



September 2026 Newsletter



Members of the summer pruning crew work on a pear tree Aug. 20.

NW Fruit, (aka Western Washington Fruit Research Foundation)

in cooperation with

Washington State University, Northwest Washington Research and Extension Center

16650 State Route 536, Mount Vernon, WA 98273

presents

Apple & Pear Sample the Harvest Day

Saturday October 10, 2026, 9:45 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Registration begins at 9:15 a.m.

Learn from experts about the many ways to enjoy the harvest and take home some fruit. A fruit sampling station will be set up so you may taste different varieties of apples and pears. Bring your lunch. Rain or shine – dress for the weather.

This event is free to current NWF Members - Become a member by purchasing a \$30 yearly membership, \$50 for family membership, or a \$20 one-day pass. We encourage updating your membership or purchasing a pass in advance by going to our website at nwfruit.org. This will help keep the registration lines short at Apple and Pear Day.



Karmijn de Sonnaville apple

Apple and Pear Harvesting

Registration at North Entrance – Please enter at the north end after you park. Guided fruit picking will continue throughout the event.

Introduction, 9:45 a.m. Fruit Picking starts afterwards – Learn when certain kinds of fruit are ready to pick and how to pick an apple or pear without damaging the tree. At this Introduction you will be given a couple of bags per person to fill with fruit to take home. Volunteers will orient you to the Inner Oval of mature heirloom apple trees, and beyond for fruit varieties you can learn about and harvest.

Take the Self-guided Fruit Garden tour

The Fruit Garden has 53 stations marked by signs with information and a QR code. Additionally, you will find trees also marked with a QR code. Use your phone camera to read about each of these trees as you pick fruit.

Schedule of Activities

Fruit Tasting Tables, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. - We will cut slices of dozens of delicious varieties of apples and pears growing in the orchard for you to taste. Experts will be at the table to tell you about each variety. After tasting these varieties, you will know which of the orchard trees to pick fruit from.

Apple & Pear Tasting Class, 11 a.m. - Jacky King has chosen fruit varieties along the flavor profile spectrum of sweet, tart and bitter flavors. By tasting them, you will learn to identify which combinations of flavors you like.

Heritage Varieties Class, Noon in Pavilion - Sam Benowitz will introduce our new collection of 40 endangered apple varieties that are unique to our region and explain how you can be involved in the project. (See the article in this newsletter)

Larry Crum will talk about the history of his favorite heritage apple tree varieties and then take you out to our inner oval to see and taste the fruit of these beautiful, mature trees.

Caring for your apple and pear trees, 1 p.m. - Gary Moulton will discuss techniques to successfully care for your trees. Jacky King will demonstrate how to tell when to pick apples and pears, including the iodine test, and Gary will demonstrate use of the pressure tester.

Purchase an apple tree: We have some trees for sale in gallon pots of some of the varieties you will be tasting. Cost \$25 each, cash or check accepted.

Fruit Garden Report: *The Fruit Garden in Summer*

By Sam Benowitz

The fruit garden has both an increased number of volunteers and has many volunteers stepping forward to lead in accomplishing many important tasks.

Jonathan Wolman is doing a wonderful job of coordinating the activities in his weekly email to volunteers, laying out the work to be done, so the appropriate number of volunteers work each week on the jobs of highest priority. He also includes photos of the work people have done the previous week which piques the interest of the volunteers.

Here are a few of the accomplishments in the garden:

Richard Fairfield, with the help of Peter Palmer and others, have completed the work of building a tidy 20 by 40 foot chain-link fenced and locking secured area that includes putting together three new locking sheds. This meets WSU's desire for a good-looking storage area and protects our equipment and supplies. It was completed within our approved budget.

Jonathan has purchased three 6-foot and three 8-foot orchard ladders, so we now have enough ladders for all the volunteers to prune and thin more efficiently and safely.

Steve Gaber has led the instruction and work of timely fruit thinning followed by summer pruning. This will be the first time our volunteers will get done with almost all our trees within the optimum window of time, resulting in larger, higher quality fruit.

Jay Scott is leading the effort to pick up all the prunings and thinned fruit and taking it to a pile for chipping or to a compost pile. He also took charge of netting the cherries.

Beth Jones has led getting the blueberries netted and pruned.

The topworking done by Larry Crum has added dozens of the best cultivars to our garden, including top working 30 new special Northwest apple cultivars curated by Lori Brakken. Lori has come by, showing Steve and Sam the Lorette pruning system.

From Larry Hedgepath's idea, small signs are being placed on trees taken on by a volunteer so that others don't prune them.

Mike Harding has installed the new signs in the garden for our upgraded garden tour. This completes some 18 months of work by many on the project.

The figs at Ned Garvey's direction are growing very well especially those within the structure built by Bill Pierce.

Bill Slater is working with Doug at WSU to get our sprays on in a timely manner.

The nursery is doing well and about 20 rootstocks are prepared for August budding. The trees have been budded.

There are some problems that need better solutions:

Scott Terrell discovered cherry fruit fly larvae in our cherries for the first time, and we need to figure out how to deal with this before it ruins our cherries.

Black Knot is endangering our plums and Steve Gaber is trying to deal with it, but it is spreading in the orchard. An experiment has been started cutting out the black knot and treating the wound by several methods to observe which will work best.



Summer pruning crew getting the job done

By Scott Terrell

After a late winter and spring season of structural pruning and late-spring fruit thinning, volunteers in the orchard start what is one of the key tasks in the Fruit Garden: summer pruning. For apple and pear trees, summer pruning is essential.

While winter pruning spurs vigor as the tree unleashes nutrients stored over the dormant season, summer pruning reduces the vigor helping to control growth.

Summer pruning clears out excess growth, letting light into the interior of the tree, promoting fruit ripening as well as allowing air to circulate.

Fruit Garden volunteer Steve Gaber said this season's goal is to ensure the entire orchard is summer pruned in one season and a pruning schedule is established.

Gaber has recruited a core group of 10-15 volunteers to cycle through during the Thursday workdays. He said they have stepped up to the challenge, developing into a "real qualified pruning team." They are enthusiastic, Gaber said, asking lots of good questions.

"We've got around eight people that keep coming back," Gaber said.



Steve Graber speaks to some of the summer pruning crew in August

Pruning is a relatively new thing to Gaber. He volunteered to do renovation pruning with the city of Bellingham, he said. Three years ago, he started at the Fruit Garden, becoming familiar with the trees in the orchard and the kinds of pruning techniques needed to help with their upkeep.

Summer pruning starts in July and continues through August. Cutting new shoots then promotes fruit bud growth rather than new growth. The Raintree Nursery website states that summer pruning can be preferable over winter pruning to lessen the chance of promoting disease that can infest trees, thanks to our mild winters and wet, early spring weather.

The more volunteers learn the ins and outs of pruning, the more the Fruit Garden will benefit.

“Learn here, learn at home, teach us,” Gaber said. “It’s really satisfying.”



Tasting the blues

Beth Jones oversees the blueberry station in the Fruit Garden. On July 23, volunteers tasted different varieties of blueberries.

From Beth: The fruit load is very good this year and we are in the middle of the season with most of the plant varieties having ripe berries now. I picked fruit from Berkeley, Bluejay, Bluejay, Bounty, Jersey, Legacy, Nelson, Olympia, Patriot, Reveille, Sampson, Sierra, Spartan and Sunrise for people to sample.

Overall, people liked Bluejay the best. Olympia and Toro were favorites as well. A couple of people preferred Sunrise and Patriot. Bounty was found to be bland. The consensus seemed to be people preferred berries with a bit more tartness and berry flavor to the sweeter berry varieties.



Cheryl Jensen shared these recipes that feature blueberries:

Double-Good Blueberry Pie

Baked 8 or 9 inch pie shell

3/4 c sugar

3 tablespoons cornstarch

1/8 teaspoon salt

1/4 cup water

4 cups blueberries

1 tablespoon butter

1 tablespoon lemon juice

Whipped cream or vanilla ice cream

Combine sugar, cornstarch, and salt in saucepan. Add water and 2 cups blueberries. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until mixture comes to a boil and is thickened and clear. (Mixture will be quite thick.)

Remove from heat and stir in butter and lemon juice. Cool.

Place remaining 2 cups raw blueberries in pie shell. Top with cooked berry mixture. Chill. Serve as is or garnished with whipped cream. Also good with vanilla ice cream.

Lemon-Blueberry Pie— with personal adaptations

Pastry for two crust pie

4 cups frozen blueberries or 2 x 10 ounce packages (thawed)

Scant 1 cup sugar

2 tablespoons quick tapioca

3 tablespoons cornstarch

1 tablespoon grated lemon peel

1/8 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons butter

Combine berries, sugar, tapioca, cornstarch, lemon peel, and salt. Place in pastry-lined 9-

inch pie pan. Dot with butter. Apply top crust, flute edges, cut vents.

Bake at 425 degrees 40 - 50 minutes, or until crust is lightly browned and juice bubbles through steam vents.

The Most Scrumptious, Never Fail Pie Crust

3 cups flour

1 1/3 cups Crisco

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon sugar for sweet pies (no sugar for savory pies)

1 egg

1 tablespoon raspberry vinegar for sweet pies (white vinegar for savory pies)

5 tablespoons ice-cold water

Combine flour, Crisco, salt, and sugar if using. Cut together until mixture looks like rough cornmeal. Beat together the egg, vinegar, and cold water. Add egg mixture to flour mixture a little at a time and stir until all is moistened. Refrigerate for about 1 hour. Makes a large double crust.

Aronia berry syrup

This recipe is from One Green World Nursery.

This Aronia Berry Syrup can be poured over any dessert giving you an antioxidant boost with a delightful flavor! We used ours to top off ice cream, lemon bread, mixed it with some lemonade, and ate it by the spoon full!

Ingredients:

- 2 cups fresh or frozen Aronia berries
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- Lemon zest to taste

Making the Syrup:

1. Pour Aronia berries and water into a saucepan
2. Bring to a simmer and cook for 10-12 minutes or until berries are soft, stirring periodically

3. Use a spoon or fork to mash the berries to get as much juice as you can
 4. Strain the juice from the berry pulp with a sieve or cheese cloth
 5. Pour juice back into your saucepan, then add lemon juice and sugar and simmer for 10+ minutes until it reaches your preferred consistency
 6. Allow the syrup to cool and serve!
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NWFruit volunteers celebrated their accomplishments during a picnic Aug. 20. Here are a few images from that day. Above, tables full of potluck items had something for everyone. Below left, Sam Benowitz gives a shoutout to the folks who help in the garden. Right, a sampling of figs.



2026 DNA samples for the Fruit Garden

By Sam Benowitz

After discussion with Lori Brakken and Larry Crum, following are the NW Heritage apples and others that we will send leaf samples to WSU. We will be taking the leaf samples in early September. It will take about four months to get the results.

Why do DNA samples?

Since we are a fruit garden, open to the public, it is important that our sign on each tree, identifying that tree be as accurate as possible. Because of accessible DNA testing that is now possible. That is why we send in the samples. Although each sample is reasonably priced we want to test many of our varieties for accuracy.

How you can help

If you would like to financially help us by donating to our DNA testing fund, please send a check to NW Fruit at the following address. In addition to funding, we need volunteers who would like to work on this project both with clerical work, and to learn how to help care for the trees in the Fruit Garden.

Anyone can send in their own samples

For a fee of \$50 per sample, anyone can send in a leaf sample to try to get the variety of an apple tree identified. So, you can help us with our samples or send in your own samples. Go to the website, WSU My Fruit Tree Project, to read all about the process and then click on: Contact us to get your tree(s) sample tested.

Read all about our NW Heritage Apple Collection

Go to our NWfruit.org website and go to Take our Fruit Garden tour and click on station #30. You can read all about our collection of Northwest Heritage apples. We are preserving many endangered varieties only found in our region.

Lori Brakken is an expert in identifying apple varieties by careful and trained inspection and then using old catalogs and other information to make an educated guess on the correct names of the varieties she has given us. The DNA leaf sample results can then be compared to Lori's identifications. Lori has received most of the listed scion from other people with the names attached. She has identified some but not most of these. The DNA sampling will go a long way in confirming correct identification. When we get results back, we will change the names of some of our varieties.

What do the DNA results tell us?

We know this explanation is confusing. Go to WSU My Fruit Tree Project page for a more complete explanation. As you read the heritage varieties listed below, the notation, **Not Listed**, means WSU does not have that variety in their database.

The notation, **Listed**, are the varieties that are in the WSU data base. That means someone besides Lori has sent in a sample. For some of these listed varieties, the parents of the variety have been identified and the leaf sample we send in means the variety name can be confirmed. However, for others, although they have tested a variety with that name, they don't have enough evidence to confirm the correct name of the heritage variety or seedling.

With some varieties that are already identified in the WSU data base, the DNA results will either

prove or disprove that Lori's varieties are correctly named. With other varieties not in the database, the information from the samples we send in will provide a new baseline to cross check against other samples that come into the WSU database from others in the future.

Below, are the varieties we propose to test in September:

Variety	WSU database status
Buckley Giant	Listed
Olympia	Not Listed
Pacific Pride	Not Listed
Wynooche	Not Listed
Almota	Not Listed
Norton's Seedling	Not Listed
Charles Ross	Listed
Summer Pear apple	Not Listed
Pink Cloud	Not Listed
Baxter	Not Listed
Yellow Bellflower inner oval	Listed
Multnomah	Not Listed
Leathercoat inner oval	Not listed
Sweet Alice	Not Listed

Battling black knot

By Scott Terrell

Black knot is a fungal disease that affects plum trees and other Prunus trees. It poses a serious threat to the plum trees in the Fruit Garden.

Black knot appears in the woody part of the tree branches and by late summer appears as a large gall.



According to the University of Minnesota Extension, some Prunus trees can tolerate the disease. But in the orchard, volunteers are busy hunting down and cutting branches that are affected. Some of the large plum trees in the outer oval have been affected, such as the Imperial Epineuse and Methley.

Plum trees along the west fence have black knot. The pluerry trees, a combination of Japanese plum and sweet cherry, have also been hit with the disease.

The disease often appears in multiple areas of the tree canopy. When on large branches or the tree trunk, the wood may split, letting wood-decaying fungi into the tree.

The UM extension says black knot is caused by the fungus, *Apiosporina morbosa*. The fungus overwinters in the galls on the tree branches, releasing spores during wet periods in the spring. Young shoots or branches with wounds are then infected. The fungus grows inside the branch, releasing chemicals that cause the tree to form large, extra plant cells that result in the large woody galls. Two years after infection, the galls are hard and black, and they release their spores in spring. If the branches become girdled, the leaves beyond the gall wilt and die. The disease can kill the entire tree.

Aside from trying to cut the galls out, replacement trees have been started in the nursery or have been planted out in the orchard.

Fruit Garden Committee co-chair Sam Benowitz said plum trees with serious infestation could be cut back in the hopes that new shoots develop.

Some work is being done to try to save the large Methley plum in the outer oval. Some areas of black knot have been cut out on the large main branches. A couple were treated with a bleach solution. Infected branches in the upper canopy are in the process of being cleared out.

The goal is to stop the disease from spreading further and allow the tree to recover its vigor.



Looking ahead

Volunteers needed:

Membership CMS - As previously mentioned, NWFruit board member Sue Williams will leave her position in September. Sue worked many hours to help streamline the way we process and monitor as well as communicate with our members and contacts. We need a NWFruit member to step up and help manage our membership content management system. The system we are now using, GlueUp, might be replaced. A committee is looking into a couple of alternatives that could fit our needs and be easier to use. Feel free to contact a board member or reach out via email at info@nwfruit.org.

Heritage apple historian, by Sam Benowitz.

The successful work of Lori Brakken has provided our garden a wonderful service in finding and telling the story of each of our collection of unique historical regional varieties. Larry Crum has done a great job in grafting and topworking these new trees on wires like the wires that support our existing espaliers elsewhere in the garden. These trees are growing 3 feet apart on dwarf rootstocks. Within two years many have grown already to the top wire.

By having a public fruit garden in the Skagit Valley and featuring heritage fruit varieties, we are trying to tell their stories and have taken on the job of becoming local amateur historians. We are telling the story of our area's past to our present generation through the lens of our heritage fruit trees.

We need volunteer amateur historians to help tell these ongoing stories. Lori Brakken and Larry Crum and I need the help of dedicated volunteers who think keeping this history alive is important.

We also need a volunteer who knows how or wants to make a commitment to learn from our existing pruning team how to prune and train these trees optimally in their limited space so they both produce a few apples regularly and stay within their space.

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 NW Fruit 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.
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Coming up:

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 NW Fruit Saturday classes are offered this summer and fall, sometimes with fruit sampling, depending on the season (See below). Free to Members.

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. See details on page 1.

Cider Making – the Thursday 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 Sept. 1 for these classes

September 12- An Eating and Learning Tour of the Fruit Garden with Sam Benowitz. Class starts at 9:30am. We are excited to take you on an introductory tour of our 53 different fruit collections at the fruit garden. Come with your specific interests and questions as we stroll through the fruit garden and sample the ripe fruit. Bring your phone so you can access the QR code stations we've placed throughout the garden to find out even more information. We will spend time discussing and tasting our heirloom apple varieties. We will also discuss other types of fruit we can grow in Puget Sound and how to successfully grow each in your home garden. We suggest you go to our website nwfruit.org and click on **The Fruit Garden Tour** to get an advance preview of what we will share. **Class size is limited to 60 members.**

October 24 – Cider Making 101 with Dave Klawer. Class starts at 9:30am. Learn the fundamentals of cider fermentation in this hands-on course. You'll be guided step by step through fruit selection, milling, fermentation, and aging while building a broader understanding of cider making. Each participant will take home one gallon of cider in progress. Take-home materials cost is **\$25**, payable by cash or check on the day of class. **Dave Klawer** is an acclaimed cidemaker, orchardist, and educator who serves as an instructor for professional educational programs like the **Cider Institute of North America's** curriculum. Dave is the owner of Alma Cider and Bitters & Sharps Orchard in Mount Vernon, WA. He is also a **Certified Pommelier™** who teaches foundational and advanced technical skills to growers and producers nationwide. **Class size is limited to 15 members.**

November 7 - Orchard Hand Tool Maintenance and Care with Don Ham (Master Gardener). Class starts at 9:30am. Don will show you ways to clean, sharpen and maintain your hand tools so they will be ready for next spring's work. Bring your loppers and hand pruners. Bring your grafting knife. Bring your hand saws. He'll also demonstrate how he sharpens shovels and hoes, along with other common hand tools used in the garden. **Class size is limited to 15 members.**

Classes are being scheduled for next year, including Winter pruning, Espalier pruning (dormant), Blueberry management, Whip grafting, Top working. Details to come.

NW Fruit Membership Form

Please Check One Box Only:

New Member: ☐

Renewing Member: ☐

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.



The finishing touches are being done in the new enclosure area west of the storage sheds.



New signs with QR codes are installed in the Fruit Garden's walking tour. There are 53 stations. Work is being planned to create an online tour that will include photos and videos, which will allow people to view the stations and learn about the Fruit Garden remotely.

