

GET THE DIRT by Peg Tillery (for 9-25-09) – Gardeners Can Be Beach Watchers Too

Fall is the annual time of year to sign up to become a WSU Kitsap Extension Master Gardener. Applications are sent out on October 15, via email. Group interviews and orientation this year are on Thursday November 12. Sent your name, address, email, and phone number to ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us to receive the application. For more information about this great program check out the WSU Kitsap Extension MG horticulture web page at <http://kitsap.wsu.edu/hort/index.htm>

Another WSU Kitsap Extension volunteer education program begins this coming month on October 23. The WSU Kitsap Extension Beach Watcher program (a partnership with WSU Kitsap Extension and Washington Sea Grant) is for those who may be interested in learning how to protect and preserve a favorite beach; or are concerned about development and its impact on our natural resources; want to learn about the geology and biology of our Kitsap Peninsula; are interested in surrounding themselves with terrific new people who share a love of nature; or wish to find a new way to give something back.

The original WSU Extension Beach Watcher Program began in Island County (Whidbey Island) 20 years ago. It was modeled after the WSU Extension Master Gardener Program where volunteers complete nearly 100 hours of education and then over the next two years complete an additional 100 hours of giving back and sharing what they've learned with those in their communities.

You may have recently seen the commercials saying "Puget Sound Starts Here." Or you may have received a letter or notice of the Shoreline Management Plan meetings being held throughout the county. But, did you know that our county alone includes nearly 300 plus miles of shoreline? And that doesn't even count all the miles along our streams and lakes in the county. We are blessed (for lack of better words) to live here in possibly one of the most beautiful places in the world, or at least in the United States.

If you're a gardener, or spend any time outdoors you are already connected to the earth. As gardeners you get your hands dirty and you watch the seasons pass and the plants evolve, grow, mature and become the food for the next generation of plants to follow. Many gardeners have told me they feel more connected to the earth when they're out in their gardens. Or you may feel connected to the water and sea when you're walking along the shore or driving across one of our many bridges here in Kitsap County.

Also, if you're a gardener, you realize that not only the land and the plants, but also the water that flows onto, over and through this place we call home is also important. Did you know that water makes a complete cycle? The rain falls from the sky, the plants absorb some of it into their foliage and roots and some flows into the streams and other bodies of water, but ultimately it all returns to the atmosphere and then the cycle starts all over again. It's all connected and part of our cycle of life here in Kitsap County.

If you'd like to know more about how that water cycle works, how the land, sea and sky are connected and how the plants, people and creatures all interconnect and what we can all do to appreciate and take care of our small part of the universe then the WSU Kitsap Extension Beach Watcher Program may be for you.

In Kitsap County the Beach Watcher Program is a partnership between WSU Kitsap Extension and Washington Sea Grant. Part I of the 3-part WSU Kitsap Extension Beach Watcher Program begins on Friday October 23 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. This is a 5 week course and the cost is \$40 per person for materials. Part II (the marine environment and marine life) and Part III (Native Plants, Riparian and Shoreline Zones) will be offered in spring and summer 2010. All three parts will be repeated each year.

Contact Peg Tillery 360-337-7224 ptillery@co.kitap.wa.us for an application and course outline. The deadline for signing up is October 16 to allow us time to get all the course materials copied and ready and assembled for the class attendees.

The training isn't free but it's a terrific deal that works two ways. There is a \$40 fee to offset printing costs. In return for this unique educational opportunity, all new Beach Watchers agree to sign a contract committing to 50 hours of volunteer community outreach for two consecutive years. There are many ways to fulfill the time commitment and the hours add up quickly. It is fun, it is easy, and we can help tailor your service to your talents, interests and comfort level. Some volunteers participate in intertidal monitoring of beaches. Others speak at schools and community meetings, lead beach walks, give nature talks or troll the shorelines for trash and noxious weeds.