



Gardening for Sustainability

ALBERS VISTA GARDENS OF KITSAP

JOHN J. ALBERS

With photographs by Stefano Politi Markovina and David E. Perry

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Gardening for Sustainability: Albers Vista Gardens of Kitsap, by John J. Albers, was published by Vista Gardens Press to present the evolution and horticultural elements of the urban botanical oasis, Vista Gardens, and to detail the principles and practices that guide the development of a sustainable garden.

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Front cover: A tapestry of plant colors and textures on a southwest hillside in Vista Gardens.

Frontispiece: A view to the west from the Stroll Gallery of Vista Gardens.

Page v: A panoramic view to the south from Vista Gardens.

Pages 10–11: The red Japanese maple ‘Oshio beni’ in Mittsu no Shima.

Pages 76–77: From the Stroll Gallery, a view of Phinney Bay and the Port Washington Narrows with the wooded Bremerton hills beyond.

Back cover: Some of the wide variety of plants and colors in the Stroll Gallery.

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Preface

I HAVE DEDICATED most of my adult life to science. Over the years, I have written thousands of pages for scientific journals and books, following the accepted style and form that typically conveys facts, occasionally opinions, yet never passion. Horticulture, landscaping, and related environmental issues have been my passion for more than three decades. Thus, I have found writing this book about Vista Gardens enormously satisfying. This joyful task has given me the opportunity to share my love of gardening and environmental stewardship. At the same time, I explain how this garden, the Albers Vista Gardens of Kitsap, came to be, and why it is so important to preserve it. In this book I hope to show gardeners how to develop attractive, sustainable landscapes and to inspire them, by example, to make their own botanical oasis. It also speaks of my love for nature and for my particular part of the world, and it illustrates the wonderful diversity of plant life.

The first part of the book is devoted to the history, setting, and evolution of the garden, and to its horticultural and artistic elements. An urban botanical oasis, Vista Gardens encompasses fourteen different garden rooms that are distinguished by garden theme, topography, and differing plant palettes. Two of the rooms hold very different woodland gardens: the first is developed with numerous striped-barked and Japanese maples to provide shade for a rhododendron collection and companion plants, and the second offers a madrona and maple native woodland. Other garden rooms showcase both common and uncommon durable, drought-tolerant, non-native plants from around the world that are particularly appropriate as a contribution to the sustainability of gardens in the Northwest and other temperate regions of the world. On the borders of Vista Gardens, shelterbelts were developed with native and climate-adapted non-native plants for wildlife habitat, screening, and erosion control. As a significant portion of today's Vista Gardens was originally degraded by Himalayan blackberries and other invasive plants, a section of the garden is dedicated to

On the Pollination Pathway in the Stroll Gallery.

the restoration of native flora. I provide a detailed account of the approaches and processes of landscape restoration used to restore the native habitat.

All gardeners have their favorite plants. Thus, a chapter is devoted to a comprehensive discussion of the special plant collections in Vista Gardens. Of all the plant groups, I consider conifers perhaps the most fascinating. Having evolved on this earth through some three hundred million years, they display an exceptional ecological and aesthetic versatility. It should come as no surprise, then, that I have devoted a section of the book to the characteristics and many landscape uses of conifers, and I have provided descriptions and numerous examples of the myriad forms and colors of conifers in Vista Gardens. Maples are another plant group with exceptional ornamental versatility. This book, therefore, highlights their ornamental characteristics, in particular those of Japanese maples and striped-bark maples. Also, many viburnums are underutilized in gardens despite exhibiting superior horticultural and ornamental qualities. I have thus provided some examples of this wonderful genus, hoping to inspire gardeners like you who are reading this book to use them in the creation of your special spaces.

Although plants have an inherent beauty, the artistry of nature can be enhanced through the use of rocks, ornamentation, and architectural elements in the landscape. The last portion of Part I of the book focuses on this often-neglected aspect of garden design. The creation of a unique space through the combination of plants with art and natural elements requires thought, planning, and vision. In Vista Gardens, my wife and I are creating a landscape that will grow and inspire. We are doing this by combining all the elements of gardening with all the wonders of nature. My hope is that this stroll through Vista Gardens will inspire and teach others to preserve and enhance the beauty of nature that is all around us.

Part II of the book describes the practical principles and practices I have found useful in the development of Vista Gardens, and the most important elements of maintenance. It concludes with a chapter dedicated to lessons learned from mistakes made during the creation of the garden.

Although the garden setting is in the northwest part of the United States, the principles and practices that were used in its development apply to all gardeners everywhere. Just as the garden has evolved over the years, so have my landscape principles and practices. For the most part, they are based on a combination of the latest scientific evidence and my own personal experience. The popular concept of sustainability is discussed not only in terms of this specific garden, but also in terms of the principles and landscape practices the greater gardening community would do well to follow if we are to conserve our limited resources for future generations. For this reason I devote a chapter to a discussion of how we can

make healthy, vibrant, sustainable landscapes. This chapter emphasizes the importance of native plants and pollinators in our landscapes and explains how to create healthy soils, enhance water infiltration and reduce stormwater runoff, make ideal plant selections, and attract pollinators to our gardens.

Garden maintenance involves the age-old issue of the balance between nature and culture, and more specifically the amount and kinds of intervention needed to maintain the garden. First, I devote a special chapter to this topic, beginning with the essence and life cycle of a weed and how to deal with weeds and invasive species in the garden. Next, I discuss the timing and methods for pruning woody plants to maintain their health and aesthetics, based on my own field experience and that of local experts. Because gardens are ever-changing, living entities, techniques for planting new plants or transplanting them to new locations are other important elements of garden maintenance. This chapter also provides the best procedures for planting, based on the latest scientific evidence. The section ends with a brief overview on fertilization, watering, and garden cleanup.

Writing this book has given me the opportunity to conceptualize all the factors that went into the development of Vista Gardens. This process has made me realize that while I have made some mistakes along the way I have also learned a great deal by the experience. Therefore, I have included some examples of the errors I have made and lessons I have learned.

I hope that by reading this book you will find both the inspiration and the practical solutions for creation of your own garden, and that your efforts will become a source of beauty not only for yourself, but for all who experience even the tiniest fraction of your garden's abundance. Vista Gardens began as a modest, ever-changing idea for creation of something new, and has become something truly unique and worth preserving. I hope you will enjoy your journey through Vista Gardens.