

Pendergrass is 'meadowscaping' with natural grasses and prairie plants

By KC Cowan
The Southwest Portland Post

At first glance, it's easy to understand why people who walk past Kathy Pendergrass' home on Southwest Evans Street might not appreciate her garden.

But if you look closer, you'll notice a sign that reads: Backyard Habitat Certification Program. Certification in Progress.

Pendergrass is "naturescaping"—a growing trend where people replace water and fertilizer-dependent lawns with native plants and shrubs.

More specifically, she is "meadowscaping," which focuses on planting an urban meadow of native, drought resistant plants to improve pollination and stormwater runoff. It also creates a habitat of beneficial insects to feed birds.

Pendergrass is recreating something that, hundreds of years ago, was seen in abundance in Oregon. A botanist, she researched native Willamette prairie for a masters' thesis several years ago.

According to Pendergrass, vast prairies once were common in the Willamette Valley. Hundreds of native species could be seen on a five-acre site.

"Those native prairies are all but gone from the valley," she explained. "It used to be extensive prairie and oaklands, but we have less than one percent of that prairie left."

Instead of a valley ecosystem full of wildflowers that supported birds and wildlife, modern agriculture and development has created a monoculture.

There are still a few natural meadows in the Willamette Valley, and some in the Puget Trough in Washington.

But Pendergrass said Portland is a large "dead space" between those wild meadows. By building a small urban meadow in your own yard, she said you can help create "gene flow" to preserve the species.

"Any opportunity I get I'm telling people there's less than one percent of this left. So if we had our ideal scenario, we'd have stepping stones or corridors (of urban meadows) to connect these pieces of what's left of those native habitats," Pendergrass said.

She has grown many native plants in her yard—Showy Tarweed and Clarkia just to name two. They're not easy to come by, but are still available through special native plant sales.

Pendergrass consulted on the Meadowscaping Handbook just released by the West Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District.

Mary Logalbo, with the district, said they already had a naturescaping book about shrubs and trees. The meadowscaping book came about after many requests for a way to landscape with natural grasses and prairie plants.

"A lot of people want something different in their landscape," Logalbo says. "Some people want to provide more wildlife habitat and others just don't want to have to water anymore. Some might want lower maintenance."

The book defines the different kinds of urban meadows you can build—from a wet meadow to an upland meadow. It provides step-by-step instructions for soil testing and site preparation, and



Kathy Pendergrass in her meadowscaped garden. (Post photo by KC Cowan)

provides a comprehensive plant guide.

"It's a little tricky," Logalbo says, "which is why our 'short handbook' ended up being almost 100 pages. You do need some guidance."

And if you don't like the rough and wild look of some meadows, the book even shows you how to design it so it looks more "intentional."

The book can be downloaded off the District's website, or you can pick one up at their office at 2701 NW Vaughn Street. It's free of charge, adding more incentive for urban dwellers to meadowscape.

Pendergrass is glad she tried it. It took her just two years to change her yard from one that was dominated by big Doug Fir trees, lawn, and ivy, to one that is light and airy and filled with

color and honeybees.

Her advice is to start with a small portion of your yard, or a strip in the front. In doing so, you are retrieving a tiny bit of the land's history.

"We had this historic landscape that must have been incredible," she said. "I wish I could go back in a time machine and see what it must have been like."

For more information about meadowscaping visit the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District website: www.wmswcd.org.

Editor's Note: Zumwalt Prairie, a 33,000-acre nature and wildlife preserve in eastern Oregon's Wallowa County near Joseph is a must-see for those interested in historic prairies. It's owned by the Nature Conservancy of Oregon. Search online for more information.



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From all of us at Transition Projects, thank you for your generosity volunteering and providing meals and resources. Hundreds of women and couples, with nowhere else to turn, were supported through your deep community spirit from November 2015–May 2016.



To all the volunteers in Multnomah Village, I want to thank you for all your dedication and hard work. Because of you my fiancé and I were fed, bed and taken care of. Thank you so much for giving us hope and giving us a place to live.
James B., Sears Shelter Participant



It has been such a blessing to have people like you give so much to someone like me, and the other people in need at the Sears Shelter. You come and give so much and ask nothing in return. I have enjoyed your warm attention you have given to us. The food was wonderful—taking the time out of your lives to make sure the ones in need were fed. Also, you gave us a warm, dry and safe place to lay our needed bodies. I don't know how to repay you but with a big THANK YOU!
Terry R., Sears Shelter Participant



To all the volunteers that have provided us with food, goodies and bright smiles. You have all been a blessing and a joy for us. Also, I would like to send out a big "Thank You" to the neighbors around the Sears Shelter. I could see and understand at times how very stressful it might be.
Sears Shelter Participant