

Self-guided Tour of Seattle University's taqwsheblu Vi Hilbert Ethnobotanical Garden

The garden is roughly divided into four biomes, or representative ecological areas of the Pacific Northwest: alpine, lowland forest, wetland and prairie. Begin your visit to the Garden at its northwest entrance, across the concrete walkway from the Arrupe Jesuit Residence and adjacent to the police callbox. This entrance is marked by a large river boulder inset with a sign bearing the following text:

Gifts from the Creator

Where Seattle University stands a forest once stood. In and around this forest, people and plants lived closely together for many centuries before the city of Seattle was established. This garden invites you to learn more about this intimate, sustainable relationship and encourages you to cultivate your own caring relationship with our native plants.

Ethnobotany is the study of relationships between people and plants. Among the Lushootseed-speaking First Peoples of the Puget Sound region, native plants have been valued for much more than their beauty. They have also been cherished as important foods and medicines, and employed as materials for a wide range of uses including building, carving, weaving, fishing, and ritual activities. Lushootseed oral traditions and teachings reflect and preserve a detailed knowledge of these native plants. In the harvesting and use of native plants, this sophisticated knowledge has been guided by an ethic of reverence and restraint that balances the needs of humans and the needs of the plants.

Reverence and knowledge are clearly demonstrated, for example, in the use of Xepayac (Western Red Cedar), a native tree that has provided materials for an astonishing variety of products, from clothing to housing, canoes to cordage, bentwood boxes to intricately woven baskets. In appreciation of its many gifts, Xepayac is honored in stories and teachings as a model of generosity, and it is harvested with expressions of gratitude and respect.

This ethnobotanical garden is dedicated to the sensitive and sustainable relationships between native plants and the First Peoples of the Puget Sound region; to the Lushootseed language that eloquently expresses these relationships; and to Upper Skagit elder taqwsheblu Vi Hilbert for her work to reawaken the language of this land.

If we learn, we will care. If we care, we can preserve.

The signage in the Garden was chosen to emphasize natural materials (such as the stones used for signs at each of the Garden's main entrances) and simple surfaces (such as the brushed aluminum of the individual plant signs). The river rock sign is intended to evoke the Skagit River home of the garden's namesake, Vi Hilbert, and harmonize with the lowland forest biome of which forms a part.

Just inside the garden entrance is an oyster shell-strewn interpretive area which recalls the shell middens of Native settlements. Plantings in this area (such as Oregon Grape, Salal, Evergreen Huckleberry, Thimbleberry and various other berries, shrubs and conifer trees) compose the lowland forest.

Downslope from the lowland forest is the wetland area of the Garden, which features a small watercourse and pool. This area is also home to a mature Vine Maple which (for now!) is the largest native tree in the Garden. Just downhill from this tree you can walk out to the pond to get a close look at the water and the plantings, including water-loving Scouler's Willow, Canoe Birch, Red-osier Dogwood and Red Alder. The watercourse is connected to the University's sprinkler network but is primarily fed by rainfall and water from a storm drain in the street above and to the east of the Garden. The small pond is a focus for animal life, and is especially enjoyed by feathered visitors.

Continuing south and back uphill on the main curved path, you pass through the prairie biome with its paired plantings of Garry Oak and Camas, accompanied by Nodding Onion. Downhill from the prairie area and fronting the street is an extensive buffer area of mixed plantings, including some high-altitude conifers like Mountain Hemlock which compose our alpine biome. Continuing on this path takes you to the southern Garden entrance next to East James Street, and the large stone plinth bearing one of the quotations that Vi Hilbert bestowed upon the garden: *Dix dx?uGusaA ti'e? swatixted* (The earth is our first teacher). Seen from the side, the stone plinth is gently curved, suggested the upturned palms that compose a gesture of respect and thanks among the region's Native peoples.