

Kubota Garden Foundation

2025 Preservation Sustained Support - Organization

Application Contact

Christine Mahler, Executive Director

Mailing City Tukwila

Council District 2

Organization Director

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Website

www.kubotagarden.org

Incorporated 03/10/1989

Mission

Kubota Garden Foundation supports, enhances, and preserves Kubota Garden in the spirit and vision of Fujitaro Kubota.

Short Organization Description

Kubota Garden Foundation advocates for the preservation of and free access to the garden, a place of respite created by Fujitaro Kubota starting in 1927.

Community

Kubota Garden relies heavily on the partnership between Seattle Parks & Recreation (Parks) and Kubota Garden Foundation (KGF). This 20-acre historic garden was created by Fujitaro Kubota, a Japanese immigrant who was instrumental in introducing Japanese garden design to the Pacific Northwest. Starting in 1927 he transformed a logged off swampland in south Seattle into a beloved urban oasis. In the 1930's he built the Japanese Garden, Necklace of Ponds, Rose Garden, Lily Pond, and Heart Bridge to show customers his work and for the enjoyment of family and friends. Mr. Kubota envisioned the garden becoming a public garden, a place of respite. Thanks to strong community voices, the late Seattle City Councilmember Jeanette Williams recognized the importance of preserving the legacy of Fujitaro and his garden. The city designated the 4.5-acre core garden as a Historic Landmark in 1981 and purchased the garden in 1987.

KGF formed in 1989 with the recognition that Parks did not have the capacity to maintain a historic Japanese garden. Over 900 members and 300 volunteers with support from a small staff (1.5 FTE) work together to preserve and enhance the garden for the enjoyment of visitors today and in the future. We help care for the garden; provide free guided tours, arts and cultural events; archive garden history; and raise funds for operations and capital projects. Much of our archives are available to the public on the DENSHO website.

We work with Parks and other partners to assure free access to a beautiful Japanese garden, programs and events. The garden is open daily and KGF volunteer programs occur

4Culture Application

several days each week. It is a serene place that lifts your spirit, delights your eyes and welcomes everyone. People from many cultures walk, relax, and gather for celebrations.

The garden is in Rainier Beach, a diverse SE Seattle neighborhood that is underserved in parks, where 31% of people are immigrants, 42% speak languages other than English at home, 75% are people of color, and 25% live in poverty. While the garden attracts visitors from throughout King County and beyond, it provides a vital green space for the 20,000 people who live less than a mile from the Entry Gate.

In 2023 nearly 116,000 people visited. Quarterly visitor surveys conducted since 2015 show that 52% of people are first-time visitors, 16% are from neighboring 98118 or 98178 zip codes, 36% from the rest of Seattle, 3% from Renton, 19% from the Eastside, 7% from elsewhere in WA State, 17% from out-of-state, and 2% are international. Visitors' race/ethnicity: 21% Asian, 2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 4% African American, 1% Native American/Alaska Native, 6% Latino, 58% white, and 8% prefer not to say. People of all ages visit: 26% 31-40, 23% 18-30, 17% 41-50, 17% over 60, 13% 51-60, 3% 0-17, and 1% prefer not to say. Visitor numbers increased from 56,357 in 2014 with a peak of 126,325 in 2020 when people really needed a place of respite during the COVID19 pandemic.

Programming

In the past two years KGF made considerable progress implementing capital construction projects designated in the "2019 Kubota Garden Master Plan Update". This plan guides KGF's strategic goals and is a response to community needs. There is increased urgency for these projects as the number of garden visitors continues to grow. A porta-potty was the only 'restroom' in the garden since it became public in 1989. This was a problem particularly for the elderly, children, and people attending events like weddings. Imagine using a porta-potty while dressed in a wedding gown! KGF wrote successful grants on behalf of Parks to fund construction of plumbed restrooms and ADA picnic area at the Terrace. Construction was completed in 2023. Of the 60+ projects supported by KGF, this is by far the most appreciated by visitors.

Our programs increase access to and understanding of the garden and Fujitaro Kubota's legacy. The volunteer program continued to recover from the downturn during the COVID pandemic. 208 volunteers in 2022 and 312 volunteers in 2023 contributed 3,863 and 5,216 volunteer hours, respectively. Garden Maintenance had the most volunteer hours, followed by Plant Sales and Nursery maintenance, Board of Directors, Programs, and Special Events.

The tour program led by 15 trained volunteers served 1,459 people in scheduled groups (youth, seniors, garden organizations, limited mobility), and monthly public tours. Nearly half of participants were first time visitors. We trained 5 new guides and provided streamlined tours for volunteers participating in corporate work parties at the garden.

4Culture Application

Evaluations by tour participants range from 4.6 to 4.9 out of 5; and favorite aspects of the tours are learning about the Kubota legacy, and the historic gardens and plants. One participant shared “My sister died a year ago. I’ve been coming to the garden, and it’s helped me as I’m learning to cope.”

KGF planned and implemented new programs: ‘Pollinator Safaris’ for youth, and a ‘Wild Bee Lecture’ enrichment opportunity for Volunteers. These are experiential educational opportunities where participants learn about the BIG 5 pollinators; and catch, observe, share and release insects.

To help support program costs, in March 2024 we implemented our first Annual Fund campaign ‘HUG (Help Us Grow) Kubota Garden’.

Management

The “2019 Kubota Garden Master Plan Update” guides our strategic planning, including setting goals and priorities. The master plan development included multi-day workshops and public meetings to engage the community to document the history, development, and use of the garden, and to establish a vision for the next 25 years. Representatives of seven neighborhood organizations and eight regional garden organizations worked collectively with Parks staff, KGF Board, and consultant team to identify needs: for the garden, for visitor amenities and accessibility, for preserving the historic core garden, for programming, events, and archival document and plant collections. As we begin each project, we contact the community for input on proposed plans and support on grants or other funding mechanisms, provide project updates, and invite to the celebration once completed. We use various approaches such as an ‘open house’ at the garden, hosting a meeting, or online surveys.

KGF’s Board designated committees, i.e., History, Garden, Plant Sale, Education, Revenue and Resources, and Volunteer Program, develop plans which go to the Board for consideration and decision making. The KGF Board is a working board. Members chair or serve on at least one committee and participate in program implementation. We plan to hire an Executive Director to increase our capacity, provide stability, and expand our network in the community.

The master plan lists 20 implementation projects. Parks and KGF Board, staff, and volunteers are strategically working through the list, with 5 (Terrace restrooms, Nursery holding area, stormwater management plan, north gate accessibility pilot project, and perimeter fencing) completed and 4 (parking lot expansion, visitor center, wayfinding project, and Parking lot accessibility project) moving forward. Some require sequencing, i.e., developing the stormwater management plan before planning the expanded Parking Lot and Gathering Plaza. Others like the restrooms and ADA picnic area at the Terrace were done earlier because grants were identified and KGF’s applications were funded. One

4Culture Application

project that is currently underway - enhancing pedestrian safety along 55th Ave S leading to the garden entrance - is not in the master plan. We noted an increased hazard to pedestrians who were walking in the middle of the road due to cars parked on the narrow road that is on a slope with drop-offs on both sides. KGF applied for a Seattle Neighborhood Street Fund grant which was funded. We are coordinating this improvement with the stormwater mitigation project and parking lot expansion.

The KGF Volunteer Program Manager has a master's degree in museology with a special focus on historic gardens and how people relate to nature. The Office Manager is a writer, and has expertise in computers, and databases. The Board is filled with expertise: architect, attorney, plant experts, Kubota family member, teachers, bank executive, chief financial officer, marketing, business owners, technical writer, stone sculptor, health care professional, program manager, health educator, and health care consultant. The History Committee Volunteers involved in historic preservation include a retired archivist (Chair), 3 librarians, 2 teachers, and a health educator.

Future

We see a robust future for the garden. The key to further success in the master plan implementation is developing more resources. KGF's strategic priorities for the next three years are:

1. Reach out to new funding and community partners including grants, corporations, donors, and sponsors to fund or support capital projects, programs, and operating costs. Continue discussions with Seattle Parks Foundation about fiscal sponsorship for a capital campaign to fund construction of the Parking Lot expansion, Gathering Plaza enhancements, and Visitor Center and its operating costs. Complete the design of the Visitor Center. KGF and yəhaw collective, a local indigenous arts organization who recently purchased property near Kubota Garden will explore further collaboration on history, horticulture, volunteer, and art projects.
2. Plan and implement the celebration of the garden's 100th Anniversary in 2027. Activities will provide more documentation about the garden's history. This will be archived and made available to the public. Plans include:
 - a. Community celebration with our neighbors in Rainier Beach, including music, food and fun activities.
 - b. Research, plan, and conduct curated tours of historic Kubota landscape installations at Seattle University.
 - c. "Stories and Celebrations from the Garden" - Collect stories from people about their meaningful experiences at Kubota Garden and produce an exhibit for display at the Wing Luke Museum. We are pilot testing a process to collect stories and will submit a proposal to the museum by the end of 2024.

4Culture Application

d. Approach MOHAI and Bainbridge Island Art Museum about hosting an exhibit “Fujitaro Kubota the Artist”.

e. Show our documentary film “Fujitaro Kubota...and his garden” and conduct author readings or other events with our award-winning book “Spirited Stone: Lessons from Kubota’s Garden”. Cascadia Art Museum agreed to host an event.

3. Hire an Executive Director to increase our capacity, provide stability, and expand our network in the community. Develop an updated business plan for KGF.

The community, public, and Kubota Garden will benefit from these partnerships and activities. People will have access to greater information about the history of Kubota Garden. The Rainier Beach community and garden visitors will enjoy additional amenities and events at the garden and have a deeper understanding of the garden.

Economic Impact

Tourism and Visitors: Kubota Garden is currently #11 of 751 things to do in Seattle per Trip Advisor, moving up the list over the years. This is likely partly responsible for the increase in visitors from 56,357 in 2014 to 115,991 in 2023. Quarterly visitor surveys since 2015 cite ‘online research’ as the third most common source of information about the garden. It’s likely that some visitors patronize businesses in the neighborhood. KGF shares a list of local restaurants with participants on guided tours and at the Garden Greeter table.

Entrance to Kubota Garden is free. The Japanese Garden at the Arboretum charges an entry fee (\$10 for adults and \$6 for children). The economic value for 116,000 visitors can be estimated at \$1,160,000.

Volunteer Hours: In 2023, 312 volunteers contributed 5,216 hours. This is valued at \$196,278 (Independent Sector’s Value of Volunteer time).

Public Benefits: KGF volunteers raised nearly \$4 million in grants on behalf of the City for Kubota Garden capital construction projects since 2014. \$150,000 in grants and donations were raised to produce our documentary film and book.

Programs and Events. All are provided free-of-charge, except Forest Bathing:

1. Guided tours – 762 people participated in guided tours, valued at \$10 per person or \$7,620.
2. Soapstone Carving Workshops for Youth – 84 youth participated, valued at \$30 per person or \$2,520.
3. Jazz at the Garden – 225 people attended, valued at \$50 per person or \$11,250.
4. Pollinator Safari (youth) and Wild Bee lecture (adults) - 35 people participated at \$15 per person or \$525.

4Culture Application

5. Summer Thunder: Taiko at the Garden – 285 people participated, valued at \$50 per person or \$14,250.
6. Wandering and Wondering: Butoh – 387 participated in 2023, valued at \$50 per person or \$19,350.
7. Iris Exhibition – 150 participated, valued at \$10 per person or \$1,500.
8. Self-guided Tour brochure – 12,500 distributed at \$0.60 each or \$7,500.
9. Forest Bathing Tours – 170 participated and paid a \$30 fee, valued at \$5,100.

Job Creation: KGF employs 3 staff.

Positive Impact on Local Community: The garden provides critical access to green space in Rainier Beach, an area identified by the City of Seattle as under-served in parks and open space. The “Seattle and Parks Open Space Plan” (2017) notes that people need to interact with nature for their physical and mental well-being. This can reduce stress, anxiety, depression, aggression, and crime; and improve immune function and social connectedness within a community. Both the City’s Environmental Equity and Races and Social Justice Initiatives call for park investments in Rainier Beach as a move toward greater racial equity.

Support Materials

Support materials may include lists of Board of Directors/Commissioners, Staff, and/or Events in addition to other attachments.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS/COMMISSIONERS

Kubota Garden Foundation Volunteer Board of Directors, 2024 Roster

2024

Kentaro Kojima, Stone Sculptor and Artist

Phyllis Grant, Landscaper

Emiko McKittrick, Marketing and Project Management

Dylan Okimoto, Teacher, Renton High School, and KGF Board Secretary

Jeanette Vinson, Retired Auditor

2025

Allan Kubota, Owner, Kubota Gardens Landscaping

Susan Lansverk, Chief Financial Officer, University Prep School, and KGF Board Treasurer

Ellen Phillips-Angeles, Retired Health Educator, and KGF Board Vice-President

Marguerite Russell, Retired Technical Writer

Laura Wildfong, Owner, NW Nurseries

2026

Marjorie Lamarre, Teacher, John Muir Elementary School

Kara Mayeda, Owner, Retire Living Well

Joy Okazaki, Owner, Hikari Consulting, and KGF Board President

Elaine Shimono, Retired Bank Executive, and KGF Board Assistant Treasurer

Mary Lou Torpey, Senior Administrator, Loeb & Loeb LLP

2027

Katherine 'Kat' Duncan, Attorney, Fenwick & West LLP

Patricia 'Pat' Norikane Logerwell, Retired Health Professional

EVENTS

Kubota Garden Foundation Events, Programs, and Primary Activities, August 1, 2022, through July 31, 2024

Date, Event, Attendance, Location:

8/1/2022-7/31/2024, Guided Tours, 1,459, Kubota Garden

4Culture Application

8/1/2023-5/31/2024, Forest Bathing Tours, 59, Kubota Garden

8/1/2022-7/31/2024, Garden Greeters, 3,480 (# visitors assisted), Kubota Garden

8/1/2022-7/31/2024, Garden Maintenance, 302 (# volunteers), Kubota Garden

8/9/2022, Jazz at the Garden, 372, Kubota Garden

8/21/2022, Summer Thunder: Taiko, 523, Kubota Garden

9/10/2022, Fall Plant Sale, 157, Kubota Garden

11/30/2022, House Plants for the Holidays, 50, Kubota Garden Foundation

5/6/2023, Spring Plant Sale, 600, Kubota Garden

6/24-25/2023, Soapstone Carving Workshops for Youth, 149, Kubota Garden

7/30/2023, Wandering & Wondering: Butoh, 387, Kubota Garden

8/8/2023, Jazz at the Garden, 150, Kubota Garden

8/20/2023, Summer Thunder: Taiko, 258, Kubota Garden

9/9/2023, Fall Plant Sale, 450, Kubota Garden

9/30/2023, Art at the Garden: Sculpture Walk, 500, Kubota Garden

5/4/2024, Spring Plant Sale, 550, Kubota Garden

6/15/2024, Iris Exhibition, 50, Kubota Garden

6/22/2024, Soapstone Carving Workshops for Youth, 84, Kubota Garden

6/29/2024, Wild Bee Lecture, 17, Kubota Garden

7/13/2024, Pollinator Safari for Youth, 13, Kubota Garden

4Culture Application

7/28/2024, Wandering & Wondering: Butoh, 150, Kubota Garden