



## The Foundation Connection

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

### Vashon Island Ace Hardware Clinic: *Small Group, Big Commitment*

...by Master Gardener Marty Byrne



*Master Gardeners Nancy van Roessel and Wendy Blair staff the Vashon Ace Hardware Clinic*

According to Master Gardener Rick Edwards, the Master Gardener Clinic serving Vashon Island gardeners almost went silent. It can be challenging to maintain the energy with a small group of Master Gardeners. “But,” says Rick, “we had a group meeting and did some brainstorming about the group and decided that we should at least co-share a leadership so that more people were involved in that way.” The group wanted to continue, allowing MGs to acquire hours and support the Vashon Dry Garden. “Everybody goes ‘Oh, no, no, no, we’ve always been here and we will always be here.’”

The Clinic alternates Fridays and Saturdays through the season at the Ace Hardware on Vashon. Rick credits the group’s rejuvenation to their brainstorming meeting and people stepping up, including Co-Leader Phyllis Kaiden. He believes the community has felt that energy also. Rick notes that there are a lot more visits to the Clinic. Previously, there might be just a few people who happened to walk by. Now 25 or 30 people will come to the Master Gardeners with questions. Recently, the Clinic took in seven specimens to send to the Diagnosticians. Master Gardener Wendy Blair has taken on publicity for the group. She has posted information in the island’s newsletter, distributed posters and spread the word. A librarian, she’s in touch with the community.

Much of Vashon Island is still rural and the questions the Vashon Clinic gets are quite seasonal. Some of the most common questions have to do with cover crops for residents’ gardens, pastures or orchards. There is rarely a question about lawns. Rick says, “It’s pretty rural here and people just don’t have the expectation of having a pristine lawn.” There are questions about fruit trees and perennials when they are in bloom, questions about conifers and then questions about when to plant tomatoes.

Because they are on an island, finding CE opportunities can also be a challenge. The Vashon group meets that challenge by touring each other’s gardens to discuss garden problems and growing techniques. Master Gardeners can also attend the meetings of the Vashon Island Fruit Club for CE credit.

The Vashon Island Master Gardeners meet a couple times a year, like most other clinics. They will hold a pre-season startup party where they do their planning and signups for the Clinic dates and then a post-season party to talk about what they’ve learned. Thirteen Master Gardeners staff the Clinics and maintain the Vashon Dry Garden. The group includes emeritus MG Helen Meeker, who was in the very first Master Gardener class. These are dedicated gardeners: one of the group also works in the Cesar Chavez Demonstration Garden and another helps staff the West Seattle Clinic.

“There really is a sense of excitement around the Program this year,” Rick says. That excitement shows itself in the increased number of visitors to the Master Gardener Clinics. “People are much more into what we are doing and how we need to stick together and keep it viable. One emeritus, Ed Turner, volunteered to do nine clinics this year.” That’s commitment.

*The Vashon Clinic operates from 9:30 am to 2:30 pm alternate Fridays and Saturdays from May to early September. Locate the Clinic and specific Clinic dates using the [Map to King County Clinics and Gardens](#).*