



Master Gardener of the Month

Pat Roome and How the Master Gardener Foundation Got its Start

When Pat Roome of Bellevue graduated from the third WSU Extension Master Gardener class in 1975, she had no idea what a crucial role she would play in maintaining the Master Gardener program itself.

“I had been volunteering as a Master Gardener for two or three years. We were struggling at the clinics...we took our own books, our own chairs and tables. If we saw two people, we thought we’d done well,” remembers Pat. “There was no money for anything.”

But George Pinyuh, long-time WSU Area Extension Agent, had an idea. “George knew that the only way to go forward was to establish a foundation. And he asked me to start it!” says Pat.

She gathered together about a half-a-dozen other Master Gardeners to work on the foundation idea. “Our group decided what to call it and how to run it. The Foundation was established as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 1984 and we were on our way.

“We were so new and informal that we wrote the By-Laws at that very first meeting held at the Bellevue Library public meeting room. We wrote them for ourselves, how we’d like the see the organization run,” says Pat. “We didn’t care who was President, but everyone voted. As it happened, there were three Pats in the group (including Pat Campbell and Pat Field) and when ‘Pat’ won for President, we didn’t know which Pat was voted in! So we, the three Pats, traded the President role after one-year terms. I think I was the second Pat to be President.”

Pat continues her stroll down memory lane. “Our main goal for funding was to raise enough money to put a *Sunset Garden* book in every clinic.” But how to raise the money was another thing.

“We decided to hold a plant sale and invited all Master Gardeners to bring plants to Tilth’s parking lot.” There was an impressive array of plants, but suddenly everyone realized that the sale wasn’t going to be held until the next day. “We couldn’t just leave the plants overnight!” says Pat. “A young man, a Master Gardener, came to the rescue. He brought his sleeping bag and slept in the parking lot with the plants.



“It was a one-day sale. We made \$600 and were very impressed with ourselves,” declares Pat. The clinics got their *Sunset Garden* books.

“I stayed with the Foundation for three years – that was the term limit and I was happy to hand it over,” she recalls. “Slowly, more people became involved. And then George Pinyuh felt that the concept of the Master Gardener Foundation should be extended to other counties. Pierce and Snohomish Counties formed Foundations and one-by-one, other Foundations formed.

“I was involved when the State Foundation was formed, too,” says Pat. “I never held a position in the State Foundation. Master Gardeners are not a competitive bunch and no one really cared if you were President or not,” she adds.

Pat also recalls when King County removed all of Extension’s funding from its budget. “Several of us tried to help by going around to different cities to ask for contributions, including asking the Mayor of Seattle.” Elaine Anderson, WSU Extension Master Gardener Program Coordinator, recalls that the transition was painless for the King County Master Gardener program. “We already had office space to move into (at the Center for Urban Horticulture), and our Foundation was able to contribute the money the County had been giving the program from its annual budget.”

Some of Pat’s other notable garden-related accomplishments include being a founding member of the Bellevue Botanical Garden Society, being involved with the creation of the Master Gardener Bellevue Demonstration Garden, working as a long-time landscape design consultant and contractor during a time when women were not readily accepted in that role. “I helped to create the Association for Women in Landscaping in King County as a way for women to have a voice. The organization has since dissolved because (thankfully) women are now an accepted part of the industry.”

Pat has many stories about the creation of the Bellevue Botanical Garden. “I was hired by Cal and Harriet Shorts, who donated their acreage to Bellevue for the Garden,” she recalls. The Shorts joined forces with neighbors Iris and Bob Jewett to convince the city to preserve the land as a botanical garden. “Harriet wanted me to design the groundcover garden. She wanted it to look like the Chase Garden in Orting.” Since Harriet had been in charge of the groundcover sale table at the Washington Park Arboretum for 25 years, Pat asked her to come up with a list of her favorite plants. “Harriet was clear that she didn’t want any trees or shrubs. She gave me a list of sun-loving groundcovers.” Pat pointed out that the site had trees on it and they needed to use groundcover for a shady site. “Harriet said, ‘Go tell the Parks Department to take the trees down.’ Bellevue Parks said no. ‘I’m sorry, Harriet, but you’ll have to come up with a new list,” she recalls telling Harriet. Pat created the shade-loving groundcover garden, personally digging in many, many cubic yards of “moo-doo” at the heavy-clay site. As fate would have it...“During the Inauguration Day Storm in 1993, every one of those trees fell down so all of a sudden it was a sun-loving site!” Pat was also involved with redesigning the stream, waterfall and pond feature at Bellevue Botanical Garden.

At age 82, Pat remains an active Master Gardener. “I give talks at the Bellevue Parks’ Ranger Station,” she says. “I speak on 32 topics, but the most popular one is ‘Growing your own vegetables.’ The last one, held in January this year, was standing-room only!”

In June, she gave a talk on alternatives to pesticides and herbicides. Another popular talk is 'Growing in the Shade.'

Pat also remains active in her own garden. When Pat moved into her house, it was a very overgrown half-acre at the top of Bellevue's Clyde Hill. "It's pure sand up there, left by the glaciers when they receded. I have super drainage! I've been adding two to three inches of compost every year, so now it's only 70% sand! You either have a beach or a bog – you can't change it, only modify it."

Pat has been working her half-acre ever since moving in 50 years ago. "I have a huge vegetable garden and all these espaliered fruit trees. And I've worked to have trees you'll find nowhere else in the area. I have visited gardens in Southwest England, and it's amazing how many seeds ended up landing in my pocket," says Pat with a wink. "One of those seeds is now a 5-foot tall tree." Pat also works to have a garden that blooms 365 days a year. "In January I have five shrubs in full-bloom."

Pat came to the Northwest by way of England. "I grew up in suburban London and my present garden reflects the landscape I grew up with," she says. "We had an orchard of 16 trees and a greenhouse. I remember being 4 years old and picking out Snapdragons from a seed tray and throwing out the ones with white stems. That year we only had red snaps. I had my own topiary of an airplane when I was nine and maintained it myself. World War II forced us to dig up the lawn for vegetables, and we also kept chickens and ducks.

"When I finished high school," continues Pat, "my only choices were being a teacher, a nurse or to work in an office—horticulture was not an option. I got my RN from University of London and married an electrical engineer. Since there were few jobs available for my husband in England, we emigrated – first to Montreal then to Seattle. We came to Boeing in 1958."

Those early days in North America were far from easy for the Roome family. "We were broke when we left England for the job in Montreal. Then the company canceled the project three weeks later, but made a deal with Boeing to take on the engineers they had brought over. We left Montreal on the train on December 12, where it was minus 23 degrees. In Calgary, it was minus 44. When we arrived in Vancouver, B.C. it was plus 44 and felt like a heat wave!" recalls Pat. "We made our way to Seattle, where they housed us downtown at the Claremont Hotel until we could find a house."

Pat tells the harrowing story of her young family losing all their valuables during the trip. "We moved with our 6-month-old baby, so you can imagine what our suitcases were filled with on the train. We put our car on another train, and left it unlocked because it was packed with items like blankets, sheets, towels, pots and pans..." The car and contents arrived safely, but the Roomes had placed their valuable belongings in storage in Montreal to be shipped later. "That warehouse went up in flames. We arrived in Seattle destitute."

The couple eventually found a tiny rental house in West Seattle they could afford, and one that accepted children. "All the ads for rentals said 'no children.' We got desperate, took our baby daughter to one rental and held her up to the 92-year-old owner and

asked, 'Is she children?' 'No, she is not children,' came the reply. We moved in the day before Christmas." They threw a "Boxing Day" party, a British tradition, for all the folks still stranded at the Claremont Hotel.

When the Roomes' son was born three years later, that tiny house no longer held the family. They wanted to find land where they could build a home and somewhere with enough gardening space for Pat. While they still didn't have a lot of money, as it turned out they had their pick of locations. It was during the 'Boeing Bust' when the infamous billboard queried, *Will the last person leaving Seattle turn out the lights?*

Pat and her husband enjoy having their daughter, son, and their families, which include five grandchildren, all living close-by.

Today, the Master Gardener Foundation of King County continues to support and promote the WSU Extension Master Gardener Program, providing more than two-thirds of the cost to run the Program in King County. The Foundation provides the resources for 38 plant answer clinics throughout King County, from Bothell and Woodinville to Auburn and Maple Valley, including several farmers' markets. Without the Foundation, there would be no Master Gardener program in King County.