



The Foundation Connection

A monthly e-newsletter from the Master Gardener Foundation of King County

Drexie Malone and Carkeek Park Demonstration Gardens: *Bringing a Demo Garden to Life*

...by Master Gardener Drexie Malone



*Master Gardener Drexie Malone
(center) with MGs Kathy Pendas (l)
and Jane Johnson (r)*

Just after I began Master Gardener training classes in 2013 and began to be familiar with MG demonstration gardens in King County, I realized that the Carkeek Park Demonstration Gardens at Carkeek Park in northwest Seattle would be perfect for inclusion in the Master Gardener Program.

The gardens I had seen in various places in King County were gardens with a purpose, beauty, and organization. The Carkeek Gardens had purpose: showing backyard gardeners how to use native plants to support wildlife, reduce garden resources, and to garden organically. The gardens were beautiful (results of a couple of years of restoration, ~2011-2013) with their unique setting within a city urban forest and a 20-year history of pesticide-free, native,

wildlife-friendly gardens. The Carkeek Gardens had organization: the Seattle Parks Department oversaw the Park's and Gardens' grounds. Volunteer gardeners, working within the Parks' protocol with a volunteer/Parks contract, maintained the grounds and plants. There was support from the Carkeek Advisory Council, the neighborhood advisory body that helps guide the Park programs.

The Gardens are one of the few gardens in NW Seattle that emphasizes native plantings and backyard wildlife support. The Gardens meld into the Carkeek Forest which covers 200 acres. The Carkeek Gardens cover approximately one acre, includes 12 individual gardens, and are in need of constant attention, additions and planning for their future.

While volunteering as a Forest Steward at Carkeek Park, I noticed the Gardens had not been tended for some years. When the last Parks staff person left during the budget cuts of 2008-2010, it was clear someone needed to help steward these Gardens. That was when I met Deb Phare, our horticulturist, who had signed the first Seattle Parks/Carkeek Garden contract with Parks for support and establishing protocols for the Gardens. Now we are in our fifth year of garden maintenance. Deb is our lead gardener, and I head up the Master Gardener program at Carkeek.

Deb Phare and I presented a proposal to the MG Program Coordinator for King County, Elaine Anderson, in 2013, the year I graduated from the MG program. Several Foundation members

(Peggy Smith, Sharon Englund and Dave Hanower) became interested in the Carkeek Gardens and visited in 2015. With their support, it became possible to envision Carkeek Gardens as part of the MG Program, and in mid-2015 Elaine Anderson added the Gardens as a Seattle and King County Master Gardener Demonstration Garden.

Originally, we were a band of two volunteer gardeners, Deb and I, and it is amazing how much two people can do when they work EVERY Tuesday. Now, we bask in the help of two more dedicated and consistent MGs, Jane Johnson (class of 2015) and Mary Vincent (class of 2013). And we have had offers of help from several MGs from the class of 2015, the class of 2016, and from the Ballard Farmers Market and Woodland Park Zoo Clinics.

It took me 40 years to become a gardener. While my mother loved displaying her hand-tended, over-wintered, and bountiful begonias and geraniums each summer, I was not interested. With my own family, I tended a yard but did not really garden until one day I was compelled to re-imagine the 1960s yard I had lived with for ten years. There was just something about all those junipers, pink azaleas, and pink rhododendrons that suggested an alternate plan. I have added some native plants to my own garden, but mostly I try to make it as beautiful as possible, whatever form that takes.

It was not until I retired from a nursing and librarian career that I began volunteering in the Carkeek Forest, and along with a group of lively foresters remove invasives and plant native trees and shrubs. Most of the foresters live near Carkeek Park, as I do; I live in a neighborhood less than one mile away—Olympic Manor. The contrast between the ‘wild’ forest and the neighborhood I live in could not be greater. Where my neighbors and I live on what used to be a golf course and now does not support a tree taller than thirty feet (for the most part), the Carkeek Forest is natural and extensive, and not groomed.

I became a MG during the first 4-year period of Carkeek Gardens restoration. It was a logical step for a gardener who had come to appreciate the world of plants, soil and wildlife. While I worked in the larger context of the forest, I favored the gardening aspect of Carkeek Park. The MG program supported both private and public gardening. I still work in both capacities-public and private gardening.

I knew I needed some perspective for this gardening compulsion. I learned that WSU offered backyard gardeners the same scientific information that its students and researchers access and is passed on to the public through MG Clinics throughout King County. I can admit now that I had intended to put in my two intern years with the Ballard Farmers Market Clinic and then move on to activities I preferred, working in the ‘real’ Gardens of Carkeek. But I got



Drexie with Kathy Pendras at the annual MG training Volunteer Fair

hooked along the way with the knowledgeable and impressive gardeners who staff the Clinic table each Sunday. And it was these same Clinic masters who have helped with the Carkeek volunteer programs each time we hold an event.

There is always another project in resurrecting the next garden area. Where once we worked only on the original dozen gardens, now we have reached into the parking surround and the meadow surround, identifying areas that will support shrubs and flowering plants, adding focal points to a forested area.



Drexie with Master Gardeners Anne Seidel, Kathy Pendras and Ann Swatkiewicz at the Clinic table on Earth Day 2016

Read Drexie's article about the formation and location of the Carkeek Park Demonstration Gardens [here](#)