



Neely Mansion Demonstration Garden

The Neely Mansion is on the National Register for Historic Places, the Washington Register for Historic Sites and is a designated King County Landmark. It is also the site of the Neely Mansion Demonstration Garden. The mansion is a unique, two-story Victorian farmhouse sitting on two pastoral acres near Auburn.

The site became a Master Gardener Demonstration Garden for the first time in 2004. It was inactive for a while, but was granted recognition again in 2015. Master Gardener Carol Grimes, Neely Mansion Demonstration Garden Leader, recalls being intrigued by the historic home from the first time she saw it.



The Neely Mansion holds tours of the historic home as well as the Master Gardener Demonstration Gardens on Saturdays, June through August.

“In 2000, I read about an open house and was excited to see the mansion. But when I arrived, there was nothing there but a field of tall grass. ‘This can’t be right,’ I thought.” As it turned out, the open house was at the Neely-Soames Historic Homestead in nearby Kent. The mansion was built by Aaron Neely, son of David and Irene Neely who built the “homestead” farm in Kent. Interestingly, the Homestead is also a Master Gardener Demonstration Garden.

Carol, who is a member of the King County Master Gardener class of 2008, says she remembers receiving an email from Elaine Anderson in 2013 asking for MG volunteers. “It was for an event at the Neely Mansion,” recalls Carol. “The house was being painted, and they needed gardeners to lead 100 volunteers from a Latter Day Saint church in moving plants away from the house. I volunteered along with Master Gardeners Susan Bender and Rick Gillmore. In about three hours we identified the plants that needed to be saved and which were weeds or needed to be removed. The church volunteers dug a 12-foot long by 3-foot ditch to replant the plants. We did it all in about three hours,” adds Carol.

“Linda Van Nest, from the Neely Mansion Board, asked if I was interested in giving gardening advice to the Board and attending board meetings.” After years of neglect, the grounds needed a lot of help. There was nothing left of the original gardens. Carol readily took up the challenge.



Volunteers dress in period costumes for special events hosted at Neely Mansion throughout each year

“I continued to help at the Mansion, and we really started to work on it in July of 2014,” says Carol. “We had to wait until then because the west-facing porch was being renovated, plus Eagle Scouts were installing a drip line. But we had started clean-up projects before then.” Removal of blackberries, up to 30 feet deep, kept volunteers busy during the fall of 2014 and winter of 2015.

Three Master Gardeners currently sit on the Neely Mansion Board, which consists of nine members. In addition to Carol, Master Gardeners Pat Stacey and Don Homer serve on the board.

The Neely Mansion Demonstration Garden has 14 (and counting) gardens with a total of 2,636 square-feet. A 5,000 square-foot perennial wildflower meadow is in the works. The smallest garden is the Japanese herb garden at 9 square feet (located in a half whiskey barrel).

The Neely Mansion Demonstration Garden is intended to be authentic to its era and to the families who lived in there. Gardens include:

- The tea garden showcases plants that pioneers made tea from. “We planted wormwood in the tea garden in honor of Mrs. Neely, who enjoyed wormwood tea,” says Carol. “However, we do not recommend drinking wormwood tea.”
- The rose garden has 57 rose bushes, including heirloom and modern varieties
- The shade garden has an assortment of plants and includes year-round interest. MGs were surprised to see a revival of the Chocolate Vine in the shade garden.
- The culinary and medicinal/herb gardens showcase plants that pioneers used for cooking and medicinal purposes. “Mr. Neely liked horehound candy and this garden includes horehound plants,” says Carol.
- The multi-ethnic vegetable garden honors the heritage of the families who lived at the mansion – it has two beds dedicated to Asian vegetables and six beds for Victorian era and European influenced gardens
- The natural fiber dye garden showcases plants that Native Americans, pioneers and people today use to dye fabric
- A Victorian cutting garden features annual and perennial flowers for use at Mansion events
- A Japanese herbs garden
- A hops arbor on the property is true to the era and used for making beer
- A triangle perennial garden is planted near the front door and is designed to feature something of interest year-round
- Hydrangeas, calla lilies and trumpet vines are planted near the south fence



Amaranth “Loves Lies Bleeding”

- The front fence and sign garden is an Eagle Scout project, intended to be planted year-round with red, white and blue flowers

Next year, Master Gardeners plan to add a wildflower meadow, enlarge the dye and vegetable garden and plant an '1890 to 1980s Family Tribute Dahlia, Peony and Iris Garden' along the arbor.

MGs are planning to install honey bee hives that will pollinate May through October. "This will be a nice addition to the existing Mason bees that pollinate February through June and Leaf Cutters that pollinate July and August," says Carol. "We also see many different varieties of bumble bees," she adds. In addition, Neely Garden maintains a Lady Beetle nursery.

Master Gardener work parties are scheduled for Tuesdays and second Saturdays 10am to 3pm, and by appointment. The garden has enjoyed having 19 first-year interns and 11 second-year interns from throughout the region. Neely Garden welcomes all interested Master Gardeners and offers many opportunities to volunteer throughout the year.



Turtleheads from the cutting garden

The Annual Farmhouse Christmas Celebration at the Neely Mansion is a great time to visit the historic property. Events include mansion tours, which is decorated for the holidays, light refreshments served by docents in period costumes and traditional holiday music. The event takes place on December 5 at 12:30pm, 2pm, or 3:30pm and on December 6 at 12:30pm or 2pm. Reservations are required. Please RSVP at www.neelymansion.org or call 253-850-2777. Tickets are \$18 for adults, \$10 for 10 and under and \$15 for seniors.

The Mansion is open for tours Saturdays from 1 to 4pm in June through August. Group tours are available by appointment.

Special events in 2016 year include a Valentine Tea in February, a Spring Tea on May 7, a Vintage and Collectibles Appraisal Faire August 5 and 6. It will include a Friday evening gala and the appraisal event on Saturday. The annual Doll Tea is scheduled for August 20. Next year's Farmhouse Christmas Celebration will take place December 3 and 4, 2016. And keep your eyes open for a special event in June: An historic Japanese bath house sits on the Neely Mansion property, built by the Hori family who leased the property in 1929. The bath house is currently undergoing extensive renovations – a ribbon cutting and celebration is scheduled for June.

Neely Mansion is located at 12303 SE Auburn-Black Diamond Road near Auburn off Highway 18 at the Auburn-Black Diamond Road exit. For information about volunteering at the Neely

Mansion Demonstration Garden, contact garden leader Carol Grimes at 253- 202-0007 or carol.r.grimes@comcast.net.

History of Neely Mansion:

Five-year-old Aaron Neely traveled on the Overland Trail from Tennessee with his parents and two brothers. The family settled in the White River Valley (now known as Kent). The Neely's were among the earliest settlers in the area and played a major role in its development. By 1891, Aaron was a prominent landowner in Auburn and began the process of designing and constructing the two-story Victorian classic revival farmhouse. This unique home was completed in 1894. The Neely farm consisted of 284 surrounding acres on which he operated a dairy, planted potatoes and other crops. The property also included an orchard with apple, pear and cherry trees.

By the 1970s, the mansion had deteriorated. The Neely Mansion Association, a nonprofit historical society incorporated in August 1983, took over ownership of the mansion. For the past 30 years, the Neely Mansion Association has slowly worked to restore the mansion for the public. The house has been largely restored to its former glory.

The exterior of the house reflects a Southern manner house, but the influence of the Swiss/Swedish, Japanese and Filipino immigrant families (who later lived and worked in the mansion) is also displayed in exhibits inside the house. The Neely Mansion Association recently produced a DVD titled "If These Walls Could Talk," depicting vignettes in the lives of each of the five families who lived at the Victorian farmhouse (www.neelymansion.org/support/dvd/)



***The Japanese Bathhouse:** An historic Japanese bathhouse sits on the Neely Mansion property, built by the Hori family who leased the property in 1929. The bathhouse was a traditional aspect of Japanese life on the farm. The Neely Mansion bathhouse has been named a King County Landmark and is the only such structure existing in the county today. The Neely Mansion Association has received funding to restore the historic building, and work has begun. A ribbon cutting celebration is scheduled for June, 2016. [Click here to learn more about the Bathhouse...](#)*
