

No matter where you live in Kitsap County you'll want to visit Roadhouse Nursery on Central Valley Road in Poulsbo. Owners Jan and George Bahr specialize in water gardening, but I've never visited them without taking home a flat or two of wonderful perennials and annuals and a hanging basket. Bahrs also have trees and shrubs to suit any gardener.

Jan built her first water garden as a teenager. It was a 4-H project and was in a bathtub. She lived on a farm and out of the whole 80 acres says she chose the worst possible place for her water garden. When Bahrs bought their present property the previous owner had grown water lilies in ponds before water gardening was popular. From then on Jan has researched plants that grow in or near water. Bahrs feel the main function of their nursery is education. Often called a water gardening guru Jan says, "We want people to be successful." George shares several photo albums and says, "customers come to look through the albums to get ideas for their water gardens, and bring us before and after photos of their projects."

Bahrs are members of the Water Lily Society and have a collection of monographs kindly shared with others. Jan told how in the late 1800s to early 1900s a Frenchman called Marliac developed many varieties of hardy lilies. Most of what we see today came from his hybridizations. Today growers are developing new varieties; color breakthroughs are peaches and almost oranges. Jan says everyone wants to develop a hardy blue.

Jan began the business in 1985. A few years later when George left Lockheed during downsizing Jan definitely needed his help in the nursery. They have no employees and say their business is "truly a mom and pop operation." For the five years I've visited their nursery I'm always delighted by the changes they make each year. It's always a pleasure to stroll through the grounds. Displays show visitors how plants will look in their own gardens. George is working with a computer database containing more than 8500 plants, constantly updating and adding to the database. He's been making informative signs labeling the plants in the nursery and in their display gardens. Jan says, "Education is what we do."

Roadhouse Nursery is at 12511 Central Valley Road NW in Poulsbo, between Waaga Way and Island Lake Parkway. You'll see their house and the nursery sign. The nursery is open Mondays in April, May and June. Regular hours are Tuesday through Saturday 9:30 AM to 5:30 PM. Sunday hours are 10 AM to 5 PM, and open by appointment from Thanksgiving through February 1. Jan says they are absolutely not open on Memorial Day ever. That's their grandson's birthday celebration each year.

People often ask how the nursery got its name. The house was built in 1904 and was a dance hall called the Pine Tree Inn. Customers often share stories about dancing there. Others told Jan and George about a room upstairs thus the name for their nursery, "Roadhouse." One customer told how her grandfather was a bootlegger who delivered "booze" to the roadhouse during the 1920s.

It's fitting that their home was a dance hall. Jan has always loved to dance. George didn't but about twenty years ago he gave Jan ballroom dancing lessons for her birthday. From then on both Bahrs were hooked. It turns out George was a very good dancer and friends kept asking for help learning the steps. Several years ago Poulsbo Parks and Recreation advertised for dance instructors and Bahrs began teaching ballroom dancing.

Bahrs are active in the community. George is an Elk. Every year Jan comes to the Raab Park Youth Garden to teach kids and parents about water gardening and has donated the plants in our small water garden plus lots of vegetables and flowers. Bahrs volunteer at Retsil and are helping a friend start a small vegetable garden for the residents. Silverwood School, also on Central Valley Road, came to the Bahrs for help with a "Dragonfly Snuggery." The school had dragonfly larvae at their pond and nowhere for the insects to climb up to continue their life cycle. Bahrs recommended and helped donate native plants: redbud dogwood, native spirea, snowberry, water plantain, arrowhead, dwarf water bamboo, slough sedge and soft rush. The plants for Brownsville School's recent plant sale were donated at cost plus the school could bring back unsold plants.

This Saturday June 3 a portion of all taxable sales at Roadhouse Nursery, Valley Nursery, Bainbridge Gardens, Lighthouse Gardens, Carters Garden Center and McLendon's Hardware will be donated to Project Family in Kitsap County to help grow healthy families. Get out there and find some plants for your gardens! You'll be glad you did.

Send questions or comments to Peg at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.