

Kitty Bell has been growing plants ever since she can remember. Her award-winning pumpkins, seeded at Lincoln Elementary, were featured in *The Olympian* when she was just eight-years old! Her garden offers opportunities for inspiration, relaxation, and meditation. The simple garden design uses almost all recycled materials found on-site. From the roughly hewn gate to the tire garden, trash is treasured as useful and nothing is wasted in this garden. The tire garden is a great example of this ethos in action. When Kitty purchased a nearby property, she uncovered hundreds of tires that had been “disposed of.” She hauled many of them away for proper disposal but knew that she could put some of them to use. The lilies, hellebores, and other flowering perennials in the tire garden flower earlier and longer than those in other areas of the garden. They appreciate the heat and the great soil that fills each tire to make it suitable for planting in.

Towering trees create areas of deep shade allowing space for a native understory and many beautiful Hostas. Clay soil supports large planting boxes filled with compost and overflowing with color and fragrance. Vivid colors and the spiraling patterns in nature create the inspiration for Kitty’s business specialty, bright and beautiful hand-dyed clothing. Many of the plants in this garden have come from the Olympia Farmer’s Market where she has offered her colorful clothing for many years. We pulled Kitty from her gorgeous garden to the lovely deck that overlooks Sanderson Cove to spend a few minutes answering the following questions.

What are your watering strategies? Hanging baskets and container planters get watered by hand fairly often when it is hot. They wilt just about every day in the summer. The perennial garden doesn’t get any water since it stays moist all year. The lawn goes dormant in the summer without additional water.

How do you control pests? There is only one area of the garden that attracts slugs. In the past, Kitty used Sluggo in that area, this year, snail jails are working well to prevent slug damage in that spot. Barking dogs help keep the deer out.

How do you fertilize? Every year or so, the entire garden gets the benefit of purchased compost that mulches the beds, adding nutrients and helping to keep out weeds. The flowering plants receive bone meal every year or so in addition to the compost.

What approach do you use for controlling disease? There haven’t been any disease problems in this garden. Keeping things tidy prevents problems. Hardy plant selection also helps.

How do you handle weeds? A lot of effort is put into weeding the entire garden in the spring so that summer time spent in the garden can be more relaxing. Hand weeding is the only thing that has ever been used to control weeds in this garden.

How many hours a week do you spend in the garden? Kitty spends as much time as possible in the garden, some of it working, some of it just relaxing. By combining the two; work and play, it doesn’t ever get overwhelming and feel like a chore.

Do you attract wildlife to your garden? Lots of flowers bring in birds, bees, and beneficial insects. The garden begins blooming in February and has flowers through October so there is a wide window of opportunity for wildlife to be nourished here.

What are your biggest gardening challenges? Finding the time to spend in the garden is the biggest challenge for this busy gardener who envisions a time in the future when gardening is all that she does!

What makes gardening fun or satisfying for you? The meditative aspect is the biggest reason that Kitty continues to garden after all of these years. She loves sharing her skill and has planted gardens for both of her adult children.