

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for What's Up 9-17-03) , ©2005

The Year 2003 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Washington State University Master Gardener Program. In fact Washington was the first state in the nation to have a Master Gardener Program that has since grown and flourished in all fifty states, Canada and overseas. It all began in 1973 in King, Pierce and Spokane Counties and has now spread in Washington State to 105 communities in 171 locations. In 2001 more than 3100 MGs spent 182,000 hours serving 338,000 citizens in Washington State alone. Those figures only reflect the hours and contacts that were officially reported.

Kitsap's MG Program was established shortly thereafter. Kitsap has ten WSU Master Gardeners who've put in more than twenty years of volunteering as Master Gardeners. Bainbridge Island's Margaret Bonifaci (1974), Poulsbo's Dick Keene (1979), Bremerton's Dorothy Martin (1979), Jim Trainer (1981); B. L. DeVore (1983); Julia Pickering (1983); Jenette Cain (1983) and Port Orchard's Virginia Jones (1982) will all be honored at the annual Kitsap County Master Gardener Potluck on September 27.

Several of these early volunteers traveled to Seattle to receive their training. Margaret was in the second class of MG volunteers trained in Washington State and Dorothy Martin was actually the Master Gardener Coordinator for several years. Dorothy is also well-known for her work in the Open-Class Horticulture Department at the Kitsap Fair and also for her presentations to groups throughout the county on the topic of insects. She's been fondly called "the bug lady." Jim Trainer is a "Tree Educator" for Puget Sound Energy. He's been called "Kitsap's Johnny Appleseed." Dick Keene coordinated the Poulsbo Market Master Gardener Clinic from its beginning and retired last year when he had to slow down because of kidney dialysis. Julia Pickering gives talks all over the County on the topic of roses. Her neighbors in Central Kitsap walk by her garden to admire her plants, especially the roses. Virginia Jones, Jenette Cain and B.L. DeVore worked together at Anna Smith Garden in Tracyton, the first demonstration garden in Kitsap County.

The goal of the MG Program is to provide research-based information in the areas of: Environmental Stewardship, Home Horticulture and Integrated Pest Management. In other words Master Gardeners help other gardeners, both young and old learn all about horticulture. Master Gardeners staff Diagnostic and Educational Clinics (answering questions about sick plants, how to grow and keep plants growing, identifying plants and even grief counseling when plants die; insect and spider identification is also part of clinic duty). Gardeners can find MGs at eleven Diagnostic and Educational Clinic locations throughout the County April through September. The Extension Office Clinic is staffed by MGs all year long.

During the months of April through October classes and information sessions are held at Anna Smith Garden in Tracyton; Bainbridge Island Helpline House; Givens Water Wise Garden in Port Orchard; Northwest College of Arts Garden in Poulsbo; Raab Park Youth and Community Garden in Poulsbo; Port Orchard Visitor's Center; and Retsil Veteran's

Home and Cemetery in Port Orchard. Kitsap Master Gardeners also give educational talks and presentations to groups and schools. Many Kitsap WSU Master Gardeners do double or triple volunteer duty as Master Weed Advisors and Master Composters delivering educational programs to the public on the topics of Noxious Weeds and Composting.

What does it take to become a WSU Master Gardener in Kitsap County? All it takes is a willingness to learn and a desire to share what you've learned with your community. Application packets for the Kitsap WSU MG Program are mailed out the middle of October every year and classes are on Fridays from 8:30 to 4 p.m. mid January through the first week in April. The 2004 classes begin January 16 continuing through April 2. There is a materials fee of \$125. No one is refused for inability to pay. Scholarships are available and payments are accepted. To apply for the program contact Peg Tillery at 360-337-7224 or email ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us. Provide your name, mailing address and phone number and you'll receive an application packet the mid-October. Every person who completes the application must attend an orientation and interview to be accepted into the program. Fifty volunteers are selected and trained every year.

You can also visit the Master Gardener Website at <http://mastergardener.wsu.edu/> or to read more about the history of the Program in Washington State visit <http://mastergardener.wsu.edu/words/mgearlyhistory>.