

MEMORIAL GARDENS

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Ask a Master Gardener

Timely insights on relevant topics from our area's home gardening experts



Planning a Memorial Garden

Creating a memorial garden is an inspirational way to pay tribute to a life and provide a place to reflect and remember

By Kathy Wolfe, WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener

Dealing with the loss of a loved one can be very challenging, an experience which most of us will face sometime in our lives. Creating a memorial garden dedicated to that person or pet can be an inspirational way to pay tribute to their life and provide a quiet, private space to celebrate them and remember what made them so very special.

There are no rules here. No space is too small or too large to provide a spot that reflects that individual's interests, personality, accomplishments, or sacrifices. It can be a spot you can see from a window in your home, on a balcony of your apartment, in a quiet corner of your yard, or on a well-traveled path in a public area. Perhaps find a place where the departed frequented or enjoyed the view. Many cities and parks have opportunities to add a labeled bench or tree with a plaque in a public place. Ask your local authorities for suggestions.

The very act of envisioning, planning, and creating such a spot can keep you focused on things beautiful and symbolic that would capture the essence of your lost loved one. Once the garden or memorial is complete, you will have a space to quietly remember the good times and warm feelings you had with that person or pet.



Memorial benches on Tommy Thompson Trail near Anacortes provide a place to rest and reflect while taking in the view. © Photographer Kit Lennard

Some components of a garden to consider are the amount of sunlight the area receives and the accessibility of the place. Doing this will help determine what plants will thrive there and allow you to choose trees, shrubs, and flowers that can give four-season interest. If your loved one had a favorite season, highlight that in your design. Remember to factor in the size of any large plants at maturity because they will continue to grow and fill your space. Trees will provide height and longevity to your design and shade for a bench or other seating area. Shrubs will add a lovely backdrop or border, while flowers can brighten up the space throughout the seasons and might reflect plants that were favorites or symbolic of the person you are memorializing.

You may want to research plant meanings. For example, yellow tulips represent friendship, roses symbolize love, poppies are for remembrance and peace, oak trees reflect strength, and cacti represent protection and endurance.

How much upkeep will you be able to do in this special garden? Adding a low maintenance ground cover, such as creeping thyme, might work better than grass that will need mowing. Adding a sculpture, fountain, stepping-stones, pathways, or solar lights to brighten the spot at night might be



Working with local jurisdictions, often a memorial can be aesthetically designed and set in a loved one's favorite place for the public to enjoy. © Photographer Kit Lennard

appropriate. A place to sit, whether a bench or seats, is important. You can also add a small table. Consider commissioning engraved stones or a plaque with meaningful wording or a poem of your choice.

Was your loved one a cat lover, an outdoor enthusiast, a big sports fan, a master quilter, a runner, an artist, or a builder of the community? All can be honored in their own way to shine brightness on the uniqueness of the departed. Use your imagination and creativity to design this special spot for your honoree.



Left: A firepit with a good-sized seating area and multiple fire irons to stoke the flames and share fond memories might be just the right idea. © Photographer Kathy Wolfe. **Right:** This bench donated by the Floral Arts Garden Club honors the service of past members. © Photographer: Nancy Crowell Photography.

Let's consider the outdoors enthusiast. A firepit with a good-sized seating area and multiple fire irons to stoke the flames and share fond memories might be just the right idea. Add a dedication plaque to commemorate the individual for years to come. Someone will tell some good stories here!

If your loved one enjoyed nature, having a plant-filled garden with a water source to attract butterflies and birds could be lovely. A fountain, small pond, birdbath, and feeders or birdhouses would nourish creatures and create a peaceful setting for the viewer. Soft wind chimes for music lovers can add to the space's ambiance. The soothing sounds can also mask outside noise and traffic.

You may have family members or friends who would like to participate in some element of the memorial. Decide who you would like to have involved and at what stage. Give them a specific role so they can feel the cathartic, calming pleasure of participation in the project. Examples of involvement might be that each member adds a tangible symbol of their connection to the departed or provides a stepping stone (manmade or individually created) to add to a pathway. Consider asking for help with the maintenance of the area on a revolving basis. A memory tree with notes, pictures, poems, and stories attached to the branches would be a good addition. Plan a

dedication event that brings people together, sharing the honoree's favorite foods, songs, and special memories.



Left: An engraved rock, the Gloria Williams memorial in the Naturescape garden at the Discovery Garden blends in with the surrounding environment. **Right:** As a fundraiser, bricks set in the Discovery Garden entry honor current members and those who have gone before us. © Photographer Nancy Crowell Photography.

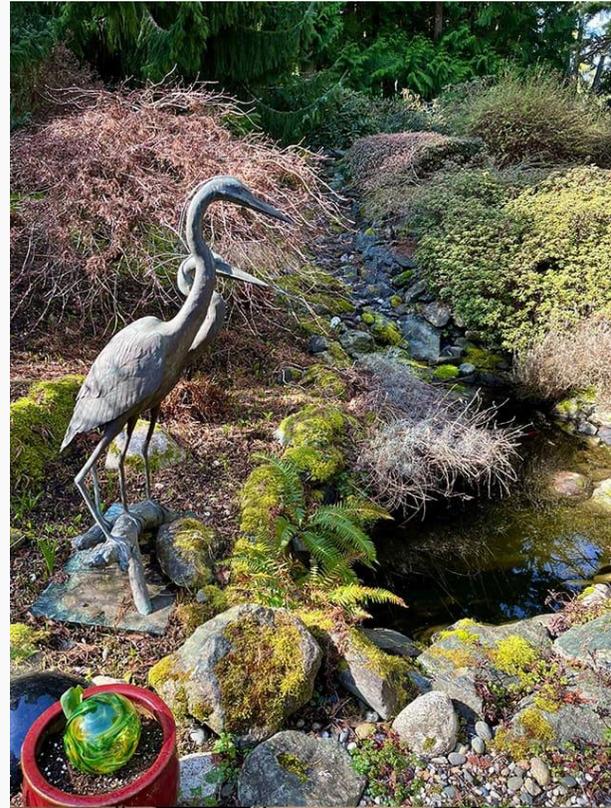
Memorial gardens need not be for humans alone. Many incorporate the ideas above to create a remembering space for a dear pet who shared their lives and provided companionship and unwavering love. Other memorials are erected to honor individuals you may not have known personally but value their accomplishments or their sacrifice to our world.

A number of memorials in the Discovery Garden celebrate Skagit County WSU Extension Master Gardener members who gave so much of their time, ideas, and dedication to making the Discovery Garden the special place it is today. Look in the Naturescape area for Gloria Williams' plaque, the Lloyd Eighme Heather Garden sign, Peggy Van Allen's Moon Gate at the entrance to the Japanese Garden, the flagpole and named area dedicated to early master gardener and Navy Veteran Joe Dupre outside the Children's Garden, and Doc's Arbor designated in memory of Dr. Richard Hoag who was instrumental in the planning of the original garden. He and his wife also donated the first "seed" money to get the project started. Stroll around the Discovery Garden and spend some time remembering and thanking these individuals.

In 2008, a memorial was placed near the roses in the Discovery Garden as a tribute to LeRoy Anderson, a WWI veteran. It was donated by Kern Funeral Home in honor of Anderson's effort to dedicate Highway 536 as Memorial Highway (in 1931) to honor the fifty young men from Skagit County who lost their lives in the First World War.

The Skagit County Master Gardener Program initiated a plan to replace elm trees planted in the early 1930s along Memorial Highway to honor these fallen soldiers of WWI. As time passed, the state highway department had to remove the elms to widen the highway and install utility lines. The first five replacement elms were planted in 2015 in the field west of the Discovery Garden. All 50 elms have now been replanted along Memorial Highway, and each tree has a granite plaque placed next to it naming one of the fifty men lost. Each year, generally on the Tuesday

before Memorial Day, the Master Gardeners have a ceremony to commemorate these young men and their sacrifice.



Left: One of the most recent additions to the Discovery Garden, this moon gate in the Japanese Garden is a fitting memorial to Master Gardener Peggy Van Allen. © Photographer Nancy Crowell Photography.

Right: The very act of envisioning, planning, and creating a memorial garden can help you focus on things beautiful and symbolic that capture the essence of your lost loved one. © Photographer Kathy Wolfe.

One more very visible area in the Discovery Garden must be pointed out. In the entrance garden, a walkway surrounding the entry fountain is set with hundreds of engraved bricks honoring past and present members, individuals not necessarily members of the master gardeners, and even some pets. More than a memorial, these bricks also signify funds raised for the garden while also recognizing those connected with the master gardener program.

Even if you don't have your own memorial garden, visit the Discovery Garden, have a seat on one of our many benches, and take some time to connect with the natural world and quietly reflect on those living and those who have passed who hold a dear place in your heart.

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