



Bellevue Demonstration Garden

The Hands-on, How-to Garden

...by Michelle Roedell, MGFKC Community Relations

What started as a soggy, weed-infested plot of land strewn with old tires and other debris became a highly regarded resource for the King County Master Gardener program. That soggy property is now the Bellevue Demonstration Garden (BDG).

The BDG is a cooperative venture with Bellevue Parks & Community Services. Established in 1984, this urban demonstration garden has grown from a single P-Patch surrounded by blackberries on a steep, rock-filled slope to the flourishing garden it is today. The BDG is a hands-on, how-to garden that creates solid learning experiences for the public and MG volunteers alike.



Bellevue Demonstration Garden's annual bed. BDG is a cooperative venture with Bellevue Parks & Community Services, photo courtesy Bellevuewa.gov

"The garden is truly a tribute to the vision, imagination, dedication and hard work of many individuals," writes retired Master Gardener Larry Davis in his history of the BDG. Larry was one of many Master Gardeners involved in the garden's development.

"I personally stumbled upon the garden many years ago while berry picking in the area," says Marcia Dillon, a member of the BDG steering committee. "I later started attending BDG's Harvest Festivals when my children were small and I fell in love with the garden. I set a goal for myself to become a Master Gardener and volunteer at BDG, which I was finally able to accomplish in 2012. It has been one of the best experiences of my life.

"One of the most unique things we offer is the incredible number of plants we grow," adds Marcia. "From dahlias, lilies and roses, to tomatoes, peppers and beans -- visitors are able to see many varieties of each, often the latest and greatest cultivars available, and various ways to grow them."



Indigo Blueberry tomatoes were a big hit at the garden in 2015

In 2015 'blue' tomatoes called Indigo Blueberries were planted at BDG. Marcia describes the unripe fruit as a deep, dark purple. As the tomatoes ripen, the fruit will turn red on the bottom. "This one plant, out of 25 otherwise stunning tomato varieties, garnered more attention from visitors than all of the other tomatoes combined," recalls Marcia. "It was fun to have so much interest in the plant, but also great from a clinic standpoint to be able to demonstrate the ripe reddish fruit versus the unripe purple fruit. Quite a few people asked for a taste as well, which we were able to provide right there."

The garden has over 40 demonstration beds and gardens. "Each of the beds has a bed manager and in some cases an assistant manager," explains Marcia. "Interns are encouraged to connect and be involved in their areas of interest. Some interns enjoy having the freedom to work in a variety of areas of the garden, whereas others have specific areas of interest and only want to work in those. We welcome all of them with open arms!"

In addition to the beds, the garden includes a diagnostic plant clinic, compost center, greenhouse and children's garden. A Saturday workshop series, offering topics on a wide range of gardening topics, runs from January through October. Workshops are open to the general public, and Master Gardeners earn 1.5 CE credits for attending. A link to the workshop schedule can be found at www.mgfk.org/resources/demonstration-gardens/bellevue-demonstration-garden.

The BDG has about 120 Master Gardeners on the roster, with roughly half maintaining very active schedules in the program. City of Bellevue volunteers work alongside the Master Gardeners.



Larry Davis and Bonny Nordgren at a Bellevue Demonstration Garden event. Photo by Emilie Castle

"The absolute best part of BDG is the people," says Marcia. "The garden itself is incredible, but being able to garden alongside such kind, knowledgeable and fun people is a truly great experience. I have learned more from our many bed manager experts than I could ever learn in a classroom or from a book. Our volunteers love to teach others what they know and it really shows. We also take field trips to local gardens (for fun and for CE) and get together socially several times a year."

BDG hosts two major events each year: a plant sale in late April and a Harvest Festival in September.

“We have an AWESOME plant sale at our garden the week prior to the CUH plant sale, and offer a wide variety of vegetable starts plus ornamentals,” says Marcia. The 2016 spring sale will take place on April 30. “We started this sale just a few years ago in an attempt to meet the underserved Eastside market, and the sale has become more successful each year. We also have a plant sale at our Harvest Festival in September which offers mostly ornamentals suitable for fall planting.”

On behalf of BDG Master Gardeners, Marcia invites you to visit. “BDG has easy access (just off 148th in Bellevue), and ample parking in our lot and on the street. We love visitors – come check us out!”

The Bellevue Demonstration Garden is located at 15500 SE 16th Street in Bellevue. It is open to visitors from dawn to dusk and is wheelchair accessible. For more information, visit www.mgfk.org/resources/demonstration-gardens/bellevue-demonstration-garden. Reach Marcia Dillon at dillon1962@att.net.

NOTE: The Bellevue Demonstration Garden and the BDG Clinic are so intertwined that information for both are related in this and the following article, which focuses on the clinic.