

## BACKBONES

SMALL GARDEN, BIG IMPACT

# SMALL GARDENS COLLABORATE FOR

On a rainy fall day in Portland, Oregon, cars begin to fill the parking lot of Lake Oswego Heritage house. Hunched against the dreary weather, bodies obscured by raincoats hurry into the building. As hoods are thrown back, smiles spread across faces and “How are you?” echoes across the vestibule as old friends re-connect. Claiming seats in the conference room, hands are shaken, new introductions made, and then attention turns to the front of the room as they are welcomed to the workshop on succession planning in public gardens hosted by the Garden Conservancy Northwest Network (GCNN).

This network was formed in 2001, inspired by another public garden network, San Francisco’s Bay Area Garden Network (BAGNet). Seeing how this alliance benefitted gardens in San Francisco, it seemed natural to create something similar with garden organizations in the Pacific Northwest. As a member of the American Public Gardens Association, the Garden Conservancy believes in the importance of networking and learning from colleagues from other organizations who are grappling with the same challenges and striving toward similar goals. In its effort to preserve gardens and increase public awareness of the important role gardens play in America’s cultural and natural heritage, the Conservancy invited like-minded public garden staff and leaders in the region to Lakewold Garden where a meeting of the minds created what is now the GCNN.

The GCNN is a member-supported association of 26 public gardens and horticultural organizations in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia including Gaiety Hollow

in Salem, Oregon, Yakima Area Arboretum in Yakima, Washington, and Milner Gardens and Woodland in Qualicum Beach, British Columbia. Guided by a volunteer steering committee, the network provides professional training, promotes member organizations’ gardens and educational programs, and builds awareness of gardens in the region as vital cultural resources.

Each year two one-day-long workshops provide professional training for the staff, board members, and volunteers of member organizations. Fees are kept low through fundraising for program support, and locations alternate between Washington and Oregon to encourage participation. Each workshop is organized collaboratively by the GCNN coordinator and the host organization. Formats vary and may include presentations of case studies, panel discussions, and breakout sessions affording opportunities for discussion and networking. In addition, each workshop includes a garden tour and general meeting. Attendees complete surveys prior to the workshop, enabling organizers and speakers to tailor each session to the needs of the participants. Recent topics include educational programming for children, garden succession planning, and collections policies.

The group’s shared wealth of knowledge helps GCNN member organizations grow and develop. Participants can put what they have learned during workshops into practice in their respective organizations, as well as build upon the relationships they have developed. Director Benjamin Streissguth of the Streissguth Gardens commented, “Ten years



# BIGGER IMPACT

Tanya DeMarsh-Dodson and Lori Taylor

Left: Gardener Scott Hoelscher leads workshop participants on a tour through Leach Garden.

Right: Despite some rain, workshop attendees enjoy a docent-led tour of Lakewood Garden.

Both photos: Colleen Adams-Schuppe

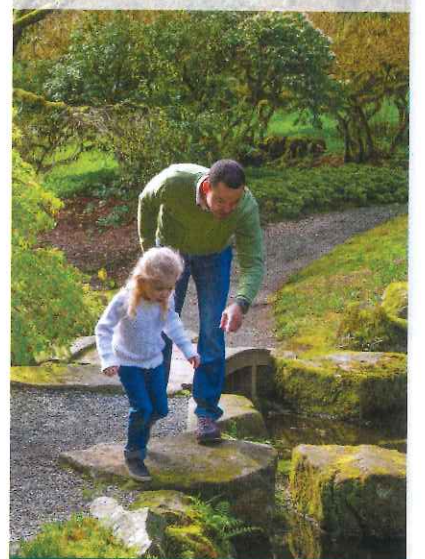
ago as we were expanding our reach as a public garden, we joined the GCNN for networking. Since then we’ve learned tons through the focused workshops targeted at our specific gardens and formed bonds with many of the other members. Now we know many of the staff members and have visited most of the member gardens, we are thrilled to be able to recommend them to our visitors.”

In order to maximize member organizations’ outreach, the GCNN coordinates collaborative marketing efforts like the association website [www.northwestgardens.org](http://www.northwestgardens.org) designed to serve travelers who want to learn about regional public gardens and horticultural events. Rack cards printed annually and distributed by member organizations provide information encouraging visitation. The GCNN has also experimented with creating a garden passport. These marketing tools promote member organizations and their educational offerings, as well as create a greater awareness of the many public gardens in the Pacific Northwest. Member organizations also collaborate with one another on educational programming, reciprocal membership, volunteer benefits, and fundraising tours.

Colleen Addams-Schuppe, director of the Yakima Area Arboretum, feels that the arboretum has been able to increase its visibility through membership in the GCNN. She says, “We have broadened our reach in our region and west of the Cascades being members of the GCNN. We have found the rack cards particularly useful, giving away many each year to visitors and members. The GCNN member gardens are increasingly on people’s radar.”

Questions about the GCNN structure, process, and/or membership may be directed to Tanya DeMarsh-Dodson, former GCNN coordinator, [tdodson@gardenconservancy.org](mailto:tdodson@gardenconservancy.org) or Lori Taylor, GCNN coordinator, [ltaylor@gardenconservancy.org](mailto:ltaylor@gardenconservancy.org). For more information, visit [www.northwestgardens.org](http://www.northwestgardens.org).

### THE GARDEN CONSERVANCY Northwest Network



The Best of the Northwest!  
Your adventure starts here

The Garden Conservancy Northwest Network (GCNN) is a member-supported association of gardens, parks, and horticultural organizations. It is dedicated to connecting people and gardens, creating engaging educational programming, fostering an appreciation of plants, and preserving gardens as vital cultural resources.

[www.northwestgardens.org](http://www.northwestgardens.org)

#### Web extra

This rack card is made available to all members of the GCNN.

<https://bit.ly/2nnvZ37>