

A friend and I went to the Suquamish Garden Walking Tour on June 24. What absolute pleasure and good exercise too. It seemed like we hiked ten miles. But the miles were filled with beautiful gardens, happy smiling people and oh so many temptations.

The tour is organized each year by local residents to promote neighbor meeting neighbor and the improvement of Suquamish Parks and Trails. It is always free but donations are happily accepted. The funds this year will be used to renovate Pathway Park which is a park used mostly by children walking to and from Suquamish Elementary School. Last year the funds went to purchase thousands of bulbs that volunteers planted in public areas around town.

Every garden was unique and delightful. Garden owners chatted amiably with neighbors and visitors. Once in a while I overheard someone saying which garden was their favorite. I couldn't pick a favorite, each was inspiring and enjoyable. One of the gardeners showed us her husband's compost bins. The bins were truly works of art. Each layer was evenly distributed. It looked like a giant striped salad. Except you wouldn't exactly want to eat it. In several months the compost will be crumbly black nutrient-rich and bio-rich organic matter to feed all the plants and nourish the soil.

One antique-looking home featured an old fashioned porch. Nestled on one step was a black ball encrusted with oval shiny glass beads. The home was surrounded by a quaint white picket fence and the flowerbeds (borders as they're now called) were filled to the brim with gorgeous blossoms. After enjoying all the blooms we walked through a garden gate and were greeted by Raquel Stanek. Raquel makes mosaic gazing balls and birdhouses. The eye-catching ball I'd seen on the porch was her creation. I bought a small ball with a stand for twelve dollars. Happily I discovered Raquel will be selling the gazing balls at Bainbridge In Bloom the weekend of July 15 and 16. Raquel's going to save me a bigger ball and I'm coming with my checkbook. The balls with stands come in about five different sizes, balls are black or white with multi-colored jewels. You can contact Raquel at 206-842-7504.

A few houses away outside another exquisite garden we met Sylvia Peterson who was selling a multitude of unusual plants to the delight of people passing by. Sylvia's business is called Peterson Plants. Her specialty is starting seeds and she'll start and grow seedlings for people. The rarer the seed the better. Many of her plants on display were started using Thompson Morgan seeds from England. Customers can call Sylvia at 360-598-4290 or email her at sypeters@hotmail.com.

Many of the gardens featured plants in containers. One combo was autumn joy sedum, ajuga, bacopa, lavender, pansies and lavender cotton. These plants (except for the pansy) will outgrow the pot in a year (maybe two) but can all be transplanted into the garden. Another striking container had purple ajuga with evening primroses. The evening primroses are tall and have yellow blooms and the ajuga is low growing and spills over the edge of pots. A perfect combination.

I was entranced by the pristine leaves of a ligularia. I gave up on them in my garden because of slug appetites. But this stately beauty was planted in a large whiskey barrel. Suddenly a lightbulb went on in my head. Why not plant ligularia in a huge pot in my own garden and ring the container with a three-inch wide (maybe six-inch) band of copper. It would prevent any slugs from plundering the ligularia. (Copper shocks their slimy little systems.) I'll report to you on the success (or not) of this venture.

One gardener answered one of our admiring comments with this statement, "People don't try things because they don't know how. It doesn't matter that you don't know how, just try it anyway." I loved that statement. It reinforces my motto of gardening, "There are no rights or wrongs in gardening." Remember, if you make a mistake just return the dead plant to the compost pile and it will become great organic matter. And then you'll have an excuse to go out and buy one or several more plants.

Tip of the Week: It's the perfect time to plant carrots. Moisten the soil first. Plant rows of radish seeds. Cover lightly with soil. On top of these rows sprinkle carrot seeds and lightly sprinkle with more soil (just a dusting). Water each day. In a few days the radishes will sprout up and you'll know where your ferny carrot leaves will soon appear. Jan Bahr shared this tip with me. It was her grandmother's technique.

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