

The best thing about having your own garden column (besides writing it) is meeting and hearing from so many gardeners in Kitsap County. Happy Valentine's Day to everyone reading this column.

To celebrate Valentine's Day I thought you'd like to hear about a bouquet of Kitsap County folks who commuted to Seattle to participate in the recent Northwest Flower and Garden Show. It's impossible to cover everyone in the county who exhibits or participates in the show in 800 words or less, but here's a peak at some and how they contributed to this year's event.

2001 marked the return of students' gardening displays. FFA members from North Kitsap High School and Junior High designed and constructed window box displays and miniature gardens at the Show. The entire group also combined their talents to create and maintain (over the run of the show) the display garden in the sixth floor food court. Students creating window boxes were: Royce Ek, Andrea Doleman, Rachael Pipo, Whitney Dodd, Jessica Armstrong, Jackie Brier, Tiffany Wisnant, Darrell Roberts, Lacey Powell. Miniature Garden creators were: RaeLynn King, Ashley Trussell, Kristen Oas, Laurel Lederer, Tony Lederer, Kristen Falk, Serena Papineau, Celena Taylor and Katie Beaver. The team of Ek and Doleman received a second place for their window box and Pipo, Dodd and Armstrong received third place. All miniature gardens received honorable mention.

For the last five years Kitsap County Master Gardeners have planned and installed "vignettes" (small show gardens) to educate gardeners about plants they can use in their own landscapes. This year's vignette called "Made in the Shade" received a judges' first place award. Master Gardener creators Megan Allen, Sue Bennett, Margie Bruenig, Jeannette Fox, Gary Gratrix, Walter Holland, Marye Jackson, Virginia Jones, DeLona Kent, Sheri Kiley, Karen Schoepel and Carol Wood worked on this project for several months planning, designing and creating. You can receive a copy of their shady plant picks by calling the Extension Office at 337-7157 or pick up a copy at this year's MG Plant Sale at the Fairgrounds May 4 and 5.

Poulsbo resident Steve Martin of Woodland Gardens has a passion for growing plants that thrive in our sometimes soggy and dreary climate. In fact Steve started working at the Bloedel Reserve when he was a high school student nearly thirteen years ago. He is part of the staff that maintains the gardens at the Reserve and comes up with new plantings each year. If you bring home hostas from Savage Plants, Valley Nursery or Bainbridge Gardens there's a high probability they were propagated and nurtured by Steve. Right now Martin's nursery is at his mom's garden but he and his wife have purchased five acres in Chimacum with the plan to open a nursery there in the near future. Currently you can meet Steve selling his delightful and healthy plants only at the Northwest, San Francisco and Portland Garden Shows.

Last but not least I'd like you to know about Digitalis (Didge) Pearson and some of her friends new and old. Yes that's her real name. She's named after the plant. And let me tell you being around her gets your heart pumping. I've never met anyone with the energy of this sunshiny woman. Didge has worked on the Show staff for two years. This year some of her helpers were Venita Caldwell, Charlotte Lombard, Joan Gustavson, and moi. You may have seen us herding school kids, running errands, taking tickets, keeping your packages and belongings secure or answering a myriad of questions.

It was great to get an inside peak at the real workings of the show. Chairman Duane Kelly's mantra is "to make the show the most wonderful and pleasant experience a visitor can have."

When asked about working the show Charlotte Lombard said "I love the smell. It's a wonderful thing to do this time of year. Visitors are great. It takes away the gray days and is a breath of spring." Didge added, "It's the most exhilarating garden experience you can have in February even when the snow is coming down. The Show management is superb, the temporary staff is upbeat and it's fun to interact with the vendors as well as the attendees."

Venita Caldwell sums up the Northwest Flower and Garden Show whether you're working or visiting saying, "The reason I keep going to the Show is because it always inspires a spiritual spring in my interior winter landscape."

You can email comments to Peg at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.