

# **Garden Rhapsodies Tour Report 2008**

## **Goals**

The Garden Tour is designed to create and strengthen the community norm that Common Sense Gardening is “the way” to garden. The tour features between ten and fourteen gardeners (depending on the number of gardens featured and the number of active gardeners in each household) acting as change agents and role models for the public to talk with and learn from. Host gardeners participate in the tour to highlight their personal integrated pest management practices including; personal strategies for reducing pesticide use in home landscapes, how to select and use slow-release fertilizers at appropriate times, tips for water conservation, compost in the gardens, and many other earth-friendly gardening techniques.

Garden Tour participants see the following practices in action in the gardens they tour:

- ❑ Effective, least- toxic pest controls such as physical and cultural methods, traps, and least- toxic pesticides
- ❑ Soil building with organic matter including compost
- ❑ Landscapes fertilized with slow-release fertilizers
- ❑ Wildlife habitat using native plants and undisturbed edges
- ❑ Water conservation techniques including low-water use plants, drip irrigation, soaker hoses, mulch, and reduction of lawn size
- ❑ Reduction of solid waste by composting and grass recycling
- ❑ Plantings to attract beneficial insects
- ❑ Use of “common-sense gardening” plants – those that are low-water use, native, and disease or insect resistant
- ❑ Storm water run-off reduction through closely planted areas, rain gardens, catchments, and ponds

## **Objectives**

- ❑ To coordinate a six hour Garden Tour with at least six gardens
- ❑ To attract at least 600 participants to the Tour
- ❑ To distribute 100 CSG guides and other written materials to support pesticide and waste reduction
- ❑ To receive evaluations from 20% of participants
- ❑ To coordinate the Tour between sections of Thurston County, Washington State University Master Gardener Foundation, Thurston County Master Gardeners, Washington State University Native Plant Salvage Project of Thurston County, and Olympia Symphony Guild to create stronger community ties
- ❑ To offer community-sponsored demonstrations in the gardens on CSG practices such as compost, rain gardens, water conservation, Great Plant Picks, etc.
- ❑ To have artists in action throughout the Tour and musicians playing in each of the gardens

## **Organizations**

The Garden Tour is a collaborative effort of Thurston County Environmental Health, Thurston County Water and Waste Management, Thurston County Stormwater, Washington State University Master Gardeners, Washington State University Native Plant Salvage Project, Thurston County Master Gardener Foundation, City of Olympia, and the Olympia Symphony Guild. Environmental Health staff coordinates the Tour including coordination of the Garden Tour Committee that includes representatives from the three non-profits. Eleven committee meetings form the organizational structure for the tour throughout the year. Committee members volunteer for specific tasks as identified by the coordinator.

## **Participation and Evaluations**

Our goal for attendance is to attract 600 people to the event. We have seen a slow decrease in the number of participants in the last three years. Many factors may contribute to the decrease in attendance such as, the general economic recession, decrease in business in nurseries (our primary ticket outlets), and the visibility and accessibility of the gardens on the Tour.

As we see from the chart below, the highest attendance in the last five years was when the Garden Tour was focused in a dense and compact neighborhood. In 2005, a significant number of people who attended the tour walked from garden to garden and those who did not were able to take a bus that came by every 10-15 minutes because of the close nature of all of the gardens. That year's tour attracted a significant number of people who had not attended the tour before with the ability to simply walk out of their front doors to visit their neighbors' gardens.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number in Attendance</b>
2008	511
2007	574
2006	585
2005	711
2004	550

Information from participants is collected through evaluations that are distributed and collected at the tables on the day of the Tour or sent to Environmental Health's office in the days and weeks after the Tour. Evaluations provide a sense of who the Garden Tour audience is and what gardening practices they engage in.

We received evaluations from 132 people (26%), exceeding our 20% evaluation collection goal. Out of these 132 evaluations, 81 (61%) had attended the Tour before. Forty-five (55%) of those return participants utilized the shuttle bus service. This is an encouraging number because we continue to see an increase in the number of participants getting used to riding the shuttle bus rather than depending on their personal cars.

Many of the Garden Tour participants who had attended previous tours responded that they had made changes in their gardens from ideas received at past tours. The most frequently cited changes made: planting native plants (12%), planting the right plant in

the right place (12%), composting (11%), close plant spacing (7%), new plant ideas (7%), general design ideas (7%), and mulching (7%). Other specific changes mentioned were: drip irrigation (5%), low water (4%), rough edges (4%) soaker hoses (2%), conservation (2%), water garden (2%), walkways (2%), beneficial insects (2%), rain barrel, hardscaping and worm bin.

The numbers of people who said that they would make changes in their yards based on information received at today's tour was as follows:

Evaluations provide direction for planning demonstrations and outreach materials for future Tours. We will seek demonstrations in 2009 on the items that people say they will try in their gardens or that they are not interested in. Two of the central tasks of education is to assist people in taking actions that they are already motivated to take as well as to highlight the importance, ease and ability to take actions that they may not currently be interested in. Based on evaluation results we will seek demonstrations on the following:

### **Publications, Demonstrations, Displays**

A total of **609 publications** were picked up from the six gardens during the Tour. The breakdown of publications is:

Aphids - 86  
How Does It Work - 42  
Calendar - 34  
Weeds - 44  
Lawn Care - 42  
Plan Before You Plant - 29  
Plant List - 48

### **Total CSG - 325**

Grow Smart - 19  
HH Companion - 61  
HHW Flyer - 24  
Landscaping Drainfield - 36  
Compost - 66  
Pet Waste - 52  
Water Conservation - 21  
Well Well Packet - 5

### **Total Other - 284**

Demonstrations in the gardens on the day of the Tour included: tool sharpening, Great Plant Picks, composting, pollinators, gravel mulches, drip irrigation, ivy removal, and container planting. One new educational aspect of the tour was to schedule demonstrations and displays that highlighted aspects already present in a garden. For example, one garden had a composting area that was underutilized. A Master Gardener/Recycler worked with those gardeners to improve their composting system in order to improve their ability to utilize yard and kitchen waste to create valuable compost that could be used in their garden. This same volunteer documented the suggestions and

changes that he made to the system to make it easier to maintain and use and staffed that compost area throughout the day of the tour to talk to participants about the system.

The demonstration on drip irrigation was used in a garden with an extensive drip irrigation system so that tour-goers could see the system working in the garden and then talk to a knowledgeable volunteer about how they could use the system in their own gardens. A new display highlighting drip irrigation was created for the tour that is now available for other events and groups to use.



Displays in the gardens included: pollinators, irrigation, gravel mulch, Great Plant Picks, ivy removal, native plants, and rain gardens. Ivy removal was used in a garden that was struggling to eradicate ivy and replace it with native plants. The rain garden display was designed for a garden that used a bio swale to deal with stormwater run off and could have benefited further from a properly designed and implemented rain garden.



Community groups with displays at the shuttle site included: Master Gardener Foundation, Master Composters with a compost bin sale, Native Plant Salvage Project, Environmental Health with pesticide-free pledges and signs, Terra Commons, South Sound Fruit Society, a local estuary group, Thurston Conservation District, and GRuB.



## **Publicity**

The most effective advertising is through *The Olympian*, including a Garden of the Month feature in the Home Section and an ad that runs 4 times a week for 1 week before the Tour. Out of 132 evaluations, people (%) knew about the Tour through *The Olympian*.

Word of mouth through friends and the Master Gardeners continues to be a major factor in raising people's awareness of the Garden Tour, with participants (%) stating that they learned about it through friends and people (%) who wrote "Master Gardeners" under "other" in response to how they knew about the Tour. Further publicity included press releases sent out to local media sources, a brief in the Green Pages, TCTV reader board, article in Stream Team news, Environment Page article, "save the date" article in spring issue of "Talkin' Trash," Earth Voices radio spot on MIXX 96, and an interview on KGY radio on the morning show. Staff responded to 73 phone calls in response to the publicity outreach.

The publicity that goes into the Tour, especially the newspaper articles, generates questions and feedback beyond Garden Tour participants. Posters and ads keep Common Sense Gardening in the public's eye for much of the summer gardening months. See Appendix for samples of publicity.

## **Gardens**

This year's gardens were previewed throughout the fall and spring of 2007. The gardens included three organic gardens and three gardens using least-toxic methods to treat weeds and pests. All of the gardens utilized compost, practiced mulching, appropriate plant placement, and other pest-prevention strategies.

From evaluations, we know that people were thrilled with the diversity of gardens and the unique beauty that each one cultivated. The gardens were all located on the Steamboat Island Peninsula with four of the landscapes leading directly to the water.



### Shuttle

With large numbers of people attending the Tour, the shuttle service is a valuable component for safety and convenience. The shuttle site has become a community gathering spot with the supporting organizations and other gardening and agriculture-related organizations providing information to the community.



The bus service provided the biggest challenge to the Garden Tour in 2008. After using the Laidlaw school buses in 2007 and hearing from a few (but loud) participants that school buses were uncomfortable, the committee made the decision to hire a local touring bus company, NA Charters, to provide three buses for the event. The Garden Tour coordinator made the arrangements for the service, making sure that drivers had routes

several weeks in advance, working with the company to make sure that bus stops were defined, and generally checking in to make sure that the shuttle service was ready and able to perform their tasks for the day of the event. Staff was assured that they were working with professionals and that everything would be taken care of.

The buses did not arrive at the shuttle location on the morning of the Tour until 10:00 am, although shuttle service should begin by 10:00 am. Drivers were not prepared with routes, asking the tour coordinator, “Where are we going?” and the most challenging aspect of the day’s event came before the buses had even left the shuttle site and the tour coordinator was informed that one of the buses (that was already loaded with passengers) had to leave the tour and go back to the bus barn to be exchanged with another bus. Needless to say, buses ran late all day causing back ups at the bus stops and frustrated shuttle users. We did hear from a few participants that they appreciated the large, luxury buses with restrooms on board, but the majority of the passengers who used the buses were not at all pleased with the timing, especially the long waits. Several passengers asked for a ticket refund because they didn’t get to see all of the gardens and the day at the shuttle site ended in frustration.

Recommendations for next year’s shuttle service include using Laidlaw (school) buses and hiring 5-7 buses so that people won’t have to wait longer than 15 minutes at a bus stop.

### **Budget**

Garden Rhapsodies is a unique partnership among government agencies and non-profit organizations. Major financial support comes from Thurston County and the City of Olympia. The three non-profits (Master Gardener Foundation, Native Plant Salvage Project, and the Olympia Symphony Guild) provide funding for the shuttle. Volunteer staffing for the gardens is provided by the non-profit organizations. The non-profits consider the Garden Tour an effective way of educating community members about how their organizations support Common Sense Gardening.

### **Contributions**

- Thurston County Environmental Health contributed \$800.00 and 28 days of staff time.
- Thurston County Solid Waste contributed \$3800.00 and 11 days of staff time.
- Thurston County Storm water contributed \$3800.00 and 11 days of staff time.
- Olympia Water Resources contributed \$850.00
- WSU Native Plant Salvage Project contributed days of staff time.
- Total volunteer time exceeded hours (not including Committee hours). The breakdown for volunteers is roughly: Master Gardeners and Master Composters contributed nearly volunteer hours, Native Plant Salvage Project volunteers contributed hours, and Master Recyclers contributed hours. In addition, the Garden Tour Committee is made up of 12 volunteers that include members of the Symphony Guild, Master Gardeners, Master Gardener board members, former host gardeners, staff from City of Olympia, staff from Native Plant Salvage Project, and Thurston County Environmental Health staff. Committee members

attended ten meetings throughout the year, and volunteered for specific tasks such as finding gardens, coordinating the shuttle site, selling tickets, distributing posters, coordinating demonstrations, etc.

- Olympia Symphony Guild contributed approximately volunteer hours. They arranged for approximately 86 hours of volunteer musicians to play during the Tour.
- Artists: Joanne Osband donated her original painting to be used as the poster. Community artists contributed approximately 45 volunteer hours creating art in the gardens during the Tour.



### Expenses

• Poster printing	\$ 729.44
• Poster, ad and ticket design	\$ 650
• Ticket printing	\$ 583.38
• Common Sense Gardening guides	\$ 5000
• Olympian ad	\$ 958.42
• Lamination	\$ 17.26
• Supplies	\$ 11.20
• Chair, canopy, water cooler rentals	\$ 622.35
• Port-a-potties	\$ 300
• fertilizer	\$ 41.17
• Shuttle service	\$ 2,754.38
(but did not pay because company went bankrupt and the service was terrible)	
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>\$ 11,668.60 (anticipated)</b>
	<b>\$ 8,913.22 (actual)</b>

## **Ticket Sales**

### **Appendices**

Evaluation Summary

Ticket

Publicity

- Poster
- Articles
- Press releases

Host Gardener Interviews