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http://www.seattlepi.com/nwgardens/329522_waterwise01.html



New plants in Bellevue Botanical Garden's Waterwise Garden are filling in nicely after a first summer. (Andrew Buchanan /)

NW Gardens: Water-wise and people-friendly

Bellevue Botanical Gardens takes whatever nature's dishes out and turns it into a resourceful beauty

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By MARTY WINGATE
SPECIAL TO THE P-I

When an opportunity presents itself in the garden, we need to take advantage of it. That's the lesson of the newly expanded Waterwise Garden at the Bellevue Botanical Garden.

It was all part of the grand design of the garden, sponsored by Bellevue Utilities to teach visitors how to have a beautiful, natural landscape that also protects and conserves our water resources.

"We want people to consider alternatives, to go beyond lawns," says Patricia Burgess, resource conservation program administrator. To that end, even though a section of lawn disappeared, the garden became more people-friendly.

To incorporate an apple tree and a linden, the line of lawn changed from a fairly straight line to a soft 90-degree turn. As if visitors were just waiting for the opportunity, the space immediately became the perfect spot for a picnic.

After the turf was removed, 3 to 4 inches of two-way Cedar Grove soil mix (half compost, half sand) was tilled in. Soil is key to the success of a garden, and starting from scratch was the opportunity to improve the tilth of the area.

Stenn Designs created the original plan for the Waterwise Garden, which opened in 1994, and Jil and Howard Stenn have continued to be a part of the development and additions.

The addition around the apple and linden trees was designed last fall, but when a conifer in the lawn just to the west fell during last winter's windstorm, alterations to the planting plan were needed.

The west-facing edge became sunnier and so was planted up with *Sedum* 'Red Emperor' and colorful coral bells, including the golden foliage of x *Heucherella* 'Sunspot' and 'Spotlight'

and purple-leaved *Heuchera* 'Plum Pudding.'

Moving farther under the canopy of the trees, evergreen shrubs with light foliage, including *Lonicera nitida* 'Lemon Beauty' and *Osmanthus heterophyllus* 'Goshiki,' provide bright swaths. The entire planting creates a high ground-cover garden under the trees, and the slight rise in elevation means that, from the road, the visitors center will be effectively hidden.

Snaking among all the plants is a watering system, which sometimes surprises visitors but really shouldn't.

"Waterwise" doesn't mean "waterless." The garden showcases good water practices, including the drip system installed in the new bed. The in-line emitters, located every 12 inches in the thin hose -- buried just under mulch -- water according to need, because they are hooked up to citywide weather sensors that monitor rainfall.

Home gardeners can install a rain sensor to control watering systems. The devices can be incorporated into existing irrigation systems or part of the design of new watering methods, such as the drip used in Bellevue. At the very least, gardeners who want to become more aware of their water usage can use a low-tech rain gage or the irrigation index listed in the sidebar.

The plan for the new garden bed was adjusted to include the sunnier rim. It's a good example of how gardeners can best use their sites, even when the change is on a large magnitude, such as the loss of a tree.

Tree loss prompted renovation in areas of the Waterwise Garden, too. The top of a large deodar cedar broke off, taking out a pine tree on its way down. That event prompted staff members to evaluate the affected bed, and either take out damaged plants or take a wait-and-see approach. (The patient path is often difficult for gardeners, as we tend to want the recovery to be as quick as the change.)

Two large California wax myrtles (*Morella californica*) were flattened by the tree damage, but have recovered and are filling in the space. A *Virburnum tinus* weathered the storm well. Even an oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) that Burgess said barely survived is now healthy, although small.

"It's always good to give the garden a chance," Burgess said of the tree events. "Take a wait-and-see approach."

Plants in this renovated area are important for their ornamental value and because they function as a screen disguising a large electrical vault.

It is the dual nature of our gardens; we want them both to look good and to fulfill some other role. Add the third role in the Waterwise Garden: protecting our resources.

Within the garden display, changes are afoot. Two Douglas firs were lost to disease in the past few years, and that has opened up the canopy. The golden locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia') has more room to shine, but beyond that, plans have yet to be made for the area.


Except, of course, the continued encouragement to homeowners to get rid of just a little more lawn to make room for the color, texture and variety of wildlife that a well-chosen water-wise garden can grow and attract.

Resources

Bellevue is part of the Cascade Water Alliance cascadewater.org, which helps educate its customers on good water practices.

The Waterwise Garden (www.ci.bellevue.wa.us/5686.htm) is part of the Bellevue Botanical Garden



 Andrew Buchanan /

Vivid plant choices, including *Dicentra* 'Gold Heart,' keep the Waterwise Garden lively.

(bellevuebotanical.org), 12001 Main St., which is free and open daily.

The city of Bellevue sponsors natural-gardening classes in the fall. Preference is given to Bellevue residents, but if space allows, all are invited. For more information: 425-452-4127.

The Saving Water Partnership (savingwater.org) offers information and education, including the Natural Yard Care Guides, at its Web site and through the many utilities and water departments that are members. The guides include "Smart Watering," "Natural Lawn Care" and "Growing Healthy Soil."

Also available is "The Plant List," which was worked on by the Great Plant Picks staff (greatplantpicks.org). It divides up trees, shrubs, perennials and grasses by their cultural requirements.

Find the evergreen, flowering shrub *Viburnum tinus* 'Spring Bouquet' for sun to part shade in the "drought tolerant" list, and Hooker's fairybells (*Disporum hookeri*) for a shade-loving perennial. Learn that the dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*), a large deciduous conifer, can take standing water in winter and dry soil in summer.

Check the irrigation index for Seattle or your area from the Irrigation Water Management Society. It helps you calculate how much water your garden needs, according to the time of year and rainfall received. For more information: iwms.org/seattle_area.asp.

Thinking about removing more lawn? The Washington Toxics Coalition tells you how: watoxics.org/files/removing-lawn.pdf

Marty Wingate, a Seattle-based Master Gardener, has a master's degree in urban horticulture and is the author of two garden books. She can be contacted at: martywin@earthlink.net.

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