Polystichum setiferum
Plumosumulatum Group
Photo by Richie Steffen
The Mukai Farm & Garden

The Mukai Farm & Garden represents a blending of two distinct cultures. Denichiro “B.D.” Mukai, a Japanese immigrant, became a successful Vashon business owner and entrepreneur, while his wife, Kuni, expressed her ethnic heritage by designing and installing a traditional Japanese stroll garden around their very American-looking home. The family balanced their Japanese heritage with a newly adopted American lifestyle. Their house, Japanese garden, and strawberry barreling plant all reflect this successful assimilation. Today, the Mukai Farm & Garden reminds us of the powerful contributions of the Mukai family and the broader Japanese American immigrant community to 20th-century agriculture, business, and community life on Vashon.

Mary & Whit Carhart

Over the past 20 years, Whit and Mary Carhart have created a 2.5 acre sloped Northwest style garden on wooded acreage which overlooks Quartermaster Bay. Multiple sculptures accent the garden with diverse woodland plants, Japanese maples, rhododendrons, and unusual conifers amongst unusual perennials, grasses, and ferns. Paths have sitting places to reflect on naturalistic plantings around the hillside waterfall and pond. An antique Indonesian garden shed adds an Asian touch to the garden. Visitors should wear comfy shoes and be prepared to walk on gentle slopes and/or stairs.

NHS MEET THE BOARD TOUR
SATURDAY, AUGUST 10, 12-5 PM

By Justin Galicic

Save the date for the summertime NHS Meet the Board Garden Tour to Vashon Island: Saturday, August 10th! This will be the first time going off the mainland to one of Puget Sound’s most exquisite islands. The ferry ride to get there is an adventure in itself and a lovely ride across the water. This year the Meet the Board Tour celebrates 15 years after the original concept was proposed by Pat Riehl, whose garden is on the August 10th tour. Thank you, Pat, for a great idea that has become an annual tradition!
Cindy & Steve Stockett

Froggsong Garden, a five acre estate garden, is a blend of formal and informal design. Rose pergolas, a roundel garden, parterre garden, a stone “ruin” and a knot garden share a space that frames and defines the senses. Cindy calls this type of garden “Northwest Formal.” The Queen’s Garden, with repeating arches of hornbeam trees, is reaching maturity. A Hydrangea Walk was completed this spring. An Earth Works garden was completed in 2015 which consists of four elements: a passageway, cairns, a wind garden and a labyrinth. This garden has been featured in numerous magazines, including Sunset, Fine Gardening, Better Homes and Gardens and Pacific Northwest Magazine.

Jonathan & Lisa Morse

Nestled on the shores of Fern Cove, the Morse garden weaves its way through a 2¼-acre property surrounded by forests of tall Douglas fir, red alder, and Western red cedar. Initially established in 1998, the garden of Jonathan Morse is a labor of love that has transformed the property that has been a part of his family for three generations. Taking cues from materials found on site, Jonathan has created a series of gateways and unique garden environs throughout the site. From an alpine garden filled with a blanket of succulents to a working potager surrounded by abundantly colorful perennial borders, every corner of the garden is individually attentive to the specific condition the site dictates.

Pat & Walt Riehl

Pat & Walt’s property is six acres with most left in its natural state. When they bought the land in 2006 there was bamboo, nettle and a weedy lawn. The garden started with a fern stumpery in 2007, inspired by a visit to The Stumpery at Highgrove Royal Gardens in the United Kingdom. Lush garden beds followed from areas of the lawn and were dug out by hand. Collections of choice epimedium, small conifers, ferns, schezfleras and saxifrages are abundant amidst a myriad of other plants in the stumpery and garden beds. The garden continues to be refined and expanded in a serendipitous fashion.}

Justin Galicic is a board member of the Northwest Horticultural Society.
It all began in 1989 with a group of over-caffeinated fern enthusiasts gathered in my Bellevue, Washington living room. So, what did we want to do? That was the easy part. Our goal was to provide a means to share information and inspiration to fellow fern growers and encourage would-be fern growers.

And how would we do this? This was where it became a bit more complex! However, in the spirit of optimism and “noble” purpose we decided that it called for an organization with long term goals dedicated to “establishing a comprehensive collection of the world’s hardy ferns for display, testing, evaluation, public education and introduction to the gardening and horticultural community.” To achieve this purpose, many species, hybrids and varieties – both common and rare – were to be propagated and tested in selected environments for their different degrees of hardiness and ornamental value.

We would call it the Hardy Fern Foundation.

Looking back, I marvel at how much energy and effort by our small, but dedicated, group went into establishing the organization and accomplishing our goals. We had excellent help, of course, including encouragement from our friends and fellow enthusiasts across the country along with the Northwest Horticultural Society, the American Fern Society and advice from Dr. John Mickel, Curator of Ferns at the New York Botanical Garden.

Although it was understood that for practical purposes our primary gardens would be in the greater Seattle area, it was clear that we also wanted and needed national test sites and display gardens representing a variety of climatic conditions. We were very pleased to find immediate interest from a number of excellent...
botanical institutions from across the country.

Membership drives and solicitations, descriptive brochures, lots of paperwork, including legal obligations and more legal obligations, obtaining plants, planting plants, researching potential test sites, and, yes, especially pursuing funding, followed intensely. We were on our way.

One of our first projects was to launch a newsletter (now a quarterly) to keep members up to date with activities as well as to present information on cultivation, fern travels and a great variety of articles of general fern interest.

Growth and progress continued and happily things went very well. By the end of our first year, I was able to report the following notes of progress in our newsletter:

“We are pleased to report that in January of this year the Northwest Horticultural Society gave us a grant in the amount of $5000 as seed money to make our proposals a reality. Our membership is approaching 250 and is truly national in distribution (33 states plus Canada). In cooperation with the Rhododendron Species Foundation, the Hardy Fern Foundation planting became a reality this past spring with a groundbreaking in June. 189 generously donated ferns representing 56 species and varieties were arranged in the Lower Study Garden and pond area. A second work party in October added another 115 ferns. Our first spore list will be published in conjunction with the American Fern Society. Requests to be considered for satellite garden status have been received from seven institutions representing a considerable divergence in climatic conditions. In addition, offers of cooperation have been received from as far away as The Netherlands, Great Britain and the former East Germany.”

Several years thereafter we began our annual fern distribution program whereby we sent ferns to affiliated gardens for evaluation and we offered ferns for sale to members.

From this modest beginning growth and enthusiasm as well as generosity grew. We were really on our way!

As the years progressed, our activities expanded. The Northwest Horticultural Society sponsored the very first Fern Fest in 1973. Back then, to display the material, we carried tables (4’ x 8’ plywood sheets) supported by sawhorses, down and – mind you – back up to the storage attic of our hosts, Seattle’s Washington Park Arboretum. It has, of course, long since expanded and moved to the more accommodating Center for Urban Horticulture on the University of Washington campus. We joined NHS in a mutually delightful cooperative effort for many years and, with their approval and continued support, took over the sponsorship of Fern Fest in the early 2000’s. This festival consists of a major (reputed to be the most comprehensive in the US) sale of ferns and companion plants as well as a featured speaker. The festival is now enjoyed annually in late May to early June.

Classes and tour opportunities have increased over the years and are very popular. The varied classes have featured everything “ferny” from growing ferns from spores and fern identification to creating and planting a fern table. Of the garden tours, in addition to local attractions, a number of exciting excursions have been jointly sponsored by the HFF and British Pteridological Society. These include the Pacific Northwest, the East Coast, Texas, Germany, the Southeast and California.

We complete our year with an annual fall potluck social, a fun and educational gathering with an extensive informational frond display artistically arranged by Richie Steffen plus a lecture which usually involves tempting us with travel.
While initially it was our intent to install our primary test garden at Lakewold in Tacoma, it was later decided that the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington offered better opportunities for mutually complementary displays of both the rhododendrons and ferns. Our collection there expands annually but our singular most popular attraction is the stumpery which was created in 2009. Composed of stumps and/or “root wads” that comfortably house displays of our friends the ferns and covers over half an acre and consists of some 140 “stumps” as well as a long horizontal viewing bench created out of a fallen tree. The ferns and companion plants have filled in handsomely, so it is a lovely year-round display. Do visit and enjoy a tour.

We enthusiastically invite you to visit our recently updated colorful website, www.hardyferns.org, where you’ll find in-depth details about “all things ferny” from the scientific to horticultural. You can see photos and learn more about the HFF and its affilia-
ates, further resources, and membership plant distribution as well as upcoming events of interest.

And so here we are now – thirty years old. We will be having a special celebratory social for members and friends at the Amazon Spheres in late October. While we no longer regularly meet for coffee in my living room, members still gather for wine, camaraderie and good cheer, yes, here in my living room.

In closing, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to the NHS for your 30 years of support, friendship and encouragement. You’ve been wonderful.

Sue Olsen is the founding member of the Hardy Fern Foundation and still serves on the board of directors and she is the owner of Foliage Gardens nursery in Bellevue, Washington.
The Miller Botanical Garden is pleased to announce the 25th Annual Elisabeth Carey Miller Memorial Lecture on September 12, 2019. Since the beginning of this event, the Northwest Horticultural Society and the Elisabeth C. Miller Library have been co-sponsors making this the largest continuous running horticultural lecture in the country. Betty Miller, the founder of both NHS and the Miller Library, was a strong advocate for horticultural education and served as a driving force for bringing noted horticulturists and gardeners to the Northwest to share their ideas in the early days of NHS. Upon her death in 1994, the newly formed Pendleton and Elisabeth C. Miller Charitable Foundation directed the Miller Garden to commemorate her with an annual lecture celebrating Mrs. Miller’s commitment to education. The Miller Charitable Foundation wanted this to be a lasting gift to the horticultural community and underwrites all of the costs of the event so all interested gardeners can attend for free.
This lecture blossomed into the horticultural highlight of the year under the direction of Richard Hartlage, former Miller Garden director and Valerie Easton, former Miller Library manager and columnist for *The Seattle Times*. Under their initial direction, top luminaries of the gardening world were brought to Seattle to share their knowledge and experiences. The first lectures were held in NHS Hall at the Center for Urban Horticulture, but as the popularity of the lecture grew, it moved to Kane Hall on the main University of Washington campus, then finally to its current home, Meany Hall for the Performing Arts, one of the premier performance spaces in the Pacific Northwest.

Historically, the Miller Lecture has featured horticultural luminaries who have shaped the way we think about gardening as well as public garden professionals whose work helps with the preservation and conservation of plants around the world. Past speakers include Sir Ghillean Prance, Roy Lancaster, Penelope Hobhouse, Dr. Peter Raven, Helen Dillion and Anna Pavord, all representing remarkable horticultural legacies. Although these professionals hold amazing garden credit, this year the lecture will focus on the future by bringing to Seattle one of the bright young talents in the world of public gardens in celebration of Mrs. Miller’s visionary view for horticulture for the area and to celebrate this special anniversary. We are excited to have our youngest speaker thus far, Peter Zale, Ph.D. of Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. Dr. Zale is the Associate Director of Conservation, Plant Breeding, and Collections, at Longwood Gardens.

Holding a Master’s degree and Ph.D in plant breeding and genetics from The Ohio State University, Dr. Zale joined the Longwood Gardens staff in 2015. Longwood Gardens is one of the most preeminent public gardens in North America with over a thousand acres featuring native habitat, beautifully cultivated gardens, and conservatories as well as highly respected research and training facilities. Dr. Zale leads the curatorial activities of the Gardens with a special interest in domestic and international relationships facilitating the exchange of information, scientific collaboration and the sharing of plant material between public gardens and botanical institutes.

Dr. Zale’s lecture is titled “Plant Exploration at Longwood Gardens: Past, Present, and Future.” A well-traveled botanical explorer, he has also participated in over 25 plant exploration expeditions throughout the United States, Japan, Vietnam, Myanmar, Republic of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and China. Using his experiences as a foundation, Dr. Zale will provide unique insights from the last 60 years of botanical exploration led by Longwood Gardens.

This lecture is free and NHS members will be notified when tickets become available in early August. Be sure to mark your calendars for this special event, September 12 at Meany Hall!

Richie Steffen is Executive Director of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden and NHS past president.
Here in the Snoqualmie Valley it is hard to grow plants from the Mediterranean basin. Our rosemary struggles and our strawberry tree never sets fruit because the first frost kills all the flowers.

But we can grow figs (*Ficus carica*). We grow both *Ficus carica* ‘Brown Turkey’ and ‘Desert King’. ‘Desert King’ (not “dessert”) was found in Madera, California around 1930 by Sisto Pedrini, an Italian grower. He took cuttings and planted trees in Los Altos.
and San Francisco. It quickly became popular for its abundant fruit, even on young trees, and its adaptability to cooler coastal climates, even cold river valleys like ours. It was propagated and distributed by the King Fig Plantation of San Francisco where it received its name. ‘Desert King’ is listed in the literature as just ‘King’ with ‘Desert King’ as a pseudonym. And, it is also known as ‘Charlie’ and ‘White King’ and sometimes erroneously offered as ‘Desert King’. I had always wrongly called it ‘Dessert King’, myself. Now, I have taken to calling it ‘King’ for simplicity’s sake.

*Ficus* is the Latin name for fig and also its modern botanical name. The name fig came to us directly from the Latin. It entered English first as *fic* or *fike*, slowly and logically morphing into fig. Fig is also the name for the 850 members of the genus *Ficus* in the Moraceae, or mulberry family. The origin of the specific epithet *carica* – also the generic name of papayas – is a bit more baffling, as it refers to a region of Turkey where neither figs nor papayas originated. There has been a long history of fig cultivation in Turkey – Turkey is still the world’s leading producer of figs so the association stuck.

The true origin of the common fig is in the Arabian Peninsula where it was first cultivated around 6000 years ago in Yemen and later transported to the fertile lands of Mesopotamia, now modern Iraq. As a highly valuable foodstuff, it was traded throughout the Mediterranean and is now naturalized from Spain to India plus figs are cultivated worldwide, particularly in warm temperate climate zones like California. It arrived in California in 1769 with Franciscan monks. The Mission fig (*Ficus carica ‘Mission’*), which they grew, is still a popular variety today. Over the centuries more and more cultivars were brought to the area by subsequent waves of immigrants. One of these was probably ‘Desert King’ since figs outside the Mediterranean basin are all sterile.

Figs are a strange fruit, not a true fruit at all, but the receptacle of an inflorescence turned in on itself, hiding the tiny flowers and tiny drupes (small fleshy fruits) deep inside. The fruit is actually the conglomeration of these with the drupes making the fleshy interior and the ripened receptacle making the skin. Figs produce two crops, the first called brebas, or brevas in Spanish, and second called figs. A bit confusing, I know. Brebas arise from parthenocarpic flowers meaning they do not require fertilization to form fruit. Fig connoisseurs argue over which is better, the brebas or the figs. ‘King’ produces a heavy crop of brebas, which insures us northerners a good crop of fruit even in a short cool summer.

I can tell you first-hand they are honey sweet and juicy, absolutely decadent. Only three percent of the global fig harvest reaches consumers fresh. Most are dried or canned. We dry our figs and make jam, but not until we are sickeningly full of ripe ones. Maybe, as our summers get warmer and longer, we will be able to try other figs, too.

But for now, ‘King’ is king with me.

Daniel Mount is a former NHS board member and a frequent contributor to GardenNotes and other publications. You can read his blog at mountgardens.com.
Sand, Silt or Clay? Texture Says a lot About Soil

By Kym Pokorny

It’s a simple equation: If you want to grow better plants, you first need to understand the soil.

“The texture of a soil is its proportion of sand, silt and clay,” said James Cassidy, a soils instructor at Oregon State University. “Texture determines all kinds of things like drainage, aeration, the amount of water the soil can hold, erosion potential and even the amount of nutrients that can be stored.”

To become better acquainted with your soil texture, he recommends using the “hand method.” Dig beneath the top layer of organic matter down to the mineral soil, about 6 to 8 inches depending on how much mulch you use. Scoop out a handful of moist soil and knead it into a ball. Add water if necessary. If it can be worked into a ribbon, you have high clay content. The clay content is roughly equivalent to the length to which you can work the ribbon. Each inch of ribbon is the equivalent to less than 10 percent of clay.

So, if you have a four-inch ribbon, the soil could be comprised of up to 40 percent clay. After wetting it excessively, if the soil feels gritty in the palm of your hand, you have sandy soil. The remainder is the silt content.

When people rave about “nice loam,” it’s the soil texture to which they are referring, Cassidy said.

“Loam means you have roughly equal portions of sand, silt and clay,” he said. “If you have sandy loam, it has a little more sand in it. Silt loam has a little more silt in it. Clay loam has more clay in it.”

Soil needs to be able to hold some water, he added, but not so much that plant roots can’t breathe. A loam achieves that balance.

Clay gets a bad rap because too much of it means it holds lots of water and so the soil stays wetter, colder and is difficult to work. But don’t be so quick to judge clay harshly.

“In defense of clay, clay is where the nutrients in soil are stored,” Cassidy said. “Sand and silt don’t store nutrients; they’re just rocks.”

Many Willamette Valley gardeners, though, must overcome the annual challenge of soils that are high with clay.

“The answer is to add organic matter,” Cassidy said.

A key way to do this is to plant cover crops from mid-August to mid-September. Plant a mix of grasses such as annual rye grass or winter wheat and legumes such as Austrian field peas or fava beans. Cut cover crops down before they go to seed in the springtime, just as they start to flower. Let the remnants rot back into the ground, and later incorporate it back into the soil.

When preparing your plot for the first time, till it lightly with a garden fork. Cassidy advises against using rototillers in a garden. Rototilling can break up large pores in the soil structure, which are key to water infiltration and drainage.

“Think minimum tillage,” he said. “If the soil is a little lumpy-bumpy, just spread a layer of high quality compost over it and it will be fine.”

But if tilling seems to be the only option, do it when the soil is ready, not when it is convenient for you, Cassidy advised. Wait until the soil has the right amount of moisture. If you squeeze a handful of soil and it’s too hard to break, it’s too dry to till. If it ruptures in the hand when squeezed, it’s good to till.

Add organic matter every year and in about five years, you will build up healthy soil with improved drainage – even with a clay heavy soil.

“There are literally a billion microorganisms in a single pinch of soil and they all need to eat,” said Cassidy, who teaches in OSU’s College of Agricultural Sciences. “They don’t photosynthesize like plants do, but they need energy and that comes from organic matter. They consume energy best in well-drained soils with organic matter.”

*Editor’s Note: Many gardeners in the Puget Sound region face the challenge of clay soils as well.

Kym Pokorny is Public Service Communications Specialist for Oregon State University & OSU Extension Service.
LITERARY NOTES
from the Miller Library

by Brian Thompson

UGH. THAT WAS MY FIRST REACTION to the title The History of Landscape Design in 100 Gardens. I immediately pictured a dull, dusty history book.

When I opened the book, I was surprised. Choosing a random page, I was hooked by the narrative and soon fully engaged. Author Linda A. Chisholm skillfully weaves stories of gardens and gardeners seamlessly within the prevailing styles and the broader culture of their times.

To do this, she uses “one hundred of the world’s great gardens, chosen to illustrate the history and principles of landscape design and to answer the question of why a particular style became dominant at a specific time and place in history.”

This history begins with a wide swath from the 9th century to the 15th century C.E. This was a time when gardens were enclosed, providing protection from the dangerous world outside. This style was used in both Christian and Muslim gardens, the latter in part represented by the Alhambra in Spain.

A later chapter, entitled “The Poppies Grow”, explores how “designers of five beloved gardens find solace in opposing the industry that led to war.” These gardens include Hidcote, Sissinghurst, Great Dixter, and Dumbarton Oaks. I’ve been to all, but I will now better appreciate their shared purposes.

Each of these entries are short, but – as a librarian friend of mine commented – meaty. Most of the gardens will be familiar. There is an emphasis on European and American history, although the two chapters that linked European and East Asian gardens were especially insightful. For example, I have never considered the similarities between French Impressionism and Japanese garden design of the same period.

This is a wonderful way to teach a challenging subject – the history of design. The author’s astute organization of the chapter topics, along with the photographs of Michael D. Garber, make this book work. I wish there was a broader selection of west coast gardens (there are two, both in Sonoma County, California), but that is a small quibble. An excellent bibliography leads the reader to a wealth of other publications to pursue these topics further.

Brian Thompson is the manager and curator of horticultural literature for the Elisabeth C. Miller Library.
Thank you to our patrons. The Wednesday Evening Lecture Series would not be possible without the tremendous support of our patrons. Their generosity helps NHS provide an outstanding educational program for Northwest gardeners.

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Dear Garden Friends,

I have to be honest. While writing this letter, I was completely distracted by the chaos of spring. I had to stop writing and go outside and enjoy the garden. The mid-spring weather was amazingly warm and dry. The garden was humming right along; perennials, such as lilies and irises, were reaching for the sun. Birds were hopping and fluttering around: black-capped chickadees, Anna's hummingbirds, and whistling towhees. The garden was calling me! You know what I’m talking about. I told myself I could spend 15 minutes in the garden for a little break. But once outside, I couldn’t just simply enjoy the garden and warm sunshine, I had to actually do some gardening. There were weeds to pull, roses to tie-up on the arbor, daffodils to deadhead, and the list goes on. The list never ends but is one that we all happily add to and complete. Then, it struck me how much I really wanted to be outside and enjoy the garden.

The pull of Mother Nature is real and strong. Nature is so amazing and wonderful. We all need to heed her call. The beauty and marvel of nature motivates us to garden, visit parks, and enjoy the beauty and nature around us. Luckily, we have insider knowledge and know when to listen. Maybe we need to listen more often, if only for a few minutes for a break and to pull a few weeds before getting back to this letter . . . then back to the garden.

Mark your calendars; we have two amazing events coming up in late summer that you’ll definitely not want to miss.

First off, we are pleased to announce this year’s Meet the Board Tour. We have an amazing garden line-up to be held on Vashon Island on Saturday, August 10th, 2019. While we haven’t held the event on any of the local island’s before, the Meet the Board Tour Committee promises a wonderful event filled with beautiful private and public gardens on Vashon Island. Please make a day of this amazing event. Our tour committee will have more information regarding ferry schedules and maps as we get closer to the date.

The second event is the 25th Annual Elisabeth Carey Miller Memorial Lecture on Thursday, September 12, 2019 at Meany Hall for the Performing Arts on the University of Washington campus. Dr. Peter Zale is this year’s guest speaker. Dr. Zale, the Associate Director of Conservation, Plant Breeding and Collections, is visiting from the famous Longwood Gardens of Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. This lecture is guaranteed to be amazing. If you’ve ever visited Longwood Gardens, you know that it is an unbelievable horticultural institution. I’m really looking forward to Dr. Zale’s lecture.

On behalf of our Board of Directors, I’m hoping you enjoyed a Happy Pride Month in June and a Joyous Fourth of July and wishing you a wonderful summer! 🌿

Happy Gardening,
Jason Jorgensen
NHS President
Gardening, like living, should be fun.
—Christopher Lloyd, 1921-2006, English gardener and garden writer

Rosa mulliganii
Photo by Richie Steffen