

About two weeks ago I had the extreme pleasure of touring the new facilities shared by the Silverdale Water District and Central Kitsap Fire and Rescue at 5300 NW Newberry Hill Road in Central Kitsap. The landscaping around the facility was designed as a learning center for the public to study and learn about water-efficient landscaping.

Morgan Johnson, General Manager of the Silverdale Water District, conducted my tour of the facility and the surrounding landscaping. The project has, so far, received over \$100,000 in donations and grants. Additional donations of time and materials came from: Craig Powell of Northwest Rock in Kingston (constructed and donated an incredible recirculating water feature); Toro and Familian (irrigation system and supplies); Ron Philips of Emu Topsoil (compost and soil) and the City of Tacoma (Tagro).

Under construction and soon to be completed is an interactive area available to visitors entering the building. The public can use interactive computers in the lobby to discover how various landscape practices effect water usage and conservation. Later this year Master Gardeners and Master Composters will be onsite during the growing season conducting educational tours of the area and answering questions about composting and water-wise gardening practices. Visitors will also explore a compost demonstration site.

Landscaping surrounding the building utilizes native plants and water wise plantings. Gardeners will experience firsthand the kinds of plantings to use at their own property. They'll see which lawns work best in our area. The display lawns and garden areas have monitoring equipment and visitors can access water usage on the computers seeing for themselves how much water is needed to maintain lawns and plantings.

People can examine an assortment of irrigation systems (traditional spray, low volume spray, above ground drip and subterranean drip). Hands on displays will be included and visitors will be able to manipulate the assorted systems.

Plantings around the building include color zones – orange/red, yellow/green, blue/violet. You'll see what plants you might want in your own gardens. Lawn area displays will include perennial ryegrass, bonsai fescue and Kentucky bluegrass as well as panels of low water consuming groundcovers. Groundcovers include: strawberry clover, English daisy and yarrow. A flagstone pathway meanders through this area.

A native plant display area will showcase plants with drought tolerance such as small-hip rose, Nootka rose, Snowberry, red-flowering currant, Oregon grape, Douglas fir, Western red cedar, vine maple, sumac, wax myrtle, kinnikinnick, salal, sword fern, bleeding heart, columbine, barren strawberry, serviceberry, red huckleberry and evergreen huckleberry.

Already the new center looks spectacular and Morgan and the rest of the Water Department and Fire Department staff offer welcome greetings to anyone visiting their site. If you just can't wait until late spring to see it in full splendor I'll bet they won't mind if you drop by now. But remember to stop back several times during summer and into fall. You can contact Morgan Johnson at 360-447-3500 or mjohnson@swd16.org.

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