



The Foundation Connection

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

Master Gardener’s Tribal Life Trail: An Ethnobotanical Garden

The Tribal Life Trail at Lake Wilderness Arboretum in Maple Valley is a trail-style demonstration garden that focuses on plants used by native peoples of the Puget Sound area. Master Gardeners have been involved in the demonstration garden since its inception.



A Native American Totem greets visitors at Tribal Life’s trailhead



Educational signage is an important element of Tribal Life Trail

Tribal Life Trail provides an educational platform and understanding of the foods, medicines and many other practical functions derived from the plants found in the demonstration garden.

Signage along the Trail provides visitors with plant information and typical Native American usages.

The trail is approximately 270 feet long and meanders in and out of the forest edge along the Lake Wilderness Arboretum.

June 5, 2010 marked the grand opening of the Trail, but Lake Wilderness Arboretum’s vision for an ethnobotanical display garden took shape in 2005.

After the clearing of the trail and installation of the initial plantings were complete, WSU Extension Master Gardeners assumed responsibility for the garden in 2008.



Lonicera Twin Berry

Ties to the Arboretum remain strong. “We run the garden in cooperation with the Lake Wilderness Arboretum,” says Tribal Life Trail Master Gardener Leader Ankie Stroes.

“They help us with watering and ordering of supplies and plants,” she adds.

“We have over 150 varieties of plants that are specific to their use by the native Puget Sound tribes,” says Ankie. “The plants are separated by culinary, medicinal, utilitarian, clothing and ceremonial uses.”

The culinary section of the trail features Wild Strawberry, Trailing Blackberry, Tall Oregon Grape, Hooker Onion, as well as many other plants used by the Native Americans as a source of food.

The medicinal section features Wild Ginger, Licorice Fern, Columbine and Sword Fern.

These plants and many others were used to treat a number of maladies from sore throats to wounds and stomach troubles.

In the utilitarian section, you will find out how resourceful and creative the Native Americans were. You will see Bear Grass, Birch, Serviceberry and Red Osier Dogwood.

The clothing section features the Western Red Cedar, which was used for making clothing and hats by pounding the roots and bark until they were soft.

In the ceremonial section, you will find Sword Fern, Red Columbine and Snowberry, which, when plentiful, were considered to be an indication that there would be many salmon.

“The Tribal Life Trail is unique in its ethnobotanical approach to native plants,” says Ankie. The highlight for events at the demonstration garden are the educational tours that are conducted every Fall with the Tahoma School District second grade classes as part of their Native / Pacific Northwest Studies unit. “We have approximately 200 students and parents each year,” says Ankie. “They do plant identification and take a tour of trail itself. This activity creates awareness and increases stewardship of our native horticulture.”



Educational tours are conducted every Fall with second graders from the Tahoma School District

The Tribal Life Trail is open to the public year-round during daylight hours. It is located at the Lake Wilderness Arboretum, 22520 SE 248th Street in Maple Valley. Volunteers are always needed, third Thursdays and every other Saturday. Contact Tribal Life Trail Garden Leader Ankie Stroes for specific dates and to get on the mailing list. She can be reached at ankiestroes@gmail.com.