



June 2026 Newsletter

16650 State Route 536, Mount Vernon, WA 98273, in cooperation with the Northwest Washington Research & Extension Center (NWREC) of Washington State University



Shiro plum in bloom during the 2026 winter field day

Message from NW Fruit President Mike Harding

Dear Fellow Members,

I hope this letter finds you well and enjoying the season! I am writing with some exciting news about developments at the Fruit Garden. And I wanted to take a moment to express my gratitude to all of you.

Before I get into the specifics, I want to say something that might not get said enough: the strength of NW Fruit lies in its people. Our volunteer community is truly remarkable. So much of what makes this orchard thrive happens quietly, behind the scenes – work that may not always be visible or celebrated – but without, our progress would not be as complete.

I'd like to shine a light on a few of the many individuals whose contributions keep us running. Sue Williams, our membership coordinator and a former board member and officer, brings experience and dedication that is invaluable to our organization. Joe Flynn keeps our digital presence humming as our website specialist and IT tech support. Jim Jones, our new board secretary, also manages our Facebook page and provides additional IT support – we're

- cont'd page 12

Fruit Garden Report: Spring in the fruit garden:

By Sam Benowitz

The fruit garden is looking the best as it ever has.

Steve Gaber, a lead of our pruning team reports that for the first time in many years we have gotten the winter pruning done on the apple and pear trees. He is now leading an effort to prune the plums and peaches.

Jay Scott and his helpers have been using landscape chips to mulch our younger trees and doing a great job.

Rabbits have caused damage eating the base of many of our younger fruit trees and we have been putting tree guards on each tree to protect it.

Bill Slater has led the effort to have the needed fungicide sprays applied. As a result, our peaches have escaped leaf curl and the other trees are doing well.

We applied a spray and have now covered our gooseberries and currants with insect netting and are expecting a big crop this year.

Our new fig planting is thriving and the construction work to protect two of the trees to give them more heat in the late summer heat is progressing well.

Richard Fairfield has led the effort to build a fence and install small sheds in a new secure area to protect our horticultural supplies and equipment.

In an effort led by Beth Jones, North Hill Resources has donated a large dump truck load of landscape chips we will be using

to mulch our blueberry plants and new fruit trees.

We are working on putting up new signs for our updated 53 station website-based tour and we will unveil this new informative tour in June. The QR code-based stations will be making a lot of important new information about each of our more than 500 fruit varieties available to both our members and volunteers and the general public.

Steve Gaber led the effort to graft about 80 scions we had collected on to Apple, Pear and Plum rootstocks. Each tree is potted in a one-gallon pot. They will grow through the summer and be available for sale during our fall field day. This means that as members taste ripe fruit in October, they can also buy a tree of the varieties of fruit they like the most.

See our class offerings curated by Jake Jacobson. Members need to sign up for classes and can attend for free. Most of the classes have filled up and are a great success.

Two grafting classes taught by Larry Crum have enabled our members attending to graft fruit trees at their home gardens.

Hazel Sitner has led Thursday efforts to provide delicious treats for volunteers including many fruit-based pastries made from fruit for our garden.

Thank you to ALL of our volunteers who are making the garden successful and such a fun experience.

If you are reading this and not volunteering yet, we would love to have you join us.

Message from Garden Coordinator Jonathan Wolman

This is the first year for me as Garden Coordinator, attempting to fill just one of Tom Wake's large shoes, after his formal retirement in November.



Every week I am in awe of the great turnout by a diverse group of volunteers. The one thing we all have in common is the love of growing fruit and sharing this with the public by means of the 6 acres of fruit tree (and berry) displays, and the many learning opportunities for both the public and our members.

We have so many experienced volunteers weekly, in addition to many new volunteer faces with vigor, eager to help and learn as they go.

We have a beautifully attended fruit garden for the public and our members to enjoy, and new learning opportunities it seems every week, both planned and spontaneous. The energy and desire to help by so many of our members, willing to step forward with many projects and training, is heartening to see.

The list of members leading these projects and accolades I feel towards them are too numerous to try and list here, so I will just list a few of the projects improving our garden so far this year: improved and secure storage area, ahead-of-schedule pruning (and training of new pruners), newly grafted fruit trees with a gravity watering system, addition of so many new trees/varieties in the orchard from the nursery, new fig structure, the information posts/stations being added throughout the garden, and the greatly expanded use of mulch around the smaller trees.

Thank you to every Fruit Garden volunteer, whether you are able to help just a few times a year, or are out there every Thursday (and sometimes Saturdays also). I am sure the founders of the Fruit Garden who are no longer with us, would be so proud of our volunteers' continued year-round efforts and improvements to their original vision.

Respectfully, Jonathan Wolman

A big **Thank you!** to two businesses:

Two area businesses gave us a big boost by donating time and materials for our wood chip pile and hog fuel needs for mulching.

North Hill Resources gave us two large piles of hog fuel that we used for mulching the west rows of blueberries and other mulching needs. The Burlington business has been a supporter of our mulching efforts for a number of years.

John the Arborist, a professional tree service company out of Bellingham, was asked to bid on chipping our huge pile of branches we accumulated starting last year. Instead, John's crew of three hard-working experts chipped our pile pro bono.

Donations by local businesses are so important to the success of NW Fruit's efforts to maintain a productive and healthy fruit display garden. Again, thank you!



Scenes from the Fruit Garden

Hog fuel (foreground) and chip piles. Below, Beth Jones spreads hog fuel mulch into a layer of cardboard on one of the two west blueberry rows.



Ned Garvey and Bill Pierce work on the frame for the figs. The almost-completed frame is at right



Richard Fairfield and Austin Breckenridge construct the new enclosure.

Morna Leonard mows.



Bill Slater paints the apple tree trunks.

A row of mulched, newly planted pear trees.



Winter pruning efforts this year resulted in an orchard poised to bear fruit. (Scott Terrell photos)

You can help run the organization! We are always looking for energetic volunteers to serve on the board or work on committees that are essential for our continued success. Here is an opportunity:

NWFruit board member Sue Williams will leave her position in September. That leaves a vacancy on the board, but also a huge need for a NWFruit member to step up and manage our membership content management system, GlueUp. We could sure use a person who is tech savvy and wants to help us. This is a great opportunity for a person who might not be able to volunteer at the Fruit Garden but can help with our success in other ways. Feel free to contact a board member or reach out via email at info@nwfruit.org

Benefits of Membership

Western Washington Fruit Research Foundation (WWFRF), aka NW Fruit is a 501(c) non-profit organization created 35 years ago. Your annual membership dues support the foundation that maintains the 6-acre Fruit Garden, a collection of hundreds of varieties of fruit. It offers members and the community hands-on opportunities to learn about fruit growing in our region through advocacy, education and demonstration.

- Field Days and Workshops are free to members.
- Apple & Pear Sample-the-Harvest Day, the second Saturday in October, offers garden tours and lectures on growing and harvesting fruit. Members are offered samples of apples, pears, grapes, and sometimes cider, to take home. Crop quantities vary from year to year.
- Winter Field Day, second Saturday in March, offers tours, lectures on fruit growing, grafting demonstrations, plus sale of scionwood and rootstocks for grafting apple, pear and other fruit trees.
- Workshops are held in Spring and Summer on learning to prune apple, pear, plum, and cherry trees, as well as blueberry bushes, grape and kiwi vines.
- As a member you may volunteer to work in the Fruit Garden on designated days. Members receive instructions on maintaining the trees, safety, and growing conditions in the local climate. Membership is required for all volunteers to work in the garden.
- A picnic for volunteers is held in the summer. Members receive the NWFruit newsletter three times a year with information about the organization's activities and fruit growing.

Membership ensures your inclusion in occasional emails about Field Days, special events and workshops that occur through the year.

Membership helps NWF pay expenses for:

Events at NWREC including the auditorium, speakers & publicity, and garden maintenance, such as tools, equipment, new plantings and pest control.

Members may attend board meetings, join committees and participate in committee planning.

NW Fruit Membership Form

Please Check One Box Only:

New Member:

Change in email or membership type:

Please print clearly so other may enter data correctly:

Today's Date: _____

Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Second Family Name: _____

Second Email Address _____

Phone: _____

Please check applicable lines to designate type of membership

_____ \$30 for Annual **Individual** Member (1 person only)

_____ \$50 for Annual **Family** Membership (couple or with minor children)

_____ \$200 for Annual **Commercial** (FULL) Membership includes three individuals, business name on our website + link from our website to the commercial members' website

\$ _____ **Please consider a Donation** of any amount to support the efforts of NW Fruit.

Make your check payable to and mail your completed form with payment to:

NW Fruit
P.O. Box 864
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

Once your payment is processed, we will add your membership details to GlueUp, our membership management platform. You will receive an acknowledgement from them via email.

Can you Volunteer to help Us?

_____ I would like to volunteer in the Fruit Display Garden (Usually Thursdays 9am-12 noon and some Saturdays as announced). We will add you to an email list to received weekly garden updates and reminders of workday activities.

_____ I would like to volunteer my time in administrative work from home computer or by phone.

Coming up:

June 27, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.: **Master Gardeners' Open House**, at the Discovery Garden at NWREC, 16650 State Rt 536. Free admission to all.

www.skagitmg.org/home/events/openhouse

Thursdays 9 a.m. to noon workdays: Fun and educational volunteer workdays every week. Learn about all that's going on, plus new ideas being proposed. Saturday workdays, for willing volunteers who can't come on Thursdays are scheduled.

For more information contact Garden Coordinator Jonathan Wolman info@NWfruit.org

Several NWFruit Saturday classes are offered this summer, sometimes with fruit sampling, depending on the season (See below). Free to Members.

Annual Volunteers' Picnic in August (will be announced) Volunteers are encouraged to attend our annual Potluck on Thursday, August ?? at noon, following the 9 a.m. to noon work session at the Fruit Garden. Beverages and a main dish with meat and vegetarian choices will be provided. If you can, bring a potluck dish.

Apple and Pear Sample the Harvest Day: Second Saturday in October.

This event centers around the harvest with educational presentations on related garden techniques and information. Members are allowed to keep a portion of the harvested fruit. Details in September Newsletter.

Cider Making - on one or two Thursdays after Apple and Pear Day in the fall.

December Celebration with cookies and end-of-season farewells. Program may include informative classes to answer home gardeners' questions. Free to Members.

Winter Field Day: 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., date TBD in March 2027 at NWREC, 16650 State Route 536. Free admission with up-to-date membership. Annual Membership Meeting – same day as the Winter Field Day to elect new board members.

Saturday classes:

Classes will be held on *Saturday mornings*, from 9:30 to 11:30, in our Fruit Garden, located at 16650 State Route 536, Mount Vernon, WA. We have a total of 13 *Saturday classes* planned for 2026, and *all classes are free* with current membership. Each class has a separate registration, which must be completed at least 7 days in advance of the class date for our planning purposes. Note that class size is restricted. If the class is full, contact Jake to go on a wait list. Use this link [NW Fruit Saturday Classes](#) to register. To renew or become a member of NW Fruit use this link [Become a Member](#).

Saturday classes continued:

Classes meet in the Pavilion located in the Master Gardener area at 9:30 a.m.. If you have questions about any of the classes, contact [Jake Jacobson](#).

Registration opens May 10th for these classes

July 11- Summer Pruning with Steve Gaber – This class, a repeat of the summer pruning class offered in June, is a more in-depth exploration into summer pruning methods for fruit trees. Despite being considered “off season pruning”, summer pruning has its place in the home orchard. It may be necessary to repair damaged tree limbs, and summer pruning is also intended to encourage huskier growth in vigorously vegetative trees, discouraging long, weak, leggy growth. This also helps manage the tree’s overall size. *Class size is limited to 15 members.*

August 22 - Bud Grafting Class with Larry Crum and Sam Benowitz– Bud Grafting, also known as chip budding or T-budding, is a type of grafting where a single bud is used as the scion, and is a method used to propagate fruit trees, particularly in late summer or early fall, before the trees go dormant. We will show how to select healthy, plump buds from the current year’s growth, how to prepare the scion and rootstock, insert the scion and secure the graft along with follow-up tips. *Class size is limited to 20 members.*

September 12- An Eating and Learning Tour of the Fruit Garden with Sam Benowitz. We will spend time discussing and tasting many heirloom apple varieties. As we walk the garden, we will also discuss the many other types of fruit we can grow in Puget Sound and how to successfully grow each in your home garden. *Class size is limited to 25 members.*

2026 Winter Field Day Report

By 9 a.m. March 14, a throng of fruit tree growing enthusiasts had lined up at the NW Fruit registration table at the Washington State University Northwest Research and Extension Center in Mount Vernon, Washington.

The 2026 Winter Field Day was blessed not only by a robust crowd, but by a rare late-winter, sun-filled day. Though the temperatures stayed in the 40s, the clear skies helped NW Fruit celebrate another event that featured talks on grafting and rootstocks, choosing scionwood, starting a home orchard and understanding fruit tree pruning, as well as a pruning demonstration by Gary Moulton and a tour of the organization’s 6-acre Fruit Garden.

People who purchased scionwood and roostocks had the option of having a team of volunteers graft their preferred variety onto the appropriate rootstock and picking up the tree later so they could attend the presentations in Sakuma Auditorium.

Sam Benowitz, co-chair of the Fruit Garden committee, said the grafting talk – selecting the appropriate rootstock to pair with a desired variety of apple, pear or stone fruit – was a big success.

Lynette Machinski was one of the volunteers who helped at the grafting table. Machinski said she enjoyed talking with members who are not regulars at the Thursday work group.

Jonathan Wolman, who helps organize the Thursday work group, said it was a great turnout and was able to greet new members. He said the event was well organized, especially the rootstock and scionwood sales tables.

NWFruit member Jennifer Fairfield said she appreciated Moulton’s advice for pruning fruit trees that bear heavy every other year.

– **Scott Terrell**

From Sue Williams: We had 20 new members including 8 new family memberships, 11 One Day Guests, 55 existing members.

Report from PayPal: 77 Transactions for \$2843. Total sales \$2771.57 net sales (less 1.999% fee).

According to GlueUp, we have 286 members!

Frames from Winter Field Day:



Gary Moulton demonstrates winter pruning on a Karmijn de Sonnaville apple tree.

See more next page:



Clockwise from top left: Scoinwood sales, heritage tree search, greetings, Les Price, Jacky King, Gary Moulton, Bill Davis holds court, grafting table, root stock sales. (Scott Terrell photos)

President's message cont'd

lucky to have him. Jake Jacobson coordinates and schedules our Saturday classes with an impressive level of organization and attention to detail that makes everything run more smoothly than most of us realize. Jonathan Wolman has stepped in as our new fruit garden manager and is already making his mark. And Peter Palmer – a true multi-skilled utility player – seems to show up wherever he's needed most.

I want to be clear: this list barely scratches the surface. There are so many others – and you know who you are – who give their time, skills, and energy to NW Fruit in ways both large and small. Every one of those contributions matters, and I am sorry I cannot name you all here. Please know that your work does not go unnoticed, even when it goes unannounced.

I'd like to highlight two exciting developments: We have established a dedicated section in our tree nursery for grafted trees, which we plan to make available for sale this coming fall or next spring – a wonderful step forward for NW Fruit. And, we have a new fenced-in storage area for equipment and seasonal items.

A special thank you goes to member Steve Gaber, who donated his time, expertise, and approximately \$650 worth of equipment to install a gravity-fed watering system for those nursery plants. Steve's generosity is a perfect example of the spirit that defines this membership.

Equally appreciated is the generosity of Richard Fairfield, who donated his time, planning skills, new storage sheds and fencing to house our equipment out of sight, greatly improving the appearance of the southeast corner of our acreage.

Finally, I'm thrilled to report that our orchard management has hit a real new stride this year. We are well ahead of our typical maintenance schedule for the season — a direct reflection of the hard work so many of you have put in. That includes the work of our many new volunteers who have begun to appear regularly in the past six months. Suddenly, it seems that we are not short of hands, and it's easier to finish projects in one go. Please give yourselves a well-deserved pat on the back!

It is an exciting time for NW Fruit, and it is because of this community — every volunteer, every donor, every person who shows up and pitches in – that we continue to grow. Thank you, sincerely, for everything you do.

Warmly,
Michael Harding
President, Board of Directors
NW Fruit