

Concrete's Community Garden

By Jason Miller

June 22, 2012



Garden continues to flourish

In its third year, Concrete's fledgling community garden continues its mission to provide growing opportunities for the town's citizens.

On a roughly half-acre site north of Silo Park in Concrete lie the green and flourishing results of a citizen-driven movement that imagined what the town could become. Named for the Upper Skagit Garden Club's first president in 1938, the Angele Cupples Community Garden offers gardening and educational opportunities for the town's citizens and the greater Upper Valley community.

The garden began as an idea floated during the town's Imagine Concrete visioning workshop in April 2009. With 42 people attending, the community garden idea netted 38 votes, more than enough to encourage the Imagine Concrete steering committee to form a task force to shepherd the idea into existence.

Concrete Town Council voted to transform three contiguous city-owned lots into the town's first community garden, and the task force charged ahead. Council member Marla Reed, who co-manages the garden, applied for and won a \$4,000 School's Out Washington grant through the Upper Valley Awareness Task force. The grant paid for the garden's perimeter fence and brought out volunteers in droves for a three-day fence-building blitz in June 2010. Members of the Concrete Lions Club set 90-plus fence posts in one day. Today, all but 30 or so of those posts are topped by birdhouses, most of which were painted by Concrete youths.

As it matures, the garden will fulfill several objectives defined during the April 2009 visioning workshop and subsequent planning meetings. Currently it offers 22 raised beds built from salvaged cedar, measuring 4x8, 4x10, and 4x12. These beds are available for rent on an annual basis, 16 of which have been rented this year. The unrented beds will be used to grow produce for the Concrete Food Bank, as will eight additional 4x12 beds and a field crops area adjoining them. This summer, one or more VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) volunteers will focus on the Food Bank produce-growing efforts. Angele Cupples' son, Robert donated another 4x12 bed to encourage "the young women of Concrete High School" to garden. 3DH Aggregates near Rockport donated the approximately 126 cubic yards of topsoil needed to fill the beds and the field crops area.

This year's projects include a Memory Garden—where people will be given a chance to pause and remember loved ones lost—and an almost-completed Children's Garden. The Children's Garden offers 2, 3, and 4-foot-square raised beds where children under age 18

may garden for free. The space is introduced by trellis walls that will soon be covered with sweet peas and scarlet runner beans. Currently under construction is a fence bordering the Children’s Garden painted to look like giant colored pencils. The “pencil” posts were donated by Skagit Farmers Supply. Rising from a central flower bed—planted with butterfly- and hummingbird-attracting plants—is a towering tuteur (a four-sided pyramid trellis) made from old fishing poles. Rocks painted by Concrete kids adorn the garden. Two cement benches picked up at a Skagit Valley College auction earlier this year now grace the Children’s Garden after getting coats of colorful paint.

The Community Garden’s anchor is a prominent gazebo, which was funded largely by Concrete citizen Ann Young, to memorialize her deceased husband. The gazebo was built by Keith Taxdahl of Taxdahl Construction, who donated his time and some materials and also roped in some of his friends for the cause.



Left: A tuteur made from old fishing poles in the Children’s Garden rises from a “flower bed” built with salvaged cedar and a discarded bed frame. The garden is planted with butterfly- and hummingbird- attracting plants and scarlet runner beans that will scramble up the tuteur later this year.

Above: Ham Herman, 13, of Concrete

checks for level while helping to install a special Childrens’ Garden entry sign for Concrete children. Colorful garden benches peek out in the background. *Photos taken by Jason Miller / Courtesy of Concrete Herald*

Future dreams

Many more ideas remain to be realized in Concrete’s first community garden. Garden organizers are in the process of applying for a USDA grant to fund a garden/utility shed that they hope to build his year. Also on the list of projects is an entry sign with donor names, three greenhouses for the eastern end of the garden, a large multi-purpose building that will include indoor and outdoor spaces for gardening and related classes, storage space and a public restroom.

In 2013, more 4x12 rental beds will be built and installed. Another dream is to have a bronze statue made of Angele Cupples in a pose from a photo of her as a young woman, dressed in her Sunday best and standing halfway up a telephone pole.

These needs and dreams cost money, and with an annual budget of \$2500, the community garden hangs its hopes on donations of money and labor to more rapidly develop into the destination it's meant to be for the community. Anyone wishing to donate to the garden is encouraged to call Concrete Town Hall at 360.853.8401.



Left: Darrel and Marla Reed take a break in the Children's Garden on one of the benches bought at auction earlier this year. After a power-washing and a colorful paint job, the benches were ready for their new home. **Right:** Teresa Wilde of Rockport shows off a dandy head of Bibb lettuce she harvested from her rented bed in the Angele Cupples Community Garden in early June 2011. *Photos taken by Jason Miller / Courtesy of Concrete Herald.*



Left: Chaz and Emily Holder of Concrete pose next to Emily's 2-foot-square bed in the Children's Garden. The garden also offers 3- and 4-foot-square beds for children under age 18 to garden for free. **Center:** Renter Darrel Reed carefully plants carrot seeds in one of the beds he and his family rented this year. **Right:** Concrete Youth Dynamics participants, Rebecca Torheim (left) and Shelby Lloyd, install landscape fabric in a Children's Garden pathway in preparation for wood chips. About a dozen high-school youth descended on the Children's Garden on May 21; in less than two hours, they finished digging in the remaining beds, filling them with dirt and lining the paths with wood chips. *Photos taken by Jason Miller / Courtesy of Concrete Herald.*

Looking for a community garden near you? A list of community gardens in Skagit County is available online at <http://anacortescommunitygardens.org/resources/find-a-garden/60.html>.