

# P-PATCH POST

SPRING 2023 | BUILDING GARDENS, GROWING COMMUNITIES

## HEAD STARTS THE BALLAD SPROUTS PROJECT

“It's friendly, it's peaceful, it's kind. And it's a joy to do this work.”

Michael Hagen

Early each spring for the past ten years, a group of some 30 dedicated volunteers coax vegetable starts from seed, transplant them to pots, and distribute them to giving gardens. Thousands of sprouts germinate in the backyard greenhouse of a private Ballard home, offering gardeners a head start in creating flourishing beds of produce which ultimately go to food banks and feeding programs around Seattle and beyond.

Michael Hagen and Kit Hitchcock are leads for Ballard Sprouts; over the years they have honed their practices, creating a detailed manual.

Michael explains the logic of starting seedlings in February:

“You can't put seeds in the ground when the ground's 40 degrees. So, what we do is give the giving gardens two crops in the spring before they can plant their own seeds, and then after that they can plant for summer and they can plant for fall.”

Many of Seattle's p-patches benefit from the Sprouts project, as do church-sponsored gardens and community gardens outside the city. The project grows cool weather crops including lettuce, chard, kale, and bok choy. Once these are done, volunteers produce a crop of tomato plants.

## HELP WANTED!

At one point there were other Sprouts projects in the city, but today Ballard is the only one. Unfortunately, the Ballard location will close after two more growing seasons. Team members are anxious to pass on the project to a new generation of volunteers, along with their experience. Kit explains how the Sprouts model is “shovel-ready”:

“We would like to transfer our knowledge and get people up and running and coach them.”



“The Seattle Giving Garden Network will provide the seeds, the soil, the fertilizer, the heating mats, the trays, the thermostats.”

**All it takes to accommodate Sprouts is a modest-sized greenhouse with electrical power and an open space for staging the seedlings. And, of course, a group of volunteers willing to give an hour a week for several months. If you are interested in taking on this worthwhile project, please contact the Seattle Giving Garden Network at [info@ssgn.org](mailto:info@ssgn.org).**

ELEANOR BOBA | Photos Provided By Sprouts Program



# COMMITTED To COMMUNITY

## For **Mark Huston**, it's not about the plants. It's about the people who grow them.

That's what prompted him to apply to become a site coordinator at the Ballard P-Patch. "Gardening has always been sort of an afterthought for me," says Mark. "I like the organization. I like the projects. It's the perimeters, the pathways, the interaction with the P-Patch staff. It's all the things that need to get done behind the scenes."

When he first got a plot at Ballard P-Patch in 1988, he had no idea what the job of site coordinator entailed. Fast forward more than three decades—after 10 years as the Ballard P-Patch site coordinator; years of leading projects; writing matching grants; serving on committees and boards, including a stint as board president of GROW and as board president of the Magnuson Community Garden, a nonprofit that contains seven garden entities, including the P-Patch; and six years and counting as the Magnuson P-Patch site coordinator—he's figured out a few things.

For one, it starts with community, and that starts with knowing the name of the person gardening next to you. That's why for every work party he's organized—and he's organized scores of them—he insists everyone has a "hard stop" at 10:30 in the morning to drink coffee and eat pastries. During this time he introduces every gardener to every other gardener. And since the Magnuson P-Patch is one of the largest, with 145 garden plots and around 200 garden spaces, there are a lot of names to remember.

"People are working and they don't want to lose their momentum, but in my experience, these coffee breaks have been the best use of people's time," says Mark. "The more people know each other, the more engaged they are and the more fun it is for them to be there."

He's seen how the dynamic improves after a round of introductions. One time, after everyone was introduced, they started to brainstorm how best to construct some rain covers at the entryway of a tool shed. Everyone got to work, coming up with good suggestions and ideas.

This is just one example of the kind of tasks Mark takes on as a site coordinator. Beyond tool shed improvements, he also works rebuilding beds, creating panels for fencing, and finding solutions to tricky problems like how to keep pathways from flooding every winter.

It's a lot of work, but Mark has help. At the Magnuson P-Patch, there are five POD leaders, who oversee 145 plots. Each POD leader takes calls from gardeners about a variety of issues, while other leadership team members manage projects like recording community hours and growing food for local food banks.

One of Mark's favorite tasks is serving as Magnuson's liaison to the P-Patch staff in the City's Department of Neighborhoods. Volunteers and site coordinators like him are essential with over 90 P-Patches across the city and only a handful of full-time city staff.

He also helps fundraising efforts. Within the Department of

Neighborhoods is a grant program called the Neighborhood Matching Fund, which have provided the funds to launch nearly all of the P-Patches as well as funding many other P-Patch projects. As a site coordinator and former board member of GROW, Mark has a lot of experience applying for these grants. He recalls applying for one of the first Neighborhood Matching Fund grants back in 1999 that funded a center patio for the Ballard P-Patch, now a beautiful focal point for the garden. More recently, the drainage problem at Magnuson P-Patch was remedied by installing a French drain with funding from a Neighborhood Matching Fund grant.



**MARK HUSTON ON THE JOB!**

"Fundraising is important for P-Patches because there are always operational expenses that aren't covered by the city, from small projects like replacing a broken digging fork to bigger projects like retaining walls," says Mark, who is actively engaged in fundraising efforts for various other P-Patches.

But Mark's heart remains in managing the day-to-day operations. That's why he stepped down as board president of GROW and took the job of site coordinator at the Magnuson P-Patch. He admits it's more than a full-time job and is aghast at the number of hours he puts in. But, he says, it's definitely worth it. And it gives him and his wife, the real gardener in the family who also manages two additional food bank plots, more than enough to talk about.

However, more importantly, the P-Patches bring people together, which has been especially meaningful during the pandemic. "We did socially distanced work parties. People still had fun," says Mark. "It's all about strengthening the social fabric with small, local acts of volunteerism."

Since the pandemic, Mark has reinstated the mandatory 10:30 coffee and pastry break during work parties, where he continues strengthening the social fabric, one name at a time.



# WHAT LIES BENEATH

**One of the fascinating aspects of Seattle's community gardens is the variety of landscapes adapted for their use. Whether "interim" use or permanent, the gardens and p-patches have managed to find homes in odd and interesting places. A number sit atop multiple layers of history.**

## INTO PLOWSHARES

Seattle's Sand Point Peninsula was once timbered ground, with a few farms and boatyards located on the north side at Pontiac Bay. The build-out of a county airstrip in the 1920s, followed by development of the huge Sand Point Naval Air Station in the '30s and '40s, forever changed the landscape of the peninsula. Today the Magnuson Community Garden is one of dozens of entities bringing new life and purpose to what is now Seattle's second largest park. The garden and p-patch occupy a man-made hill constructed from the debris of the runways at the Air Station, which was largely deactivated in 1970. Aircraft once parked along a runway just below this hill. Mark Huston, the garden lead, can show you one of the tie-down hoops in the parking area.

Magnuson Community Garden took root in 2001. Soil, plants, trees, and gardeners from the long-running p-patch across Sand Point Way were brought over to the new garden. The Sand Point P-Patch had grown up on the site of old navy housing at the base of View Ridge hill. That housing, in turn, had taken the place of Japanese-run farms seized by the government in the early days of World War II. Folks who grew up in View Ridge recall playing in and around the old housing foundations. Sand Point (and now Magnuson) gardener Leslye Coe recalls finding numerous nails in her plot. Today what was the Sand Point P-Patch has been layered over by a Seattle Children's Hospital complex.



**Raised beds planters at Magnuson Community Garden**

## LAYERS OF USE

When Bradner P-Patch in the Mount Baker neighborhood was founded in 1987 it still had school portables on the grounds from the time it was used as a middle school annex (1971-1975). Until 1993 the structures were used by a nonprofit, Central Youth and Family Services. And, prior to all of that, the site held the Quinsite-Bradner housing project (1942-53), emergency housing for veterans returning from World War II and the Korean conflict. Some folks still recall these "temporaries" around town that lasted much longer than the five years planned. The garden itself began as a p-patch for Southeast Asian refugees and later expanded into a community garden and park serving all neighbors, Bradner Gardens Park. A basketball court added by the school district still stands.



## ABOVE THE WAVES

In 2010, a new model for community gardening, Rainier Beach Urban Farm and Wetlands (RBUFW), was established on the site of a defunct city nursery in the Pritchard Island neighborhood of Southeast Seattle. The 11-acre nursery, which grew plants for the city's parks and utility properties, occupied the land from about 1937 to 2010. Atlantic City Nursery and neighboring parkland existed on land reclaimed from Lake Washington when that body of water was deliberately lowered in 1916 by the opening of the Ship Canal. Much of it is still wetland. The neighborhood, no longer an island after the lake lowering, was once the site of a Duwamish Indian settlement.

Today, RBUFW is run as a cooperative garden and educational farm in a partnership between the City of Seattle, Tilth Alliance, and Friends of Rainier Beach Urban Farm and Wetlands. Some of the old nursery structures remain next to shiny new buildings. There are no individual plots at Rainier Beach. Instead, the land is managed in a way to promote education and advocacy, all while producing fresh produce for the benefit of the community. On any given day there may be a group of East African elders working on their crops, a gaggle of preschoolers on a field trip, and young adults in the school district's Bridges Program learning vocational and social skills.

In the words of one of the Friends, Sue Gibbs, the farm is "a healthy, safe place for people to grow, live, and grow their families."

**Thanks to Sue Gibbs, Leslye Coe, Mark Huston, Kathy Dugaw, Marty DeLong, and Joyce Moty for oral history interviews.**



# PICARDO P-PATCH

## The Giving Garden That Went From Charity to Hospitality | Cara Caulton

To any gardener who has dabbled in the rich history of the Seattle P-Patches, the Picardo P-Patch is sure to be a standout. Being the oldest P-Patch in Seattle, and in fact the program's namesake (P for Picardo!), the Picardo patch has no shortage of stories to tell. From its beginnings in the 1970s, to its evolution into an astonishing 2.25-acre garden of 259 plots and 300+ gardeners, there is plenty to share about Picardo. And while some of the Picardo P-Patch's rich history has already been documented, this special patch is continuing to make history today. We at the P-Patch Post spoke with Director of Donations and Giving Garden Steering Committee member Ava Clennon about some of the recent developments in the Picardo P-Patch, specifically their restructuring of the garden's donation program to bring in a focus on community partnerships and mutual aid—developments that she believes have the power to revolutionize how P-Patches and Giving Gardens across Seattle engage with their communities.

When Ava first began her work in the Picardo Giving Garden and their donations program in 2021, she encountered what is often the P-Patch standard—beds set aside for donations to local food banks, with individual gardeners donating excess produce. Although undoubtedly an invaluable service to the community, Ava, who had worked in food banks prior to her position at Picardo, explained to us that much of this donated summer produce never makes it to the shelves. Produce, especially the ultra-fresh, unprocessed produce that comes out of P-Patches, has a shorter shelf life than the canned and packaged foods that food banks typically receive. As Ava explains, "We're donating a lot of the same things at the same time as the other P-Patches are, so tomato seasons comes up and like—woah, there are so many tomatoes!" Unfortunately, this can overwhelm food banks and mean lots of five-star produce going to waste. And even if the food makes it to the shelf, it can often be impractical for low-income households or people experiencing homelessness. "We're giving all these vegetables, fruits, herbs and flowers to people who might not have a place to process, cook or keep them... So it just made a lot more sense for us to reach out into the community and create other partnerships with community organizations where we could get fresh food directly into our neighbor's kitchens."

With this in mind, Picardo has completely transformed their donations program. Their goal is simple: Connect with organizations in the community that directly work with populations who might benefit from P-Patch produce, and learn over time how to best serve them. As of now, Picardo has found partners in three special communities: The Silvercrest HUD retirement community in Greenwood, Idris Mosque in Northgate, and Sand Point Transitional Family Housing in Magnuson Park. Although these communities serve a diverse range of populations, all have one thing in common: A need for fresh, beautiful P-Patch produce!

After connections had been established, Ava got to work setting up rotating shifts of gardeners to run deliveries and adopted a simple setup of laying out the week's produce on tables "farmers market style" for folks to pick and choose. More than anything, Ava stressed to us the importance of this hands-on, relational element. Rather than watching their donations disappear into food banks, gardeners were now directly driving it to the community members that most needed it. "I spent quite a lot of time giving the gardeners regular updates on how their produce and flowers were genuinely changing the lives of our neighbors on the receiving end," she explained. "It was energizing to everyone, especially knowing that none of their beautiful food was going to waste."

When we spoke with Ava, she was thrilled to report that the program has been an enormous success. Picardo closed out their donation season with 2,152 pounds of produce, all donated from individual garden plots because Picardo's Giving Garden was being prepared for a major renovation project and dedicated to saving seeds. Additionally, dozens of herb bundles and flower bouquets were donated to their community partners. Ava's voice wavered with sentimentality as she told us about the young people at Sand Point, which houses women and children relocated from domestic abuse shelters, who would meticulously pick out bouquets to bring home to their moms. As Ava explained, "I believe our switch to creating community partnerships gave a purpose and real meaning to our gardeners this year and that's why they shared a truly unbelievable amount over this season."

From this success, Ava hopes that Picardo can serve as an inspiration for other P-Patches to expand their own donation programs and get more gardeners involved in Giving Gardens. Throughout our talk, the passion and pride that Ava had for the Seattle P-Patch program was obvious. These programs bring so much life into our communities and have the potential to strengthen the preexisting mutual aid systems here in Seattle. Opportunities to welcome neighbors into the patch, as well as encourage gardeners to go beyond the patch and connect with folks in the community, is how we can continue to grow the Seattle P-Patch program to be something truly special.

### WHAT'S NEXT FOR PICARDO?

"The next step of the plan is to bring our neighbors in, both physically and through feedback on what they'd like us to grow. A number of the Sand Point residents have been inspired to learn how to garden for themselves after experiencing a season of so much abundance! And like all P-Patches we have a wealth of masterful gardeners to show them how." In addition, this year Picardo is collaborating with Bastyr University's permaculture class to redesign the Giving Garden space, with feedback from their community partners. "We're learning what serves them best and with our Giving Garden, we fill in the gaps around what other gardeners most commonly grow and give from their individual donations," Ava explains. **If you'd like to learn more about Picardo's donation program, you can reach out to Ava Clennon at [GoddessVentures.888@gmail.com](mailto:GoddessVentures.888@gmail.com)**

**PICARDO WILL BE HOSTING A CELEBRATORY 50TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT ON SEPTEMBER 9TH THIS YEAR! Save the date and stay tuned for more info at: <https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/p-patch-gardening/about-the-program/50th-anniversary>**

**Would you like to donate to support the work of Picardo's 50th Anniversary event? Picardo and their community partners would be so grateful if you donate to this project: <https://grow.networkforgood.com/projects/188454-seattle-p-patch-program-50th-anniversary-celebration>**



***Y-WE Grow empowers young women to create positive change by connecting with each other and the land.***

## Understanding the larger ecosystem

“Is that a hawk?” asks Neli Jasuja, environmental justice programs manager for Young Women Empowered (Y-WE). We’re sitting on a bench at Marra Farm, located in Marra-Desimone Park, next to the Y-WE Grow garden plot. “My friend told me that when you see hawks circling near you or above you, it means you’re in the right place at the right time. I feel happy when I see them out here in particular,” she says.

Before Neli fully introduces herself, we walk over to a timeline of Marra Farm, so I can better understand the context of the land we’re standing on.

I learn that Marra Farm is on the traditional homeland of the Duwamish and Coast Salish tribes and that it’s one of the last remaining pieces of farmland in the city of Seattle. I learn that Italian, Japanese and Filipino immigrants settled in the area around turn of the twentieth century, and that Japanese farmers grew two-thirds of South Park’s produce until many of them were interned during World War II. And I learn that the farm and park is named after several Italian truck farming families who stewarded the land until they sold it to King County in 1980.

Once on the outskirts of town, the farm today is tucked into an industrial pocket, directly under a flight path and surrounded by highways. The South Park neighborhood is still home for many immigrant and refugee populations. And despite having inherited a legacy of environmental injustice and racism — such as a lack of services, including a grocery store — local residents continue to organize, build community and support each other.

This network of support and camaraderie is evident at Marra Farm, where many organizations share space and resources, including the P-Patch Community Gardening Program, Solid Ground, Salsa de la Vida and Y-WE.

“I think all this history and present day reality adds to the depth of the work we do here because the young people that we work with, whether they live in South Park or across the region, experience a lot of environmental racism and the impacts of that as well. It’s challenging but it’s also an opportunity,” says Neli.



## What Healing Looks Like

For Neli, connecting with the earth has led to an easing of the chronic pain that started to develop while working in tech marketing. As the child of immigrant parents who prioritized financial stability, she found success pursuing and achieving their dreams, but felt disconnected from her values and her body.

That’s when the pain started, so she took a major career U-turn and became an AmeriCorps volunteer with Solid Ground. Soon she discovered Y-WE, and eventually took a job coordinating their Nature Connections program and starting their farming and food justice program. “I started coming out here and began to feel an easing of that chronic pain through using my body to connect with and steward the land,” says Neli. “I was like, this feels better. Let’s go in this direction.”

This healing is an essential part of Y-WE’s mission: to cultivate the power of diverse young people to be courageous changemakers in our community. Y-WE centers BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) and LGBTQ+ youth who identify as women or were assigned female at birth, including trans and

non-binary and other gender expansive folks. Programs focus on social justice, art, and environmental justice programs, including the Y-WE Grow program at Marra Farm.

Neli explains that many of the youth participants have experienced trauma at the site of the land either personally or ancestrally. Y-WE Grow seeks to repair that relationship. “Our goals here are to disrupt racism and injustice in the food system and learn about those issues. The way we do that is by first providing space for healing and connection with the land for the young people we work with,” she says.

Healing can look as simple as weeding—like following Morning Glory from one side of the farm to the other. It can look like noticing bugs or planting seeds and watching them grow. It can look like a farm-to-table meal with fall harvest soup and kale salad with nasturtium vinaigrette. It’s felt in caring for and stewarding the land, says Neli, especially since everyone knows all the food goes back into the Y-WE and South Park communities.





## From Healing to Action

Another goal of Y-WE Grow is to help young people develop skills for interdependence since food systems aren't built for BIPOC and immigrant communities, which is why the program offers workshops on food preservation, plant medicine, woodworking and creek restoration. "We're starting to build these systems and skills so we can actually rely on each other. It's cool to see how the young people are directing that growth with that focus," says Neli.

From everything Neli says, the youth are clearly fired up and invested in the land, the food and the program. It was their idea to start a paid internship program, which continues to expand, and many return to provide continued leadership after graduating. Their passion is evident in their ability to find creative solutions to tough problems like the recent revelation that the soil is contaminated. In response, the youth began working with soil experts to learn what to grow where, built raised beds, had soil delivered, and began worm composting to remove pollutants.

Learning how to transform that grief into action has been hard but valuable, says Neli, and it's part of a continual process. "There is a sense of healing that people get when they come here. And from that sense of healing, they start developing purpose. Healing moves into purpose and from purpose we move into action and advocacy. I think they all feed into each other," she says.

## It Starts With Community

When the pandemic hit in March 2020 and everything went virtual, it didn't take long for the Y-WE Grow program to start back up. Soon it was the only in-person Y-WE program, and provided a much-needed space for youth to gather and process together.

"With the pandemic and with racial justice uprisings, having a place for young people to come to be in community with human, plant and soil and water allies. It was extremely necessary," says Neli. "We really heard from young people: We want this. We need this."

That feeling of connection extends to other groups on Marra Farm, within the South Park community, and beyond to a broader BIPOC-led farming and food justice movements across the region. "We're in constant relationship with everyone here. We look out for each other," says Neli. "We share seeds and food with each other."

During a recent fieldtrip to YES Farm to learn from the Black Farmers Collective, Neli recalls how the youth felt antsy. They wanted to be put to work. They wanted to know what they could do right then and there.

It turns out the hawks might be onto something as they circle Marra Farm. Y-WE Grow may have found the right place and the right time to grow something big and monumental. And the youth are leading the way.

**Young Women Empowered (Y-WE) is a Seattle-based nonprofit that serves young women and anyone assigned female at birth, including trans and non-binary youth ages 13-19. We offer after-school programs, summer camps, and events, all free of charge, that are centered around leadership development and mentorship. You can learn more about our unique model, program offerings, and about our Y-WE Grow program focused on farming and food justice on our website :**

**[youngwomenempowered.org](http://youngwomenempowered.org)**

# GARDEN HOTLINE

Seasonal Garden Tips By Laura Matter

## Protecting Soil During a Northwest Spring Gardening Season

The Pacific Northwest is known for its rainy winters, typically drizzly and cloudy, with occasionally virtuous downpours. As our climate patterns change we are encountering heavier rainfalls, more often, throughout our winter season. According to the USDA Northwest Climate Hub, "Precipitation trends are changing throughout the region. In Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, recent years have seen a reduction in summer precipitation and an increase in winter and spring precipitation." This has repercussions for our spring gardening season, in particular for when we can work our soil to begin growing vegetables, or planting in our garden beds. In some cases, like in my yard which has a flat garden section that backs up to a steep hillside full of springs, you might not even be able to walk around much on your lawn or garden beds because they are so saturated. We are eager for spring and to get out and plant but do be cautious with your soil in order to protect it.



# LEGACY GIVING

## Where There's a Will, There's a Way

**Legacy Giving** is not a new concept but one definitely worth considering if you want to leave a lasting gift to a nonprofit whose mission you are passionate about. If you are passionate about community gardens and our support to fight food insecurities in our community, if you are passionate about preserving open, green spaces, please remember GROW in your estate planning. A legacy gift can help GROW in its mission without impacting your financial security during your lifetime.

Is there a particular garden that you want to help? Do you want your gift to help teach kids the benefits of gardening? Does the idea of preserving open spaces for gardening appeal to you? We can help you plan ways to achieve these goals. **We encourage you to contact GROW to discuss your philanthropic vision.** We can help ensure that your gift will have the greatest impact and will support the programs and goals you value most. Of course, this article is not intended as tax or legal advice. We'll leave that to the professionals. Our hope is that you keep GROW in mind as you create or update your estate plan.

**A gift to GROW made as part of your estate can create a legacy of healthy food and open spaces for many future generations of gardeners!**

Written By Eric Todderud and Michelle Blume

**Legacy or planned giving can be accomplished through a variety of options.**

### 1. Leave a contribution directly to GROW in your estate will.

The contribution could be in the form of money, land, or other property, including shares of stock or other investments. The gift could be a set dollar amount or simply a percentage of your estate.

### 2. Designate GROW as a beneficiary to your estate.

Retirement plans, insurance policies, and other financial instruments may allow you to designate a beneficiary to receive the funds on your passing. Designating GROW as a beneficiary for a portion or all of the estate is an easy way to make sure the important work we do continues while your funds remain in your hands during your lifetime.

### 3. GROW also can be the beneficiary of a charitable trust.

A trust can protect your assets while you are alive and ensure that a gift will pass to GROW upon your death. Although trusts are a little more complicated than direct gifts, they can provide valuable tax benefits in your lifetime and more control over how the funds are used. We recommend that you consult with estate planning professionals to help with the details.

Wet soil needs to be left alone until it is not going to be damaged by turning it. When the soil is too saturated your activity in the soil can cause compaction that can take years to correct. All that hard work of growing cover crops and adding compost over the years will cause you to “lose ground” in soil health. Test your soil by grabbing a sample in your hand and try to form it into a ball. If it is crumbly and won't hold shape you are good to go. If it forms a ball and stays intact wait a bit and try again another day.

If your soil is dry enough to turn, take time to evaluate if you need to add amendments. More compost is not always a good thing. Healthy soil for gardens, in particular vegetable and flower beds, only needs from 3 – 5% organic matter content. Too much organic matter can be detrimental to nutrient runoff, growth of plants, affect microbial populations and in general result in a poorly growing garden. Test your soil to assess if you need amendments at all and for any other nutrients you might be lacking. It helps to have information before taking the time and spending the money to accumulate products you might not need.

# ENJOY THE UNFOLDING SPRING!

**Call us with your questions  
at 206-633-0224— or email  
via the form at:  
[gardenhotline.org/question](https://gardenhotline.org/question)**



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**P-PATCH GARDENERS' 2023 DISCOUNT COUPON**

This coupon is good for 10% off purchases related to your P-Patch or other community garden. Be sure to present your coupon BEFORE the cashier rings up the sale. **Happy gardening!**

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