



The Foundation Connection

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

Garden Spotlight: *Magnuson Children's Garden*

The Magnuson Children's Garden is a magical place for young and old alike.

"What is so unique is that children and parents actually came up with all the ideas for the garden," says Master Gardener Emily Bishton, who serves as the current chair of the Magnuson Children's Garden Committee. "Kids and parents created wish lists at the original design meetings, which the Garden Committee put together into a plan. The results are that children know just what to do when they come into the garden, even if they've never been there before. They run to the top of the lookout, they roll down the rolling hill. They build things on the log pile." Emily feels gratified and inspired when she witnesses these encounters. "The garden reflects what children want."



The Magnuson Children's Garden was designed with input from children. As a result, they know just what to do when they come into the garden!



Master Gardener Emily Bishton with Rowan at the Magnuson Children's Garden P-Patch plot. Rowan is Cindy Hazard's son, former Chair of the Magnuson Children's Garden Committee

In addition to a P-Patch, visitors will see a wildlife garden and a Snack Wall of berries to nibble on. Child-size picnic tables and tree stump stools welcome little ones. Children are enchanted by a garden shaped like a starfish and the sea of grasses that rustle in the wind. The Salmon Survival Path, created by kids and filled with mosaic steppingstones and pools, depicts the upstream journey of our native salmon. Creating garden art at the giant outdoor chalkboard captivates a child's imagination. "And the decomposing log pile for building forts, nests and bug houses is one of the most popular parts of the garden," says Emily.

"We are part of the four-acre Magnuson Community Garden, which consists of five other garden areas and is a non-profit organization with a volunteer board of directors," she adds.

Magnuson Children's Garden became a Master Gardener garden in 2003. It is also used as an outdoor classroom by the Magnuson Community Center Nature Programs for its year-round educational camps, classes and field trips, which serve well over a thousand children and adults each year. Other organizations use the garden, too.

“It has been well worth the time it takes to build and keep strong partnerships with the other groups that use the garden,” says Emily. “And having more stakeholders in the garden’s health and beauty adds to its success.”

Three Master Gardeners are on the Children's Garden Committee, along with volunteers from other programs. In addition to planning and organizational duties, committee members take turns leading events in the garden.

“We appreciate the gardening knowledge and skills that Master Gardeners bring to the table. It’s wonderful when they help guide the novice volunteers who come to our stewardship events or teach the children in our nature programs,” says Emily. “Our philosophy is to utilize MG brains more than their ‘brawn,’ ” she explains.

There are ten MG docents teaching at Magnuson Nature Programs, which represent about half of the program’s docents. “We would love to have more Master Gardeners join us,” says Emily. “Or, Master Gardeners are welcome to volunteer for one-time assistance at special events.”

The garden is a busy place. Several times each summer, Family Garden Days are offered as part of the free Friday concerts in the Magnuson Community Garden amphitheater, which is next to the Children's Garden. Activities include worm bin exploration, nature art sculptures, and planting and harvesting in the Children’s Garden and its 300 sq. ft. organic P-Patch plot. Community volunteers come to weed and mulch, while Master Gardeners are on hand to answer home gardening questions. Families often join in to water plants, spread wood chips or refill bird baths and butterfly puddling ponds. Each year, the Scarecrow Festival fills the Children’s Garden and neighboring lawn with an orchard maze scavenger hunt, petting zoo, free concert and carnival games, along with a fall harvest of fresh vegetables and herbs for local food banks.

The garden is open year-round. “It’s a very public garden, with no fences or gates,” says Emily. “There are hundreds of families who visit each year outside of any of our special events or programs.” Thoughtful planning ensures that the garden is an enriching and easy-to-explore experience on any self-guided adventure.

“I feel lucky to be following in the footsteps of Master Gardener Cindy Hazard, who was the founding chair of the Magnuson Children’s Garden Committee,” says Emily. “Her leadership is a huge factor in the success of the garden. What attracted me originally was how much community-building there was, and how involved children were in the design process. Continuing that legacy is one of my biggest volunteer rewards.”

For more information about the Magnuson Children’s Garden, visit www.magnusonnatureprograms.com and click on the “Gardens” tab.