

Art in the garden

Horticulturist and garden designer Becky Graham has passion for making things better, brighter and beautiful

Becky Graham eats, sleeps and dreams plants — to say she is a gardener only hints at her story.

She will share her talents (the plural is correct), including her extensive knowledge of plants, landscape design, containers and the ongoing nurturing of things that grow, at the Astoria Co-op Grocery's next food and wellness lecture series, Beers to Your Health. Mark your calendars for 7 p.m. Thursday, May 14, and head to the Fort George Brewery's Lovell Showroom.

Graham's landscape business, Harvest Moon Design, has been showing and growing itself in Astoria for over seven years. Fondly labeled "the parking lot gardener" by the Astoria Co-op crew, Graham has transformed the store's entry. "Somehow she makes it really beautiful. Our customers love looking at the different plants that she rotates seasonally. We get lots of positive feedback," says Astoria Co-op Grocery General Manager Matt Stanley.

Another of her projects involves the healing garden at Columbia Memorial Hospital. And over at Astoria's Hotel Elliott, John Nelson, the hotel's general manager, says, "We constantly get compliments about our entry boxes and the

rooftop garden. You'll even find them mentioned on Trip Advisor. Becky's skill has led her to other clients in the neighborhood. In my opinion the whole area is looking better because of Harvest Moon Design. She has a definite passion that would be the envy of most people."

That passion began when Graham was 19 and living in Portland. "I was and am fascinated by plants. I nurture them, and they nurture me," says Graham. A career in health care paid her bills while an amazing but small home garden and a fledgling plant-scape business, the Corporate Jungle, fed her enthusiasm.

When her incoming-earning employment became just that, a job, she left. A secure position with a benefit package, six weeks of accumulated vacation, five weeks of sick leave, and weekends off was history. She's never looked back. "I took the master gardener's program, got a degree in horticulture from Mt. Hood Community College and enrolled in any plant class I could find," Graham says. "I got a job with (Drake's) 7 Dees in Portland — working every weekend, no benefits — and it paid seven dollars an hour. I loved it — I had a blast! I got another couple of jobs on the Mt. Hood college campus working on the grounds with the horticulture department. I had so much fun. Everyday work felt like play."

Next came a five-year position as a plant buyer in Portland at West Coast Plant Company; a high-end haunt for unusual and the unique plants. "I had the greatest job in the world. I brought in tropical plants from Florida and Hawaii, or got in a pickup truck and headed way out in the country discovering wonderful plant varieties and exceptional finds," Graham says. "I don't call myself an expert at anything, but plants are my strong point."

One day, an online ad for property for sale in the Astoria area caught her attention. "It was for an acre of land; more or less a dump with a run-down manufactured home and some boulders out in front," Graham says. "It spoke to me. I had a growing passion to live in the country and have a large garden to call my own. The layout



Photo by Joshua Bessex

Becky Graham waters plants in her front yard garden in Knappa.

was perfect. I wanted a small home and a large garden. I wanted to be energy efficient. I wanted to grow my own food. And I wanted to be able to afford it. It was wonderful. So, she bought it.

Located in Knappa, a few years of ownership and lots of grunt work has turned Graham's dump into something to behold. Like a cover on a home and garden magazine, the garden bursts with cascading colors. Multiple raised beds include an artful mix of harmony and harshness: edibles, foliage, flowers and found objects all complementing each other. Bees buzz, birds chirp and Graham's two beloved dogs reign over it all.

"When I'm designing or gardening, I feel like I'm playing. I call my garden my playground, my classroom and my sanctuary," Graham says. "I hunt and gather things that make me weak in the knees. I have an old copper washing machine, and I know I'm either going to make a



Photo by Joshua Bessex

Graham repurposes various metal pieces she recovers from scrap yards to use as planters, decorations and stepping stones in her garden.

water feature out of it or a planter."

In the mean time, she's got a full spring planting schedule in Astoria that she's ready share with an appreciative audience.



Submitted photo

The Astoria Co-op Grocery's parking lot garden is one example of Becky Graham's skills of creating beautiful container gardens in unusual places.

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Story by MARILYN GILBAUGH

Beers to Your Health: The Art of Gardening

with Becky Graham,
of Harvest

Moon Design

7 p.m. Thursday, May 14

Fort George Lovell Showroom

426 14th St., Astoria

Free