

Growing the Gardens

The roots of all gardens are in the earth, nourished by nature and human energy. So, too, is the Community Garden of Mayne Island, or 'Cogami'. Located on the grounds of the Community Centre, it is supported by the vision and generosity of many people.

The 5 acre parcel of land that comprises the Mayne Island Community Centre was donated by the developers of Felix Jack Road. Barry Wilkes turned up with his heavy machinery and spent two weeks clearing the land for free. Ideas started to percolate about having a community garden, and the funds from an Antiques & Collectibles Sale were designated for the use of creating the garden. In 2005, Greg Harmon, the Garden's 'Patron Saint' and a Board member of the Centre for the last 10 years, was passionate about the idea of establishing a Community Garden, and reached deep into his own pockets. He paid for a 10,000 gallon water catchment system, and fencing to protect the Garden. This water system takes rain water that falls on the roof of the Centre, stores it in 4 large tanks, and then funnels it into the Garden. So, on our dry island, we are not draining the water table to grow the plants there. Next, a beautiful cob tool shed was created in four days at an all-women workshop, led by Patrick Hennebery and Tracy Calvert. The Community Centre put up the previously-raised funds and fed the voracious crew throughout the workshop. The Garden was now open for use, and the community was invited to build a bed and grow their vegetables. Over the next 2 summers about 7 beds were created, but most of the space remained undeveloped.

In the summer of 2007, I was lamenting the loss of sunlight in my own garden due to the vigorously growing Douglas Firs that surround my space. There was definitely no longer enough sunlight to grow my cherished tomatoes. What to do? I saw a small notice in the MayneLiner about space available at the Community Gardens, and I immediately contacted Lise McLeod. Lise showed me the space, and explained that you had to construct your own container and then purchase the dirt to fill it. It seemed a bit daunting. I went away to think about it. Lise called back a few days later and said that I could use her bed and the one beside it. I set out to plant my tomatoes. All summer, I nurtured my plants and kept looking at this largely undeveloped weed-strewn space. I had sort of promised Lise that I would do something towards helping the gardens as a whole, so one golden September afternoon, after I had thrown most of my blighted tomatoes over the fence; I took clippers in hand and attacked the blackberry brambles. A vision of how beautiful and productive this space could be kept coming up, but it needed a community of people to do the work. Enter Becky Hardey, a better worker I have never met. We happened to team up in preparing one of the 100-Kilometer Dinners, and discovered our mutual passion for gardening and community. In December of 2007, Becky and I approached the Community Centre Board with a plan to 'grow the gardens' by harnessing community energy in a group process. We suggested that, if we put up the money for soil and assisted people to build the containers, probably a lot more folks would be interested. We proposed that, instead of ownership of a plot, each gardener would have stewardship of the space, for which they pay \$20. per year, maintain an active membership in the Community Centre, and commit to a minimum of 8 hours of service to the garden. The response and enthusiasm was overwhelming. Ron Olivier donated, and hauled to the garden, the mill ends to build the beds. Ron Willick hauled in the soil. Work parties were well attended, and people really did have a good time, as the garden took shape. The Community Centre maintained their constant support and helped us generate the needed funds. We provided the staffing for 3 fundraisers: 'The World of Merlot' wine tasting with Jurgen Gothe, and 2 community dances, and the Centre gave us the proceeds. Colleen and Brian Dearden hosted a dance last September, with all the money going to Cogami.

September 2008 found me back in the gardens on another golden afternoon, only now, I was surrounded by members of Cogami. The garden itself looked like Eden. We were there to talk about what we envisioned for the future. Our dreams included enlarging the garden for another 18 beds, creating a labyrinth, starting an orchard, and maybe having a greenhouse, for good measure. Of course, we would need to enlarge the water storage system, so perhaps another 4 tanks would be in order. The price tag for all of this was estimated at around \$20,000.

We took a collective deep breath, and started to organize. Committees were formed, events were planned, articles written for the MayneLiner, and the gifts began pouring in: a small greenhouse was donated by Michael and Carole Buchan, another frame for a greenhouse was offered by Michael Crovato, and glass panes were offered by Bruce Roberts. Mark Aiken came, cut 6 large trees & cleaned up the area. The Mayne Inn came through with a very generous donation of a 2,000 gallon water storage tank.

The Chinese New Year Dinner and Silent Auction, our first major fundraising event, was sold out quickly, with many disappointed people on the waiting list. After a beautiful and creative decorating, the Community Centre was transformed into a Mayne Island-style Chinese restaurant; the doors opened, and the fun began. In between varying courses of Chinese dishes - all prepared by individual members of Cogami - participants were: entertained by Chinese proverb games (such as "A 3-legged deer is more useful than.... Relatives that come to stay"! and "If pillows could talk..... Doris Day would never have married Rock Hudson"!), learned their Chinese Zodiac animal & it's traits, and placed bids on a wonderful array of donated items in the Silent Auction. It was an evening of good fun and good food! A big Thank You to everyone who helped make the evening such a success! We now have a start on the funds needed to initiate the first phase of the garden expansion. We will still happily accept any and all donation of materials, energy, or money, and if you are interested in learning more about Cogami, or want to get involved, contact Vicki - 539-9946, or Becky - 539-3167.

"The Community Garden is Growing, and It's Roots are Deep"