

The month of March always makes me itchy to get out in my garden and start planting, except for the rain and mud. But it's never too wet or soggy to go visit our local nurseries. Last week I drove what seemed like hours through wonderful rolling countryside in Port Orchard to visit with Susan Dearth and Marilyn Hepner co-owners of "Gardenscapes the Herb & Perennial Farm." It was definitely worth the drive.

Sue Dearth, a retired nurse, and Marilyn Hepner, retired from careers as an educator, college administrator, computer programmer, environmental worker and property manager, have combined their talents to create a successful home-based business that gives joy to them and to their customers. And they do it all on only one and a half acres.

Garden design appealed to Dearth who began taking courses at Edmonds Community College ten years ago. In two years she started to design and install gardens for friends for fun and continued working part time in nursing but reached a point where she had to choose between her two strengths. She and Marilyn began talking about using their property to grow plants for landscaping. One of the areas Sue had studied was how to grow a maximum of plants in a small area.

In 1995 Dearth and Hepner began growing herbs and plants taking them to the Farmers Market to sell. Their efforts were so successful they decided to open a nursery on their property. Their first starts were grown with grow lights in the loft of their garage. Now they have two greenhouses.

Visitors to Gardenscapes will discover colorful textural borders with shrub roses, blueberry bushes and herbaceous plants. Some areas are composed of cool colored plants; others have hot colored plants. Customers will find an herb garden designed in four theme areas: culinary, medicinal, fragrance, and color and cuts (annuals and perennials for bouquets). There's a demonstration area showing several kinds of lavender and rosemary so gardeners can decide which to grow at their homes. Metal sculptures, garden art and a gift shop are also available, plus a picnic area under a magnificent maple.

Marilyn always had an interest in plants, growing marigolds, petunias and tomatoes from seed as a child. She says she hasn't had any formal horticultural training but reads and studies all she can about plants. Her forte is propagation from divisions and cuttings and creating the plants that help in their design work.

"We decided to share our love of gardening through teaching," Dearth said. The Hanging Basket Workshops have really grown. The partners originally sold the planted baskets but had so many requests they decided to show others how to do it themselves. Hepner grows the plants for the workshops from seeds and cuttings. She fell in love with the design of the Victorian Hanging Baskets shown in a "Sunset" magazine article. But the plants were patented in Canada and not available here. Seeds were available though so Hepner purchased the seeds and began growing plants and saving seeds for propagation each year.

Gardenscapes has great success with lavender. The soil in the lavender beds is a combination of half sand and half compost mounded up in rows. A tablespoon of lime is added for each plant. The mounds provide great drainage yielding contented healthy plants. The beds have over one hundred plants. Be sure to catch the lavender festival this year on Saturday and Sunday July 8 and 9. Gardenscapes is also experimenting with Rosemary and asked me to remind everyone that Rosemary is the herb of the year. May 8 through 13 is National Herb Week.

Gardenscapes' Grand Opening for the Season is Saturday, April 1 at 10 AM. The nursery is open Wednesdays through Sundays from 10 AM to 5 PM or you can call for an appointment. From Highway 16 exit at Sedgwick Road/Southworth Ferry. Go approximately 6 miles east on Sedgwick to Wilson Creek Road. Turn left and then take the first left which is Grandview. Grandview turns into Terrace Way after the curve. Look for the Gardenscapes sign on the left. I followed these directions and found their nursery easily. You can too.

Gardenscapes has an email address: gardenscapes@silverlink.net. You can also call them at 360-871-7245 or Fax 360-871-6571. Be sure to order their newsletter and list of classes. In parting Sue told me, "We want to create a place where people love to go and enjoy the garden and the energy. Maybe even buy a few plants." Even on a cold gray day their gardens renewed me. For sure I'm going back to buy some plants in April and to visit with Sue and Marilyn again. Drive out and meet them, you'll be glad you did.

Email Peg Tillery with comments or questions at gardenmentor@yahoo.com.