

Chapter 59.12 RCW
FORCIBLE ENTRY AND FORCIBLE AND UNLAWFUL DETAINER

Sections

59.12.010	Forcible entry defined.
59.12.020	Forcible detainer defined.
59.12.030	Unlawful detainer defined.
59.12.032	Unlawful detainer action—Compliance with RCW 61.24.040 and 61.24.060.
59.12.035	Holding over on agricultural land, effect of.
59.12.040	Service of notice—Proof of service.
59.12.050	Jurisdiction of proceedings.
59.12.060	Parties defendant.
59.12.070	Complaint—Summons.
59.12.080	Summons—Contents—Service.
59.12.085	Alternative service of summons—Limitation on jurisdiction.
59.12.090	Writ of restitution—Bond.
59.12.100	Service of writ—Bond to stay writ.
59.12.110	Modification of bond.
59.12.120	Judgment by default.
59.12.121	Pleading by defendant.
59.12.130	Jury—Actions given preference.
59.12.140	Proof in forcible entry and detainer.
59.12.150	Amendment to conform to proof.
59.12.160	Amendments.
59.12.170	Judgment—Execution.
59.12.180	Rules of practice.
59.12.190	Relief against forfeiture.
59.12.200	Appellate review—Stay bond.
59.12.210	Effect of stay bond.
59.12.220	Writ of restitution suspended pending appeal.
59.12.230	Forcible entry and detainer—Penalty.

Joint tenancies: Chapter 64.28 RCW.

Tenant's violation of duty under landlord-tenant act grounds for unlawful detainer action: RCW 59.18.180.

RCW 59.12.010 Forcible entry defined. Every person is guilty of a forcible entry who either—(1) By breaking open windows, doors or other parts of a house, or by fraud, intimidation or stealth, or by any kind of violence or circumstance of terror, enters upon or into any real property; or—(2) Who, after entering peaceably upon real property, turns out by force, threats or menacing conduct the party in actual possession. [1891 c 96 s 1; RRS s 810. Prior: 1890 p 73 s 1.]

RCW 59.12.020 Forcible detainer defined. Every person is guilty of a forcible detainer who either—(1) By force, or by menaces and threats of violence, unlawfully holds and keeps the possession of any real property, whether the same was acquired peaceably or otherwise; or—(2) Who in the nighttime, or during the absence of the occupant of any real property, enters thereon, and who, after demand made for the

surrender thereof, refuses for the period of three days to surrender the same to such former occupant. The occupant of real property within the meaning of this subdivision is one who for the five days next preceding such unlawful entry was in the peaceable and undisturbed possession of such real property. [1891 c 96 s 2; RRS s 811. Prior: 1890 p 73 s 2.]

RCW 59.12.030 Unlawful detainer defined. Except as limited under RCW 59.18.650 relating to tenancies under chapter 59.18 RCW, a tenant of real property for a term less than life is liable for unlawful detainer either:

(1) When he or she holds over or continues in possession, in person or by subtenant, of the property or any part thereof after the expiration of the term for which it is let to him or her. When real property is leased for a specified term or period by express or implied contract, whether written or oral, the tenancy shall end without notice at the expiration of the specified term or period;

(2) When he or she, having leased property for an indefinite time with monthly or other periodic rent reserved, continues in possession thereof, in person or by subtenant, after the end of any such month or period, when the landlord, more than 20 days prior to the end of such month or period, has served notice (in manner in RCW 59.12.040 provided) requiring him or her to quit the premises at the expiration of such month or period;

(3) When he or she continues in possession in person or by subtenant after a default in the payment of rent, and after notice in writing requiring in the alternative the payment of the rent or the surrender of the detained premises, served (in manner in RCW 59.12.040 provided) on behalf of the person entitled to the rent upon the person owing it, has remained uncomplied with for the period of three days after service, or for the period of 14 days after service for tenancies under chapter 59.18 RCW. The notice may be served at any time after the rent becomes due. For the purposes of this subsection and as applied to tenancies under chapter 59.18 RCW, "rent" has the same meaning as defined in RCW 59.18.030;

(4) When he or she continues in possession in person or by subtenant after a neglect or failure to keep or perform any condition or covenant of the lease or agreement under which the property is held, including any covenant not to assign or sublet, other than one for the payment of rent, and after notice in writing requiring in the alternative the performance of such condition or covenant or the surrender of the property, served (in manner in RCW 59.12.040 provided) upon him or her, and if there is a subtenant in actual possession of the premises, also upon such subtenant, shall remain uncomplied with for 10 days after service thereof. Within 10 days after the service of such notice the tenant, or any subtenant in actual occupation of the premises, or any mortgagee of the term, or other person interested in its continuance, may perform such condition or covenant and thereby save the lease from such forfeiture. For the purposes of this subsection and as applied to tenancies under chapter 59.18 RCW, "rent" has the same meaning as defined in RCW 59.18.030;

(5) When he or she commits or permits waste upon the demised premises, or when he or she sets up or carries on thereon any unlawful business, or when he or she erects, suffers, permits, or maintains on or about the premises any nuisance, and remains in possession after

the service (in manner in RCW 59.12.040 provided) upon him or her of three days' notice to quit;

(6) A person who, without the permission of the owner and without having color of title thereto, enters upon land of another and who fails or refuses to remove therefrom after three days' notice, in writing and served upon him or her in the manner provided in RCW 59.12.040. Such person may also be subject to the criminal provisions of chapter 9A.52 RCW; or

(7) When he or she commits or permits any gang-related activity at the premises as prohibited by RCW 59.18.130. [2021 c 212 s 6; 2019 c 356 s 2; 1998 c 276 s 6; 1983 c 264 s 1; 1953 c 106 s 1. Prior: 1905 c 86 s 1; 1891 c 96 s 3; 1890 p 73 s 3; RRS s 812.]

Effective date—2021 c 212: See note following RCW 59.18.030.

Intent—2019 c 356: "It is declared to be the public policy of the state and a recognized governmental function to assist residents who are experiencing a temporary crisis in retaining stable housing, and by so doing to contribute to the general welfare. Decent housing for the people of Washington state is a most important public concern. An escalation of rents and scarcity of housing supply have made it difficult for many Washingtonians to obtain stable housing, especially if they lose housing after experiencing an extraordinary life event that temporarily leaves them without resources and income. It is the long-standing practice of the state to make rental assistance available in many such urgent situations, and it is the intent of the legislature to provide a payment on the tenant's behalf to the landlord in certain eviction proceedings to give the tenant additional time to access resources that allow the tenants to stay in their home." [2019 c 356 s 1.]

End of month to month tenancy: RCW 59.04.020, 59.18.200.

Unlawful detainer defined: RCW 59.16.010.

RCW 59.12.032 Unlawful detainer action—Compliance with RCW 61.24.040 and 61.24.060. An unlawful detainer action, commenced as a result of a trustee's sale under chapter 61.24 RCW, must comply with the requirements of RCW 61.24.040 and 61.24.060. [2009 c 292 s 11.]

RCW 59.12.035 Holding over on agricultural land, effect of. In all cases of tenancy upon agricultural lands, where the tenant has held over and retained possession for more than sixty days after the expiration of his or her term without any demand or notice to quit by his or her landlord or the successor in estate of his or her landlord, if any there be, he or she shall be deemed to be holding by permission of his or her landlord or the successor in estate of his or her landlord, if any there be, and shall be entitled to hold under the terms of the lease for another full year, and shall not be guilty of an unlawful detainer during said year, and such holding over for the period aforesaid shall be taken and construed as a consent on the part of a tenant to hold for another year. [2010 c 8 s 19006; 1891 c 96 s 4; RRS s 813. Formerly RCW 59.04.060.]

RCW 59.12.040 Service of notice—Proof of service. Any notice provided for in this chapter shall be served either (1) by delivering a copy personally to the person entitled thereto; or (2) if he or she be absent from the premises unlawfully held, by leaving there a copy, with some person of suitable age and discretion, and sending a copy by certified mail, posted from within Washington state, to the last known address of the person entitled thereto; or (3) if the person to be notified be a tenant, or an unlawful holder of premises, and his or her place of residence is not known, or if a person of suitable age and discretion there cannot be found then by affixing a copy of the notice in a conspicuous place on the premises unlawfully held, and also delivering a copy to a person there residing, if such a person can be found, and also sending a copy through the mail addressed to the tenant, or unlawful occupant, at the place where the premises unlawfully held are situated. Service upon a subtenant may be made in the same manner: PROVIDED, That in cases where the tenant or unlawful occupant, shall be conducting a hotel, inn, lodging house, boarding house, or shall be renting rooms while still retaining control of the premises as a whole, that the guests, lodgers, boarders, or persons renting such rooms shall not be considered as subtenants within the meaning of this chapter, but all such persons may be served by affixing a copy of the notice to be served in two conspicuous places upon the premises unlawfully held; and such persons shall not be necessary parties defendant in an action to recover possession of said premises. Service of any notice provided for in this chapter may be had upon a corporation by delivering a copy thereof to any officer, agent, or person having charge of the business of such corporation, at the premises unlawfully held, and in case no such officer, agent, or person can be found upon such premises, then service may be had by affixing a copy of such notice in a conspicuous place upon said premises and by sending a copy through the mail addressed to such corporation at the place where said premises are situated. Proof of any service under this section may be made by the affidavit of the person making the same in like manner and with like effect as the proof of service of summons in civil actions. When a copy of notice is sent through the mail, as provided in this section, service shall be deemed complete when such copy is deposited in the United States mail postage prepaid, by certified mail, posted from within Washington state, directed to the last known address of the person entitled thereto: PROVIDED, HOWEVER, That when service is made by mail five additional days shall be allowed before the commencement of an action based upon such notice. A termination notice served pursuant to this section shall specify in the notice the date by which the person to whom the notice is sent must vacate or, if applicable, comply. [2025 c 44 s 1; 2021 c 115 s 14; 2010 c 8 s 19007; 1983 c 264 s 2; 1911 c 26 s 1; 1905 c 86 s 2; 1891 c 96 s 5; RRS s 814. Prior: 1890 p 75 s 4.]

Finding—Intent—Application—Effective date—2021 c 115: See notes following RCW 59.18.620.

RCW 59.12.050 Jurisdiction of proceedings. The superior court of the county in which the property or some part of it is situated shall have jurisdiction of proceedings under this chapter. [1891 c 96 s 6; RRS s 815. Prior: 1890 p 75 s 5.]

Venue and jurisdiction, generally: RCW 2.08.010 and chapter 4.12 RCW.

RCW 59.12.060 Parties defendant. No person other than the tenant of the premises, and subtenant, if there be one, in the actual occupation of the premises when the complaint is filed, need be made parties defendant in any proceeding under this chapter, nor shall any proceeding abate, nor the plaintiff be nonsuited, for the nonjoinder of any person who might have been made party defendant; but when it appears that any of the parties served with process, or appearing in the proceeding, are guilty of the offense charged, judgment must be rendered against him or her. In case a person has become a subtenant of the premises in controversy after the service of any notice in this chapter provided for, the fact that such notice was not served on such subtenant shall constitute no defense to the action. All persons who enter the premises under the tenant, after the commencement of the action hereunder, shall be bound by the judgment the same as if they had been made parties to the action. [2010 c 8 s 19008; 1891 c 96 s 7; RRS s 816. Prior: 1890 p 75 s 6.]

RCW 59.12.070 Complaint—Summons. The plaintiff in his or her complaint, which shall be in writing, must set forth the facts on which he or she seeks to recover, and describe the premises with reasonable certainty, and may set forth therein any circumstances of fraud, force or violence, which may have accompanied the forcible entry or forcible or unlawful detainer, and claim damages therefor, or compensation for the occupation of the premises, or both; in case the unlawful detainer charged be after default in the payment of rent, the complaint must state the amount of such rent. A summons must be issued as in other cases, returnable at a day designated therein, which shall not be less than seven nor more than thirty days from the date of service, except in cases where the publication of summons is necessary, in which case the court or judge thereof may order that the summons be made returnable at such time as may be deemed proper, and the summons shall specify the return day so fixed. [2005 c 130 s 1; 1927 c 123 s 1; 1891 c 96 s 8; RRS s 817. Prior: 1890 p 75 s 7.]

RCW 59.12.080 Summons—Contents—Service. The summons must state the names of the parties to the proceeding, the court in which the same is brought, the nature of the action, in concise terms, and the relief sought, and also the return day; and must notify the defendant to appear and answer within the time designated or that the relief sought will be taken against him or her. The summons must be directed to the defendant, and in case of summons by publication, be served at least five days before the return day designated therein. The summons must be served and returned in the same manner as summons in other actions is served and returned. [2010 c 8 s 19009; 1927 c 123 s 2; 1891 c 96 s 9; RRS s 818. Prior: 1890 p 76 s 8.]

Summons, generally: RCW 4.28.080 through 4.28.110.

RCW 59.12.085 Alternative service of summons—Limitation on jurisdiction. (1) When the plaintiff, after the exercise of due

diligence, is unable to personally serve the summons on the defendant or defendants, the court may authorize the alternative means of service described in this section.

(2) Upon filing of an affidavit from the person or persons attempting service describing those attempts, and the filing of an affidavit from the plaintiff, plaintiff's agent, or plaintiff's attorney stating the belief that the defendant or defendants cannot be found, the court may enter an order authorizing service of the summons as follows:

(a) The summons and complaint must be posted in a conspicuous place on the premises unlawfully held not less than nine days from the return date stated in the summons; and

(b) Copies of the summons and complaint must be deposited in the mail, postage prepaid, by both regular mail and certified mail directed to the defendant or defendants' last known address not less than nine days from the return date stated in the summons.

(3) When service on the defendant or defendants is accomplished by this alternative procedure, the court's jurisdiction is limited to restoring possession of the premises to the plaintiff and no money judgment may be entered against the defendant or defendants until jurisdiction over the defendant or defendants is obtained. [2014 c 3 s 1.]

RCW 59.12.090 Writ of restitution—Bond. The plaintiff at the time of commencing an action of forcible entry or detainer or unlawful detainer, or at any time afterwards, may apply to the judge of the court in which the action is pending for a writ of restitution restoring to the plaintiff the property in the complaint described, and the judge shall order a writ of restitution to issue. The writ shall be issued by the clerk of the superior court in which the action is pending, and be returnable in twenty days after its date; but before any writ shall issue prior to judgment the plaintiff shall execute to the defendant and file in court a bond in such sum as the court or judge may order, with sufficient surety to be approved by the clerk, conditioned that the plaintiff will prosecute his or her action without delay, and will pay all costs that may be adjudged to the defendant, and all damages which he or she may sustain by reason of the writ of restitution having been issued, should the same be wrongfully sued out. [2010 c 8 s 19010; 1927 c 123 s 3; 1891 c 96 s 10; RRS s 819. Prior: 1890 p 77 s 9.]

RCW 59.12.100 Service of writ—Bond to stay writ. The sheriff shall, upon receiving the writ of restitution, forthwith serve a copy thereof upon the defendant, his or her agent or attorney, or a person in possession of the premises, and shall not execute the same for three days thereafter, nor until after the defendant has been served with summons in the action as hereinabove provided, and the defendant, or person in possession of the premises within three days after the service of the writ of restitution may execute to the plaintiff a bond to be filed with and approved by the clerk of the court in such sum as may be fixed by the judge, with sufficient surety to be approved by the clerk of said court, conditioned that he or she will pay to the plaintiff such sum as the plaintiff may recover for the use and occupation of the said premises, or any rent found due, together with

all damages the plaintiff may sustain by reason of the defendant occupying or keeping possession of said premises, and also all the costs of the action. The plaintiff, his or her agent or attorneys, shall have notice of the time and place where the court or judge thereof shall fix the amount of the defendant's bond, and shall have notice and a reasonable opportunity to examine into the qualification and sufficiency of the sureties upon said bond before said bond shall be approved by the clerk. The writ may be served by the sheriff, in the event he or she shall be unable to find the defendant, an agent or attorney, or a person in possession of the premises, by affixing a copy of said writ in a conspicuous place upon the premises. [2010 c 8 s 19011; 1927 c 123 s 4; 1905 c 86 s 3; 1891 c 96 s 11; RRS s 820. Prior: 1890 p 77 s 10.]

RCW 59.12.110 Modification of bond. The plaintiff or defendant at any time, upon two days' notice to the adverse party, may apply to the court or any judge thereof for an order raising or lowering the amount of any bond in this chapter provided for. Either party may, upon like notice, apply to the court or any judge thereof for an order requiring additional or other surety or sureties upon any such bond. Upon the hearing or any application made under the provisions of this section evidence may be given. The judge after hearing any such application shall make such an order as shall be just in the premises. The bondspersons may be required to be present at such hearing if so required in the notice thereof, and shall answer under oath all questions that may be asked them touching their qualifications as bondspersons, and in the event the bondspersons shall fail or refuse to appear at such hearing and so answer such questions the bond shall be stricken. In the event the court shall order a new or additional bond to be furnished by defendant, and the same shall not be given within twenty-four hours, the court shall order the sheriff to forthwith execute the writ. In the event the defendant shall file a second or additional bond and it shall also be found insufficient after hearing, as above provided, the right to retain the premises by bond shall be lost and the sheriff shall forthwith put the plaintiff in possession of the premises. [2007 c 218 s 77; 1905 c 86 s 4; 1891 c 96 s 12; RRS s 821. Prior: 1890 p 78 s 11.]

Intent—Finding—2007 c 218: See note following RCW 41.08.020.

RCW 59.12.120 Judgment by default. If on the date appointed in the summons the defendant does not appear or answer, the court shall render judgment in favor of the plaintiff as prayed for in the complaint. [1989 c 342 s 2; 1891 c 96 s 13; RRS s 822. FORMER PART OF SECTION: 1891 c 96 s 14 now codified as RCW 59.12.121.]

Effective date—1989 c 342: See RCW 59.18.911.

RCW 59.12.121 Pleading by defendant. On or before the day fixed for his or her appearance the defendant may appear and answer or demur. [2010 c 8 s 19012; 1891 c 96 s 14; RRS s 823. Formerly RCW 59.12.120, part.]

RCW 59.12.130 Jury—Actions given preference. Whenever an issue of fact is presented by the pleadings it must be tried by a jury, unless such a jury be waived as in other cases. The jury shall be formed in the same manner as other trial juries in the court in which the action is pending; and in all cases actions under this chapter shall take precedence of all other civil actions. [1891 c 96 s 15; RRS s 824. Prior: 1890 p 79 s 15.]

RCW 59.12.140 Proof in forcible entry and detainer. On the trial of any proceeding for any forcible entry or forcible detainer the plaintiff shall only be required to show, in addition to a forcible entry complained of, that he or she was peaceably in the actual possession at the time of the forcible entry; or, in addition to a forcible detainer complained of, that he or she was entitled to the possession at the time of the forcible detainer. [2010 c 8 s 19013; 1891 c 96 s 16; RRS s 825. Prior: 1890 p 79 s 16.]

RCW 59.12.150 Amendment to conform to proof. When upon the trial of any proceeding under this chapter it appears from the evidence that the defendant has been guilty of either a forcible entry or a forcible or unlawful detainer, in respect of the premises described in the complaint, and other than the offense charged in the complaint, the judge must order that such complaint be forthwith amended to conform to such proofs; such amendment must be made without any imposition of terms. No continuance shall be permitted on account of such amendment unless the defendant shows to the satisfaction of the court good cause therefor. [1891 c 96 s 17; RRS s 826. Prior: 1890 p 79 s 17.]

RCW 59.12.160 Amendments. Amendments may be allowed by the court at any time before final judgment, upon such terms as to the court may appear just, in the same cases and manner and to the same extent as in civil actions. [1891 c 96 s 19; RRS s 828. Prior: 1890 p 80 s 20.]

RCW 59.12.170 Judgment—Execution. If upon the trial the verdict of the jury or, if the case be tried without a jury, the finding of the court be in favor of the plaintiff and against the defendant, judgment shall be entered for the restitution of the premises; and if the proceeding be for unlawful detainer after neglect or failure to perform any condition or covenant of a lease or agreement under which the property is held, or after default in the payment of rent, the judgment shall also declare the forfeiture of the lease, agreement, or tenancy. The jury, or the court, if the proceedings be tried without a jury, shall also assess the damages occasioned to the plaintiff by any forcible entry, or by any forcible or unlawful detainer, alleged in the complaint and proved on the trial, and, if the alleged unlawful detainer be after default in the payment of rent, find the amount of any rent due, and the judgment shall be rendered against the defendant guilty of the forcible entry, forcible detainer, or unlawful detainer for twice the amount of damages thus assessed and of the rent, if any, found due. When the

proceeding is for an unlawful detainer after default in the payment of rent, and the lease or agreement under which the rent is payable has not by its terms expired, execution upon the judgment shall not be issued until the expiration of five days after the entry of the judgment, within which time the tenant or any subtenant, or any mortgagee of the term, or other party interested in its continuance, may pay into court for the landlord the amount of the judgment and costs, and thereupon the judgment shall be satisfied and the tenant restored to his or her estate; but if payment, as herein provided, be not made within five days the judgment may be enforced for its full amount and for the possession of the premises. In all other cases the judgment may be enforced immediately. If writ of restitution shall have been executed prior to judgment no further writ or execution for the premises shall be required. [2010 c 8 s 19014; 1891 c 96 s 18; RRS s 827. Prior: 1890 p 80 s 18.]

RCW 59.12.180 Rules of practice. Except as otherwise provided in this chapter, the provisions of the laws of this state with reference to practice in civil actions are applicable to, and constitute the rules of practice in the proceedings mentioned in this chapter; and the provisions of such laws relative to new trials and appeals, except so far as they are inconsistent with the provisions of this chapter, shall be held to apply to the proceedings mentioned in this chapter. [1891 c 96 s 20; RRS s 829. Prior: 1890 p 80 s 21.]

RCW 59.12.190 Relief against forfeiture. The court may relieve a tenant against a forfeiture of a lease and restore him or her to his or her former estate, as in other cases provided by law, where application for such relief is made within thirty days after the forfeiture is declared by the judgment of the court, as provided in this chapter. The application may be made by a tenant or subtenant, or a mortgagee of the term, or any person interested in the continuance of the term. It must be made upon petition, setting forth the facts upon which the relief is sought, and be verified by the applicant. Notice of the application, with a copy of the petition, must be served on the plaintiff in the judgment, who may appear and contest the application. In no case shall the application be granted except on condition that full payment of rent due, or full performance of conditions of covenants stipulated, so far as the same is practicable, be first made. [2010 c 8 s 19015; 1891 c 96 s 21; RRS s 830. Prior: 1890 p 80 s 22.]

RCW 59.12.200 Appellate review—Stay bond. A party aggrieved by the judgment may seek appellate review of the judgment as in other civil actions: PROVIDED, That if the defendant appealing desires a stay of proceedings pending review, the defendant shall execute and file a bond, with two or more sufficient sureties to be approved by the judge, conditioned to abide the order of the court, and to pay all rents and other damages justly accruing to the plaintiff during the pendency of the proceeding. [1988 c 202 s 55; 1971 c 81 s 128; 1891 c 96 s 22; RRS s 831. Prior: 1890 p 80 s 23.]

Severability—1988 c 202: See note following RCW 2.24.050.

RCW 59.12.210 Effect of stay bond. When the defendant shall appeal, and shall file a bond as provided in RCW 59.12.200, all further proceedings in the case shall be stayed until the determination of said appeal and the same has been remanded to the superior court for further proceedings therein. [1891 c 96 s 23; RRS s 832. Prior: 1890 p 80 s 24.]

RCW 59.12.220 Writ of restitution suspended pending appeal. If a writ of restitution has been issued previous to the taking of an appeal by the defendant, and said defendant shall execute and file a bond as provided in this chapter, the clerk of the court, under the direction of the judge, shall forthwith give the appellant a certificate of the allowance of such appeal; and upon the service of such certificate upon the officer having such writ of restitution the said officer shall forthwith cease all further proceedings by virtue of such writ; and if such writ has been completely executed the defendant shall be restored to the possession of the premises, and shall remain in possession thereof until the appeal is determined. [1891 c 96 s 24; RRS s 833. Prior: 1890 p 81 s 25.]

RCW 59.12.230 Forcible entry and detainer—Penalty. Every person who shall unlawfully use, or encourage or assist another in unlawfully using, any force or violence in entering upon or detaining any lands or other possessions of another; and every person who, having removed or been removed therefrom pursuant to the order or direction of any court, tribunal or officer, shall afterwards return to settle or reside unlawfully upon, or take possession of, such lands or possessions, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor. [1909 c 249 s 306; RRS s 2558. Prior: Code 1881 s 858; 1873 p 195 s 66; 1854 p 86 s 60.]