

- 9% of gardeners donate once a week, 40% monthly
- 38 P-Patch community gardens have dedicated “giving gardens”

## Stewardship and Investment in Public Land

- Community gardens invest in soil, plants and social infrastructure that create the opportunity for public enjoyment and education
- Long term stewards are the biggest donors of their time and money—this investment sustains P-Patch community gardens

## Education

- Long term gardeners actively share and model organic gardening principles through direct education and demonstration. Each P-Patch community garden becomes a demonstration and educational garden
- P-Patch community gardeners are a source of green innovations such as water collection systems, composting toilets, green building materials, reuse of organic and inorganic materials

## Gardener Demographics—P-Patch community gardening encourages inclusivity:

- 20% gardeners are people of color
- 55% gardeners are low income
- Except for a few grandfathered cases, P-Patches are limited to Seattle residents

## Is Community Gardening Private Use of Public Land?

- P-Patch community gardens are composed of planting space and public space - planting space is used by participants in return for a payment of time and money; participants must maintain their own planting space, as well as participating in maintaining public space, including paths, perennial beds, food bank gardens, fruit trees, sitting areas and play spaces
- Planting space and public space are both completely open to the public - the public is welcome and encouraged to enter the community garden and engage, observe and learn from the use of the space in a way that does not happen in other exclusive uses of public land

## What is a community garden?

Community gardening is fundamentally a community-building activity that brings neighbors together to steward (plan, plant, and maintain) neighborhood open space. Traditionally, community gardens in Seattle include individual gardening plots that community members rent while common areas in the garden are maintained by all who rent space in the garden. All maintenance is done by the gardeners.

## What is a P-Patch?

P-Patch is the name given to community gardens in Seattle that are managed by the City of Seattle’s Department of Neighborhoods, P-Patch Program. Members practice organic gardening techniques and plant a mix of food crops, flowers, herbs, fruiting bushes and trees.



## GUIDE TO THE CARE OF TREES AND SHRUBS

by Michael Oxman, Professional Tree Surgeon, [www.treedr.com](http://www.treedr.com)

Trees are universally loved, and a requirement for quality existence. Trees calm the soul; their beautiful greenery creates an atmosphere of serenity. Landscapes that seek to replicate native habitat bring the forest into the city, and enhance the human life experience.

Property values are increased by an attractive, functional landscape. A well-designed, sustainable urban ecosystem reduces the need for maintenance, and energy conservation savings are substantial.

In their dual role as both observer and caretaker of the garden, people have a duty to provide proper design and maintenance in exchange for the social, ecological, and financial benefits they enjoy. To ensure a quality landscape, use the 5 Ps: Plan, Plant, Provide, Protect, and Prune.

### Plan. Put the right type of plant in the right place.

- A thorough site analysis can determine the size of available soil and canopy area. Assess nutrients, water availability, and drainage qualities of the soil.
- Select appropriate species characteristics. Future size of the mature plant must match site constraints. Account for maintenance needs, disease susceptibility, and seasonal changes.
- Allow for the ability to co-exist. Does the plant meet our need for beauty and function?

### Plant. Correct site preparation and installation.

- Soil fertility is important. Encourage roots to extend beyond the root ball into the surrounding soil.
- Enhance stability by staking the plant to prevent windthrow, if necessary.
- Obtain quality nursery stock. Make sure the history of the plant in the nursery is consistent with eventual siting. For example, street trees should be limbed up to clear trunks above head height.

### Provide. Supply enough water and nutrients on schedule.

- Irrigation: Install an automated irrigation system. Don’t let your garden be subject to water stress in dry times
- Drainage: Proper soil type and provision for runoff allows adequate gas exchange for root health.
- Fertilization: If necessary, augment soil with nutrients.

### Protect. Keep human-caused stress and biological attack from hurting trees and plants.

- Prevent mechanical injury. Stakes can play a dual role by preventing mower & weedeater ‘blight’.
- Mulch to maintain and buffer soil. A 2-4 inch thick layer of bark, chips or other mulch can be spread 1-3 feet wide around the base of plants.
- Pest control is usually done with a thorough application of ‘elbow grease’. Don’t rush to apply chemicals until after manual methods of cultivation are exhausted. Ensure heavy attacks of garden pests don’t go unchecked. Some damage is natural and is okay. Biological control uses natural enemies of pests to maintain balance.

### Prune. Use proper methods of structural improvement.

- Select plants that have been shaped appropriately in the nursery stage. History of plant pruning prior to planting must be consistent with eventual use.
- Prune for structural stability. Stems get larger where there are side branches, so strength is optimized by leaving lower limbs on the trunk. Promote a large amount of taper by leaving 2/3 of foliage on lower half of tree.
- Stage pruning at appropriate intervals over the life of the plant.
- Prune away no more than 25% of the total foliage from the plant at a time. Schedule more frequent but less intensive pruning to reduce stress and encourage optimum regrowth.
- Use pruning standards from the International Society of Arboriculture. When the job is too big for you, hire a Certified Arborist or Certified Landscaper.
- Use natural target pruning techniques to make cuts at the correct position and angle on the stem.
- Avoid heading back the ends of limbs to control the size of the plant. Most efforts at reducing branches to shorten them are ineffective, since plants are genetically programmed to attain a certain height. Topping is no longer considered an acceptable practice. Do not top trees, because weak future growth is connected to a pocket of decay.
- Shearing shrubs makes more work for you. Rather, use selective thinning to space growth evenly throughout the plant structure. Remove entire stems and adjacent plants that interfere with desirable growth. Remember, many landscapes are initially overplanted with many small specimens. Some plants may need to be removed as they grow larger.

# A Guardian Angel at Interbay

Article and photos by Judy Hucka

“Guardian angel” is the most frequent description of the man who showed up at the Interbay P-Patch in March 2010. “Jack-of-all trades” is another. But the best way to characterize Robert Kolbe is “a truly fine human being.”

In the ten months since that day last March when he first appeared at the P-Patch, Robert has contributed hundreds of hours in volunteer labor and service to the Interbay garden—and he’s not even a gardener.

Robert discovered Interbay as he rode by on his bicycle on his way to Fisherman’s Terminal, where he was working on fishing boats. “The park always looked nice,” he says. He stopped to look around and, when his paying work dried up, started lending a hand.

Jim Blackstock was one of the first gardeners to appreciate Robert’s extensive skills. Jim and another gardener were installing a bench and struggling with concrete and an unruly auger that was about to get the best of them. “Robert kept his silence, at least for a while,” Jim said, “but he finally took over. It was quite evident he knew how to use this ‘demonic’ tool and mix concrete just right.”

After consulting with site coordinator Ray Schutte, Robert offered to do a few small projects and started getting to know a few of the gardeners. He soon discovered that some of the older gardeners who have been heavily involved in the garden for years were slowing down and “starting to get burned out,” so he helped them out. One job led to another and before long, Robert was spending most of his time working in the garden.

Longtime gardener Fred Nollan has been laid up by a sore knee and torn ankle ligament and may have had to give up his plot this year if not for Robert’s help. “He single-handedly set my garden up for the winter,” said Fred, “removing weeds, rebuilding a raspberry trellis and more, all without my asking. He sees something that needs doing and goes ahead and does it.”

When Robert noticed that longtime gardener Jean Unger had stumbled on the uneven pavers in the main garden walkway, he removed and then re-leveled all 700 pavers in the entire pathway.

“Robert has done so much for me, individually, and for a multitude of older gardeners,” said Jean. “Wherever there is a need, Robert steps in.”

Robert, 53, is a plumber by trade and spent nearly a decade in the Navy as a Seabee, working on military construction projects in Alaska, Spain, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. After leaving the military, he returned to Alaska, working on fishing boats and doing construction. He came to Seattle in the early 2000s, and worked in plumbing and construction until the economy slowed.

Robert is what some would describe as “homeless.” He “sleeps out” and takes most of his meals at the Union Gospel Mission. He considers shelters “depressing” because, he says, they are filled with drug and alcohol users who collect government assistance and don’t want to work. He can’t tolerate “freeloaders.”

“Robert likes to be busy and feel useful,” says Interbay food bank garden co-coordinator Jude Berman. “I’m so glad he decided to adopt Interbay P-Patch as the place to fulfill those needs!”

“There have been so many projects that Robert has taken on for the garden and for individual gardeners, it would take hours and reams of paper to account,” said Jim Blackstock.

What he has done for Interbay’s food bank garden “is beyond my wildest dreams,” said Jude—rat-proofing the greenhouse, sifting decomposed woodchips into bags full of beautiful seed-starting medium, completely redoing the irrigation system. “This will probably be the first year in the history of food bank gardening at Interbay that we will have water available precisely where and when we need it.”

He has also completely repaired and reengineered the rest of our water system; put in a drainage system in our parking lot, eliminating the giant mud puddles; and chipped all the garden pathways twice, spreading more than 50 yards of chips each time. He regularly helps set up and then clean up for our many garden events.

Robert has also taken on the role of security guard, foiling several theft and vandalism attempts and preventing illegal dumping.

“In my humble opinion, Robert has been nothing short of a guardian angel at Interbay P-Patch,” said Jude. “He cares deeply about the garden and takes great pleasure in making it more beautiful, functional, and safe.”

Some Interbay gardeners have tried to pay Robert for his help but most often he refuses any money. Some slip him thank-you notes and home-baked goodies, and at least one has hired him for landscaping work and other jobs outside the garden.



Robert Kolbe has contributed hundreds of volunteer hours at Interbay Garden  
“... a truly fine human being”

“I get as much out of the garden as I put into it,” he frequently says. “It’s my way of giving back.” But of the thank-you notes, he says, “they mean a lot. More than anything else.”

Robert has come to mean a lot to Interbay.

“Robert’s constant giving and working nature has been a godsend for all of us,” said Deb Rock, co-coordinator for the food bank garden. “I most enjoy his impervious joy and upbeat attitude. It amazes me that he works outside all day even in freezing temperatures and does so with a smile on his face and in his heart. He told me he knows the secret to happiness and I believe him. We all are learning a lot from having Robert in our lives.”

“He is one great guy,” echoes Fred Nollan. “We are so fortunate to have him.

Plus he is a lot of fun to visit with.”

Robert’s many hours in the Interbay garden—on weekends and weekdays, in the spring, summer, fall, and now winter—have led him to some observations about the P-Patch program and its gardeners.

He thinks too many new and “younger” gardeners don’t spend enough time tending their garden plots and contributing to the upkeep of the garden’s common areas and infrastructure. “The system needs to tighten down a little to enforce people working in the garden,” he says. “To have a place like this that’s really nice and only do the minimum for it, that’s really sad.”

As for his work, “everything is pretty well fixed, now the gardeners can start maintaining it again.”

“It does me good at the end of the day, to look at it and say ‘I did this.’”



“I get as much out of the garden as I put into it,” says Kolbe

# Heirlooms in your patch: Growing varieties with a history

By Bill Thorness

Did you know that some of the commonly grown vegetables in P-Patches come with an historical pedigree? You might be surprised by how many have been grown for generations, even since early American gardeners first turned over the soil. Today they are some of the most flavorful, unique plants in the patch.



*Seven-inch, red Jimmy Nardello Italian Sweet peppers are perfect for grilling and draping over the top of a burger.*

Heirlooms are commonly defined as varieties that are at least 50 years old (many are much older), that have been passed down from generation to generation, and that are not being grown commercially.

Gardeners used to have many more varieties available to them than we have today. A comparison of 75 popular homegrown vegetables and fruits in U.S. Department of Agriculture listings in 1903 and 1983 reveals the loss of 93% of the varieties. Much of the reduction has come through consolidation of seed companies, which often results in seed inventories being combined and lesser-selling varieties being dropped. Other factors include the advent of industrial agriculture after World War II; commercial hybridization and patenting; and the reduction of home gardening during the post-WWII era, when continuity between generations of home gardeners was largely lost.

But about 20 years ago, the loss of varieties was reversed when a number of dedicated gardeners and activists began to speak out about the value of seed diversity and started to take action. Organizations such as Abundant Life Seed Foundation (originally from Port Townsend and currently located in Cottage Grove, OR) and Iowa-based Seed Savers Exchange (which turns 30 this year) gathered these efforts into a critical mass of people growing and caring for our living history. People put more effort into growing, saving, exchanging and even selling the old, beloved varieties. Some varieties that had been thought extinct were found, shared, and brought back from the brink.

You might be surprised at the number of heirlooms being grown in P-Patch gardens. Some of these plants were commonly sown by Native Americans. For example:

- *Table Queen* acorn squash, introduced to the public by an Iowa seed company in 1913, is thought to have come originally from the Arikara people of the northern Plains. Its skin is so dark green to be nearly black, but inside, the flesh is a rich orange with a slightly nutty taste.
- *Ozette potato*, also called Anna Cheeka's Ozette after the Makah tribal woman who kept it alive and introduced it to circulation, is a knobby fingerling potato. Spanish explorers sailing up from Peru gave Ozette potatoes to the Makahs at Neah Bay. It has yellow flesh that is mild and creamy.
- Cherokee Purple is a reliable tomato variety that is said to have been grown by the Cherokee Indians, who gave the seeds to a Tennessee grower more than 100 years ago. It has reddish purple skin with green streaks on the shoulders, and a juicy, winy flavor.
- Inchelium Red garlic, first discovered on the Colville Indian reservation in Eastern Washington, is a mild, artichoke-type garlic prized for its large heads and good storage.

Other plants came from European immigrants:

- Jimmy Nardello Italian Sweet pepper is called the ultimate frying pepper. This slender, knobby pepper has a fruity taste when raw that becomes creamy when fried. It bears the name of the Italian immigrant who brought it with him when settling in Connecticut. It's reliable and prolific in our climate.
- A French soldier settling in the Walla Walla area carried the onion seed now known as Walla Walla Sweet with him from the island of Corsica. Italian immigrant farmers then began cultivating it into the prizewinner we grow today. In 2007, this delectable onion became Washington's official state vegetable.
- You might know Little Gem lettuce as "Sucrine," a label that gets it onto trendy restaurant menus. But this hardy, baby romaine was introduced to us from England. It produces a cup of elongated oval leaves curling inward into a small head.
- The city of Nantes in northern France has supplied us with a few well-loved vegetables, including the sweet Scarlet Nantes carrot, which is exceptional both for its striking red skin and a small central core. Want more production? Try Oxheart, a stout, blunt-ended variety also from Nantes, developed in about 1870.

When you grow these or other heirloom vegetables, you're not just providing your family with fresh, organic vegetables. You are bringing history to life, and literally eating the stuff on which our country was made.

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## Heirloom seeds are available

from *Seed Savers Exchange* ([www.seedsavers.org](http://www.seedsavers.org)), *Territorial Seed Co.* ([www.territorialseed.com](http://www.territorialseed.com)) and *Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds* ([www.rareseeds.com](http://www.rareseeds.com)). Also look for heirlooms in your favorite seed catalog or nursery rack, as there are many other suppliers.



*Heads of Little Gem romaine lettuce are interplanted with onions in Bill Thorness's P-Patch garden*

**Bill Thorness** is a gardener at the Ballard P-Patch and the author of *Edible Heirlooms: Heritage Vegetables for the Maritime Garden* (Skipstone, 2009). He will be speaking on vegetable gardening this spring at City People's Garden Store and at regional flower and garden shows. His book is available at most bookstores, garden centers and PCC stores.