Master Gardeners 'Spring into Gardening'

MARILYN GILBAUGH | Posted: Thursday, April 11, 2013 8:00 am

No doubt about it, spring is in the air. Signs of it are everywhere. Buds are bursting; branches are bearing. And the Clatsop County Master Gardeners (CCMG) are bustling as they “Spring into Gardening.” The master gardeners invite the public to join them for their annual Spring Garden Seminar from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, April 13 at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds. Take off a layer or two of winter clothing, go find your gardening tools and mark your calendars for a free day filled with plants, classes, advice, vendors and raffles.

Arrive early; grab a cup of coffee and a snack, compliments of the master gardeners. Then stroll through the more than 30 vendors’ booths. You’ll find all things gardening: plant sales, master gardeners on hand answering gardening questions; a master gardeners’ raffle – just about anything that has to do with gardens.

Be sure to catch the Tongue Point Job Corps (TPJC) Landscaping booth to see what a bunch of skilled students are up to. Five dollars will purchase a raffle ticket, and there’s no limit on the number you can buy. The winning ticket is worth eight hours of landscaping or yard work in Clatsop or Pacific County. TPJC landscape instructor Kris Saulsbury, his student crew of about 15 experienced landscapers, and all equipment needed come with the win. To say the least, these are the hottest tickets of the day, and you don’t have to be present to win. “I like the raffle idea. With a raffle everyone has a chance,” Saulsbury said. There’s only one winning ticket, but all proceeds go toward the Clatsop County Master Gardeners’ scholarship.

One lucky Astoria couple, the Laugherys, know what the win can bring. “Bill and I won a full day of yard work donated by the students,” Gin Laughery said. “We were extremely happy with their work. They worked together as professionals, problem solving right along with Kris. Then came the rain, the hard rain, forcing the crew to quit, but making sure we knew they would be back to finish up. We were so pleased with their work that we hired Kris and four of his students to come back and do some clearing for us. It’s evident that these kids fall in love with landscaping. Kris is proud of them and he should be.

“By the way, if you haven’t seen the Job Corps’ grounds, which are maintained by the landscape program’s students, they look somewhat like a golf course,” Laughery added. “They are absolutely stunning while at the same time providing the students with lifelong skills.”

There are only 12 landscaping vocational training programs nationwide, and Tongue Point Job Corps has the only one in the Northwest, which draws its students primarily from Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Alaska.

The master gardener seminar also provides several speakers to address a variety of gardening know-
how.

Keynote speaker and Clackamas Community College horticulture teacher Elizabeth Howley will discuss Victory Gardens, both their history and their place in present day, at 11 a.m. Howley has over 30 years of experience teaching and lecturing on a variety of horticultural topics. “Since my first visit to a greenhouse with my grandfather at age five, I’ve been learning how plants grow,” Howley said.

At 11:30 a.m., Susan Dyer-Preston, former Astorian, a master gardener and the woman behind the Clatsop County Animal Shelter’s Pet Friendly Garden (which is open to the public) will discuss Pet-Friendly Gardens, highlighting plants and gardening practices that are safe for animals.

Becky Graham, Astoria master gardener and owner of Harvest Moon Designs, will speak about custom container gardens at 1 p.m. She and her husband, TPJC landscape instructor Saulsbury, have over 100 plants in containers in their own garden. “You might say it is an obsession,” Graham said.

At 2 p.m. Teresa Retzlaff of 46 North Farm, will talk about extending a growing season with raised beds and row covers. Retzlaff is a well known advocate for all things healthy, including a local food economy. Retzlaff will also participate in the Open Forum.

New this year is the addition of an Open Forum at 3 p.m. A panel will share their knowledge and answer questions from the audience. The panel includes “man-for-all-seasons,” traveler, former restaurant owner and current farmer Fred Johnson of Fred’s Homegrown Produce. Johnson says that “farming has humbled him as a human, an eater and a pompous chef but makes him whole in ways he has never before known.” Panelist Retzlaff is an organic farmer, well known and respected local food enthusiast, founding member of the North Coast Food Web and outreach coordinator for North Coast Land Conservancy. Completing the panel is Michael Bunch, a CCC science instructor and a master gardener who has taught botany for the Clatsop County Master Gardeners’ certification classes for many years.

The Clatsop County Master Gardeners have been actively working in and educating themselves and our community for 25 years. The first of what became their annual spring event was held at Astoria High School shortly after they formed; it was then moved to the Fairgrounds. “This is our biggest public outreach event,” Sandy Gipson, chair of this year’s “Spring into Gardening” event, said. “The master gardener mission is public education. We want people to know that we are here to answer their questions. Sometimes people assume that we know everything. We don’t. Far from it, but we are well trained to look stuff up, to find the correct answers, which are usually available through Oregon State’s OSU Extension Service or other such bona fide research. We are continually learning.”

The Clatsop County Master Gardeners, well rooted in our community for over two decades continue to grow and to give. “Spring into Gardening” with them at the Clatsop Fairgrounds and leave feeling more ready than ever to dig into your own gardens.