

HISTORY

of

ISLAND COUNTY MASTER GARDENER EDUCATION GARDEN

The Education Garden is a project of the WSU Extension Island County Master Gardener program. A formal agreement between WSU Extension Island County and the Port of Coupeville governs the relationship.

The Island County Master Gardener Foundation provides funding to support the Education Garden.



WSU EXTENSION
Island County



Last Updated November 24, 2025

Compiled by Ilze Zigurs, Class of 2014

Thank you to Donna Stansberry for permission to use pictures from the scrapbook she created covering 2002-2006. Thank you to all the garden leads who scoured their memories for additional highlights about the later years.

The Beginning – 2002

In March 2002, WSU Extension Island County Master Gardeners began the groundwork for an education garden at Greenbank Farm. Farm management identified several areas for potential garden projects. The original garden was at the Davis Farm, north of the barns, but it was limited in size. The Port of Coupeville suggested moving the project to its current location.

The Master Gardeners developed a five-year plan for creating six garden areas, guided by the overall Master Gardener mission and the need to ensure the gardens would be consistent with the Greenbank Farm context.



View of the shed across the pond, before its transformation to Stansberry Cottage

Initial projects were construction-oriented, including building an arbor next to the Pie Café and transforming a derelict shed into the Stansberry Cottage. The original plan comprised six gardens: Pergola Garden, Cottage Garden, Pond Garden, Rose/Herb Garden, Shade Garden, and Native Plants.

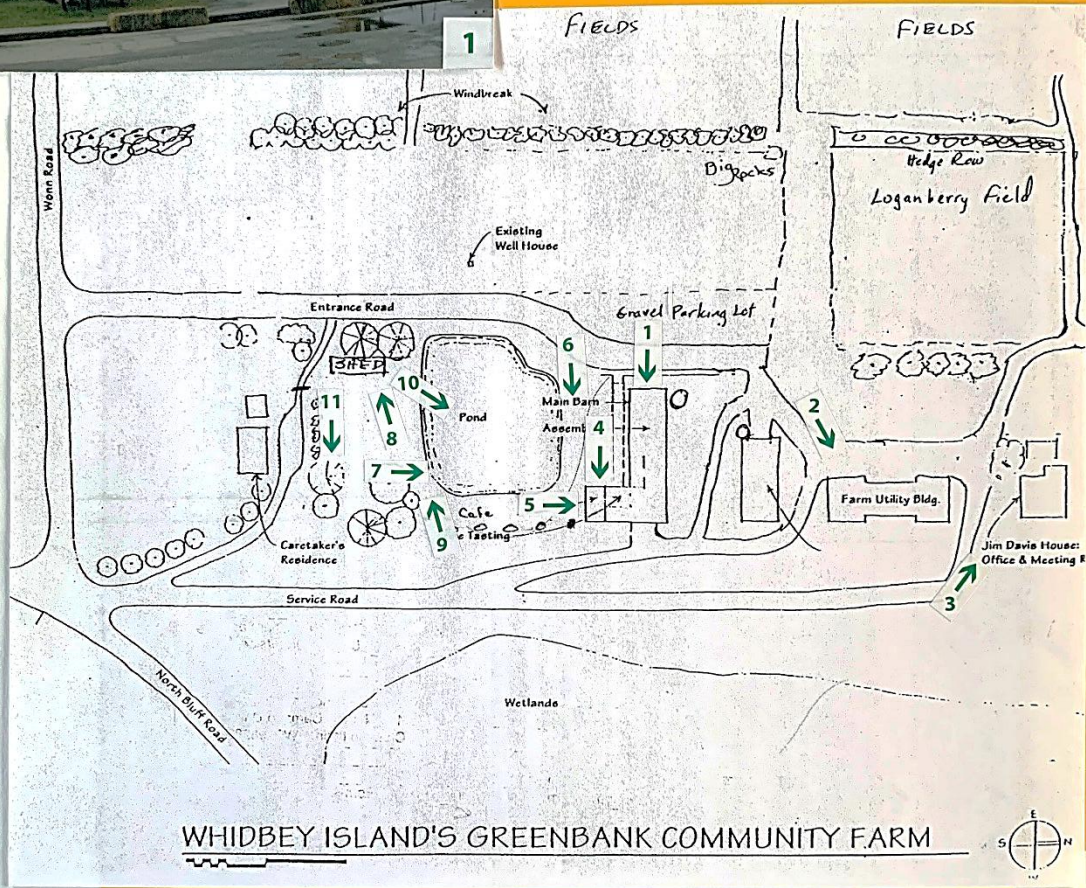
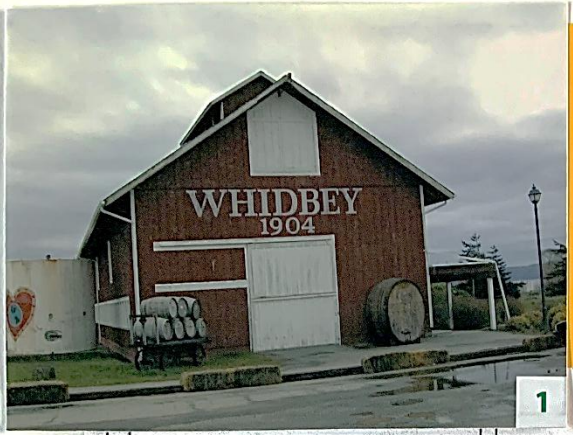
The pictures on pages 2 through 29 are taken from the scrapbook that Donna Stansberry created and show the development of the gardens from March 2002 to 2006. The original scrapbook is kept at the WSU Extension Office in Coupeville.

Timeline of Development of Gardens

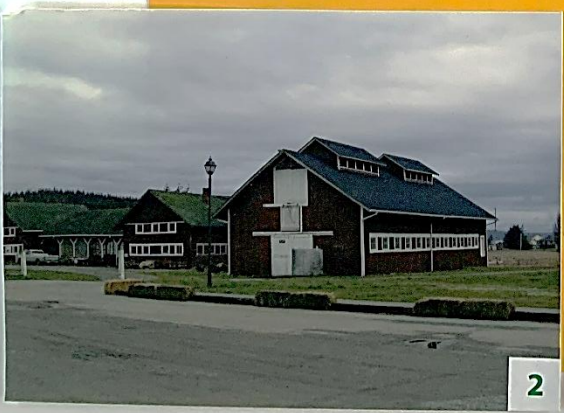
2002 – Pergola Garden
2003 – Cottage Garden
2004 – Allée Plantings
2004 – Rose Garden
2004 – Compost Bins
2005 – Pond Garden
2006 – Shade Garden
2007 – Native Plant Garden
2010 – Drainfield Landscape Test Project
(concluded 2015)

2012 – Veggie Garden
2019 – Greenhouse
2019 – NW Native Prairie Garden &
Wildlife Sanctuary
2020 – Worm Bins
2021 – Pollinator Garden
2021 – SIP Beds
2022 – Four-Season Garden
2023 – Crevice Garden
2024 – Rhodie Garden extension

March 2002



WHIDBEY ISLAND'S GREENBANK COMMUNITY FARM



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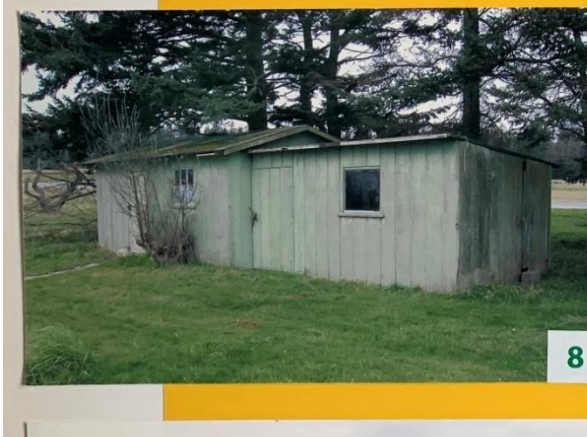
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Pergola Construction

**June
2002**



Erected June 2002
by the
WSU Island County
Master Gardener Association



**Placing the
Plaque**



**The Pergola in
February 2003**

Donna and Steve Stansberry's original plans to turn



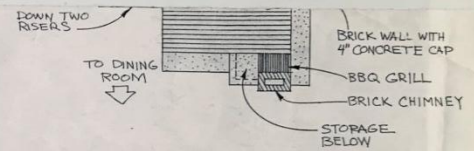
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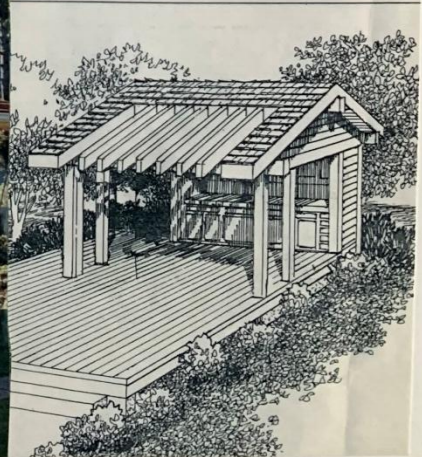
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safety reasons. No longer a necessity, a separate summer kitchen is a charming option for cooking outdoors. In this over 600-square-foot design, a spacious deck connects the barbecue area with its generous counter space and storage, with the covered cooking area complete with sink, stove and refrigerator. Translucent panels in the roof provide lots of natural light. There is ample



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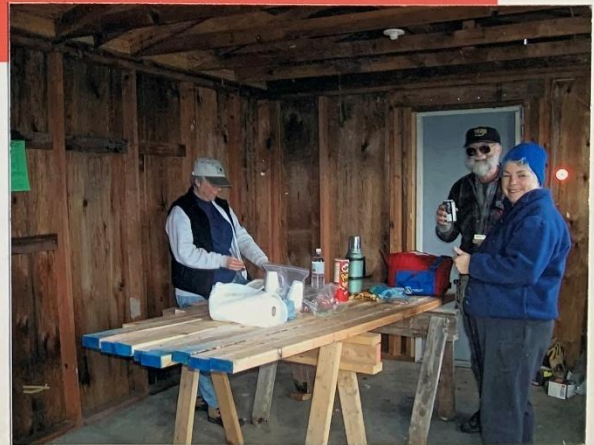
Demolition Autumn 2002



...yuk!



January-February 2003





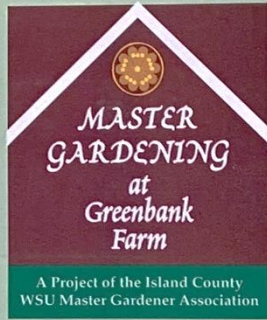
March 2003



"Take us to your ladder!"



The Plan



Master Gardener Educational Garden Projects

- A** Pergola Garden
- B** Cottage Garden
- C** Pond Garden
- D** Shade Garden
- E** Herb Garden
- F** Rose Garden
- G** Native Plants
- H** Wildlife Viewing Area
- I** Nursery



The First Design Team



Mauri Bell
Steve Standen
Maureen Coffey (not shown)
Helen O'Connor
Luc Fassenden
Dorothy [unclear]

The First Day of Spring (br-r-r)

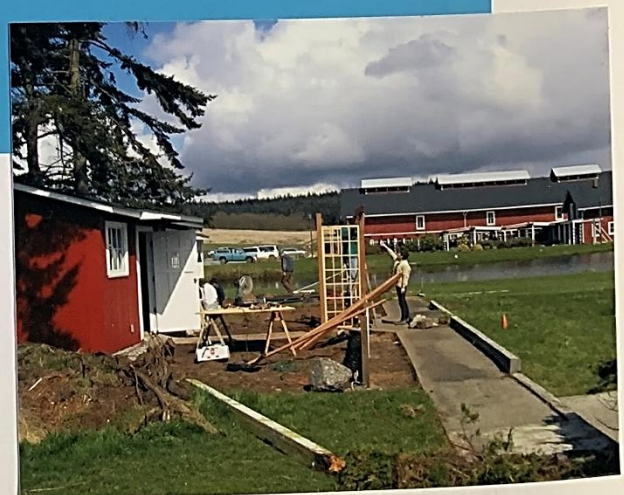


Picket Line





Putting in the water line





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MGs and friends planting the Pergola Garden



The Pergola Garden became a popular site for wedding pictures, with a lush array of blooming perennials and climbing roses. It was renamed the Pie Shoppe Garden in 2020.

**Dig!
Dig!
Dig!**



Diggin' it for the power cable





Planting the Cottage Garden



November 2003



Planting
beech trees





Planting laburnums



Compost fence





A sign of the times

**During 2003,
the South Whidbey Rotary Club and
Whidbey Island Garden Tour, Inc.
awarded grants to the
Island County WSU Master Gardener
Educational Garden at Greenbank Farm.**

Thank You!

28 February 2004 Getting Ready for Spring



← **BIG pile of beauty bark**



Work, work, work

...three hours later!





The Allée

**...planting
laburnums and lilacs**





**Café
Entrance**

**Pergola
Garden**





Compost bins



The compost bins evolved from 2004 (above) to what they look like in 2024 (to the right).

New signage describes the phases of cold composting that are represented in each bin.





**First Signs
Installed
July 6, 2004**





The Rose Garden December 2004

Marcia Nelson and Maryanne Coffey were instrumental in establishing the Rose Garden, helped by a crew of rose lovers. Each of the four raised beds was planted with roses in a different color theme, with a central round area planted as a knot garden.

Pond Garden Installation Begins February 15, 2005



Carolyn Mercer's husband, Jerry, built benches around the pond for visitors to relax and watch wildlife. In July of 2007, a heron sculpture, by Gunter Reimnitz of Abraxas Crow Company in Port Townsend, was purchased and placed in the pond. That heron became the "voice" of the Education Garden Facebook page, as created by Julie Lary in 2024.



The Cottage gets a name! March 24, 2005



Donna and Steve Stansberry retired from the Education Garden in February of 2024, after untold contributions of time and energy, not to mention the weekly lunches that Donna brought to feed the volunteers at Wednesday work parties.

The Cottage Garden covers a fairly large area, requiring a team of volunteers to keep everything in shape. To help coordinate the team – and to identify themed areas for visitors to the garden – the idea of islands was implemented in March of 2024. Each island is a clearly delineated area of the Cottage Garden that is maintained by a specific volunteer. To help orient visitors, islands are identified by numbers.





**March 18,
2006**



Shade Garden – 2006

Several members of the Master Gardener Class of 2006 collaborated on the original layout of the Shade Garden – an area filled with a variety of mature trees, including cherry, willow, Douglas fir, and Sitka spruce. The goal was to display shade-tolerant plants that thrive in Island County and to provide a quiet resting spot under the trees.



Shade Garden area, 2003

- Craftsman from Scatchet Head made twig furniture for seating area.
- Bill Stipe donated rhododendrons.
- Winter storm of 2007-08 toppled centerpiece tree in round bed.
- Aging Curly Willow removed in 2013. New furniture in seating area crafted from branches by Albe Rustics.
- Native cherry trees infested with Cherry Bark Tortrix removed in 2014, leaving much of garden without shade.
- Next generation of shade trees planted in 2015 (Brandywine Red Maple, Scarlet Oak, Vulcan Magnolia, Cascara and Pacific Yew).
- Rain garden refocused as wetland viewing platform in 2018.
- Development of **Wetland Garden** started in 2023 with removal of invasive plants in preparation for new plantings.
- Remaining Curly Willow stump keeled over to become wildlife haven in 2024.



Gary Ketcheson, Shade Garden lead since 2017

Native Plant Garden – 2007

Steve Stansberry and John Bachert were instrumental in starting the Native Plant Garden, along with help and plant donations from Bud Wilkinson and Don Lee, among others. The class of 2009, including Nancy Hindes, did hands-on work as an intern project.

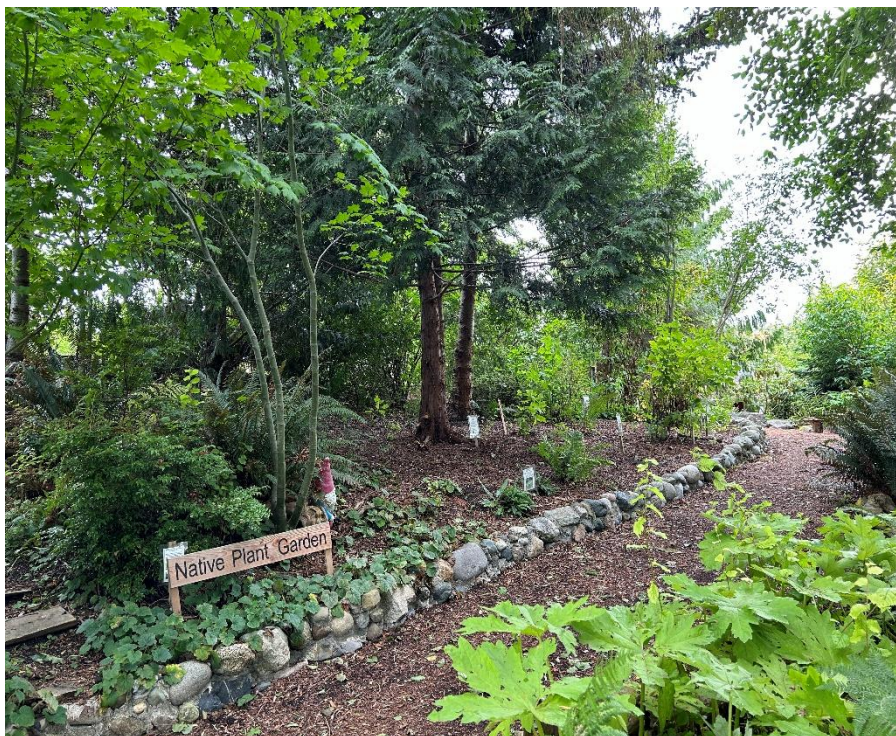
- Steve Stansberry and John Bachert built a rock wall with native rock gathered from Greenbank Farm property. The two of them and Bud Wilkinson also built a stone bridge leading into the garden.
- Habitats were designed to range from shady woodland to sunny meadows.
- Mary Fiedler established a berry patch.
- Steve Stansberry and John Bachert added a driftwood arch to the north entrance of the garden, with signage developed by Nancy Hindes.



Steve Stansberry and Nancy Hindes, 2023

Nancy Hindes retired from the Education Garden in March of 2024.

The garden was renamed the **NW Native Lowland Garden** in 2025.



Native Plant Garden, 2024

BEYOND THE ORIGINAL SIX GARDENS

Veggie Garden – 2012

The space between the espalier apple tree and the fence that borders the Cottage Garden on the east contained a few raised beds for many years.

- Susan Dakis took over that area to create a Veggie Garden that would demonstrate different ways to grow a variety of vegetables in our climate and soil conditions.
- Paul Marshall built new raised beds for more comfortable and accessible access, using a vegetable trug design.
- Vertical structures make efficient use of small spaces.
- Odorous herbs were planted to demonstrate pest deterrence.



Veggie Garden beds, 2017



Susan Dakis, Ed Garden Festival, 2018



Veggie Garden with trug, 2019

GATHERINGS...



December 2015 Holiday potluck

Left to right: Ilze Zigurs, Margaret O'Brien, ??, John Bachert, Steve Stansberry, Donna Stansberry, Carolyn Mercer, Mark Willstatter, Richard Tamura, Barb Douglas, Mark Walljasper



August 2018 Steering Committee

Left to right: Roger Scharer, John Bachert, Carole Matthews, Donna Stansberry, ??, Barb Douglas, Susan Dakis, Steve Stansberry, Margaret O'Brien, Carolyn Mercer, Nancy Hindes, Mark Willstatter

Greenhouse – 2019

A team of interns from the Class of 2018, led by Katie Levine, did a comprehensive analysis of options for installing a greenhouse on the grounds of the Education Garden. Their detailed report outlined several options, and the Foundation provided funding to proceed.

- A greenhouse was purchased and installed in 2019.
- The greenhouse was designed and built locally by David Beust.
- Funding from the Foundation was supplemented by in-kind donations from Island County businesses and grants.
- Barb Douglas and Susan Dakis became the greenhouse managers. They made many improvements to the basic structure, including lighting, different heating methods, and water installation.
- In 2022, Melissa Evans created and installed a stained-glass panel that was placed above the entry door.



Laying the foundation for the greenhouse. Left to right: Carole Matthews, Barb Douglas, Ken Hess, Delivery staff, Ilze Zigurs, Barb Schmitt, ??, Tristy Nielsen



Barb Douglas with plant sale bounty, May 2025

NW Native Prairie Garden – 2019

Interns from the class of 2019 developed an idea for a Prairie Garden, inspired by their field trip to the Pacific Rim Institute. Jim Peskuric wrote a plan for the garden to be placed on the edge of the Native Plant Garden, in the sunniest spot possible.

- Members of the class of 2019 who helped install the new garden were Gail Guthrie, Elaine Koper, Barb Moore, Janet Richards, and Gretchen Schlomann.
- The interns were helped by Master Gardeners Nancy Hindes, Bobbi Peskuric, Steve Stansberry, and Mark Walljasper.
- One challenge is to educate the public on the look of prairies in different seasons, especially in winter when plants have gone dormant.
- Soil in this location is also a challenge. Northwest prairies thrive in the rain shadows of the coastal mountains, where there is glacial outwash soil. That soil is very sandy, which this soil is not. Native prairies prior to European arrival required no maintenance, but here we regularly need to weed out invasive grasses.



Left to right: Bobbi Peskuric, Gretchen Schlomann, Jim Peskuric, Nancy Hindes, Lisa Phillips, Steve Stansberry



In 2021, Jim Peskuric developed a second prairie garden, called Building Blocks of a Prairie and located up the hill from the first garden.



Plantings, 2021



The building blocks, one year later

Wildlife Sanctuary – 2019

The area for the original Prairie Garden had to be cleared of existing plants. Rather than letting those plants go to waste, Jim replanted them farther north. Natural weeds that looked good were allowed to thrive. The area got so thick that wildlife started to move in, including rabbits, snakes, birds, snails, butterflies, and lots of bees, so Jim named it the Wildlife Sanctuary. Structures for coyotes were installed, using railroad ties and lumber.

Blackberries and other noxious weeds were curtailed in the space north of the Sanctuary, and the area became a dumping ground for horsetail. The intent is for this area to become a zero-waste compost area for the entire Education Garden.



Jim Peskuric in the sanctuary, October 2025

GATHERINGS...



December 2019 Holiday potluck

Left to right: Luella Golder, Steve Stanberry, Jim Peskuric, Bobbi Peskuric, Gary Ketcheson, John Bachert, Don Krafft, Carolyn Mercer, Nancy Hindes (wearing cap), Raissa DeArmond, Barb Schmitt, Carole Matthews, Donna Stansberry. Back corner with hand over eyes, Mark Walljasper.



August 2020 Steering Committee

Social distancing in the COVID-19 era

Worm Bins – 2020

For many years, unused worm bins sat in front of the wheelbarrow shed. In 2020, Bobbi Peskuric completely redesigned the area, installing new bins and live worms. She continues to maintain the beds, and everyone helps to feed the red wigglers.

- Bobbi is active in educating the public on the value of vermicompost and the ease with which people can build their own worm bins.
- Vermicomposting is key to the gardener's role in keeping food waste out of landfills.
- The worm bins provide a fun and exciting way to involve children of all ages in gardening and composting.
- The vermicompost from these bins is used to great effect in many parts of the Ed Garden.



Bobbi Peskuric, October 2025

Pollinator Garden – 2021

Barb Douglas built a planting bed next to the greenhouse in 2021 for a pollinator garden, and Lisa Phillips took over management of the garden.

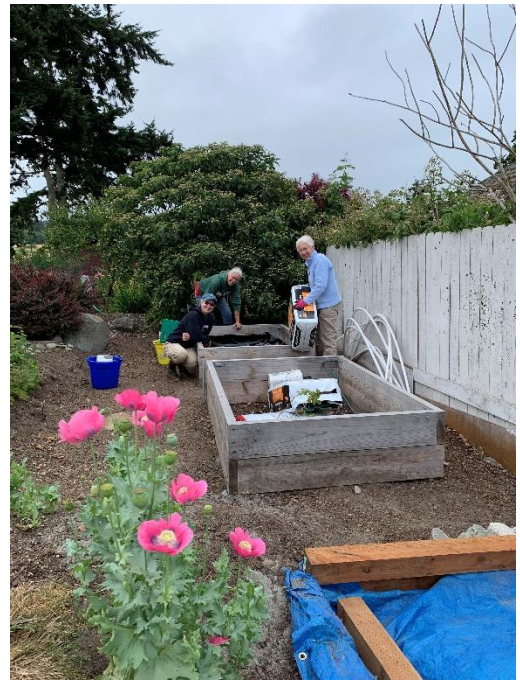
- The goal is to show pollinator-friendly plants that grow well in our region and complement each other.
- In 2025, a trellis was added to support the *Rosa glauca* and other plants along the wall of the greenhouse.



SIP Beds – 2021

Barb Douglas, Kim Baxter, and Lisa Phillips built the first SIP beds (Self-Irrigating Planters) in the space east of the Greenhouse. Previously, this area held potted plants being grown for the Plant Sale.

- Barb introduced the SIP technique, which quickly became popular around the Education Garden and with the public.
- Each year, different flower and vegetable crops are planted to see how they perform.
- The beds have performed better than expected during hot, dry summers, with watering only once per month.
- SIP techniques have been a popular topic for presentations to local garden clubs and at the Whidbey Gardening Workshop.



Left to right: Kim Baxter, Lisa Phillips, Barb Douglas

GATHERING... December 2021, pandemic rules allowed indoor gatherings again, but no holiday potluck this year



Steering Committee. Left to right: Sue Moore, Barb Schmitt, Susan Dakis, Loren Imes, Carolyn Mercer, Donna Stansberry, Steve Stansberry, Carole Matthews, Gretchen Schlomann, Judy Nylander, Gary Ketcheson, Bobbi Peskuric, Kim Baxter, Lisa Phillips, Barb Douglas, Holly Grason, Ilze Zigurs (the photographer, photoshopped in at committee's request)

Four-Season Garden – 2022

The Four-Season Garden was developed by a team of four members of the Class of 2020, an MG who transferred from King County, a veteran of the Ed Garden as a liaison, and our MG Program Coordinator. As always, other Master Gardeners pitched in to help during work parties.

The idea was to create an aesthetically pleasing design for the main entry point of the Education Garden, to encourage visitors to gather and explore all the gardens.

- Key design elements were four-season interest, low maintenance, drought tolerant plants, and consistency with aesthetics of surrounding area.
- A custom sign created by local artist Pat McVay was installed on the wall of the cottage.
- Plants show a variety of colors, textures, and sizes, with identifying labels and a detailed chart accessible via QR code.
- Summer classes in the MG Education Series are held in the seating area in front of the cottage. That area is also a popular picnic spot for visitors.



Left to right: Sarah Van Alstyne, Sally Howard, Rich Yukubousky, Sue Moore, Ilze Zigurs.
Not pictured: Cathy Lofton-Day, Loren Imes.



Layout of walkway and seating area, 2022



Sarah Van Alstyne, 2025

Crevice Garden – 2023

In 2009, Marcia Nelson proposed the idea for a Drainfield Landscape Test Project, to identify which plants are best suited for growing on drainfields. A mock drainfield was built and plants installed. When the project concluded, a variety of ideas for what to do with that space were put forth. Carole Matthews first had the idea for a Crevice Garden, and in 2023, a team of six Master Gardeners took on the project.



Drainfield Test Project mound, 2022



Crevice team, August 2023. Left to right: Lisa Phillips, Ilze Zigurs, Kim Baxter, Cathy Lofton-Day, Carol Russo, Gretchen Schlomann

- The team developed a design, project plan, and budget, and received approval and funding to proceed. Several local businesses donated hardscape components.
- The drainfield mound was leveled, and the team built two crevice gardens – one from flagstone and the other from urbanite.
- A metal border was installed to define the area.
- Brant Baxter installed concrete steps and a granite bench.
- Paul Marshall built a raised bed in which Lisa Phillips installed a crevice garden.
- Planting began in spring of 2024.
- In 2025, a corten steel planter box was added, to provide an example using a small container.



Rhodie Garden – 2024

Two rhododendron beds were planted as part of the Shade Garden when it was developed in 2006. The original plants were donated by Bill Stipe, a well-known rhododendron hybridizer. For many years, Mark Walljasper tended the rhododendrons until his retirement from the Master Gardener program.



In 2024, Judy Nylander and Lisa Phillips undertook a major renovation and expansion of the Rhodie Garden.

- Existing rhodies were trimmed, cut back where needed, and fertilized.
- Overgrown shrubs of other varieties and perennials were removed, so the two plots focused entirely on rhodies.
- The bed to the north was expanded for a better visual match with the Rose Garden space.
- Four new rhododendrons from Bill Stipe's collection were added.



Lisa Phillips and Judy Nylander, June 2025

