

MsK Rare and Native Plant Nursery

The Lifelong Dream of Mareen Schultz Kruckeberg

BY JOHN A. WOTT



*M*areen Schultz Kruckeberg was a major horticultural force in our region. Born Mareen Schultz in 1925, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, she moved to Washington State as a child. She developed an interest in nature at an early age, during trips she would take with her mother to such places as Mt. Rainier and Olympic Hot Springs.

ABOVE: *Rhododendron* blooming in the Upper Garden in spring. **INSET:** Mareen photographed in 1952, aged 27.
(Photos courtesy Kruckeberg Botanic Garden)



After graduating from West Seattle High School, Mareen headed to Alaska, where she worked for five years in an army base file room during World War II. During that time, she went on numerous hikes in the wilderness. On one of those hikes, a friend informed her about the Latin name of a handsome tree, which was an *Acer*, and Mareen caught the botany bug. Upon returning to Seattle, she entered the botany program at the University of Washington. She also started her life-long quest of growing the plants that she studied.

While attending her botany field trips, she met a widowed professor, Arthur Kruckeberg. They married in 1953 and set about caring for Arthur's three children, plus eventually two of their own. During this time, they lived at Arthur's Capitol Hill address.

Purchasing the Property

But the longing for a garden and more space resulted in their purchase (in partnership with Mareen's father, Arthur Schultz) in 1958 of a 3.86-acre stretch of hillside in Richmond Beach. The family lived in the main home, while grandfather occupied a small adjacent building (still standing), where he also built the children a large jungle gym, which became a neighborhood favorite.

Arthur and Mareen started planting immediately, first by bringing in trees from their Capitol Hill property. In order to expand the plant collection, Mareen studiously began to propagate plants from seeds and cuttings, and as success came, she started to sell the excess to friends and plant enthusiasts. The family would often go on picnics where they HAD to eat everything



contained in their picnic baskets so they could fill them with plants, cuttings, seeds, rocks and other items to add to their growing garden.

Mareen loved animals. “Being able to watch all birds in the garden through her bedroom window was a must for her,” says Enid Kruckeberg Kriewald, Mareen and Arthur’s

youngest daughter. Horses were in the lower pasture, and the children rode them all over the neighborhood.

Mareen also loved dogs, and one puppy grew into a large animal with a hard-wagging tail. Once, says Enid, while Mareen was giving a garden tour, this dog started methodically “chopping off” the heads of flowering lilies with its tail. But Mareen was completely unperturbed. “That is all right,” she said. “They will grow back next year.” Similarly, dogs lying in a flower bed were not to be punished or disturbed: The plants would return!

Nursery Beginnings

From the very beginning, the MsK Rare Plant and Native Plant Nursery, and what is now called the Kruckeberg Botanic Garden, were intimately entwined. Certainly Mareen influenced the character of the garden because of the plants she selected to grow. Before a plant went into the ground, it met her requirements as to mature size. Arthur brought home UW Botany greenhouse-started seedlings and planted them in the lower meadow. In 2002, Mareen sawed them down because they were eventually going to get too big for the area.

Officially, Mareen began to sell plants in 1967, after requests from the many visitors who toured the grounds and then saw the excess of potted plants in the nursery. In 1970, the greenhouse was built. Learning that she couldn’t legally sell plants without a business license, Mareen obtained her nursery license in 1971 for \$1.00. Right from the beginning, she specialized in native plants that were rarely available elsewhere.

Mareen was a quiet, shy person. She did not like big-group tours and preferred one-on-one interactions instead. On one occasion, says Enid, Arthur invited an Arboretum Foundation unit to visit the garden, but Mareen canceled the tour when she learned about it, claiming there were too many weeds.

ABOVE LEFT: The MsK Nursery, photographed in 2011. (Photo courtesy Kruckeberg Botanic Garden)

ABOVE INSET: Mareen and Art in the nursery in 2001. (Photo by Norm Plate)

Visiting the Nursery & Garden

The MsK Nursery and the Kruckeberg Botanic Garden are located at 20312 15th Avenue NW, in Shoreline, Washington. They are open to the public every Friday, Saturday and Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the regular season (March to September), and from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. during the cold season (November to February). Admission is free. For more information, visit www.kruckeberg.org or call 206-546-1281.

Branching Out

Mareen's curiosity for the rare and unusual led her to seek out plants from New Zealand and other regions with similar climates to the Pacific Northwest. By 1975, she was selling to arboreta and parks across the United States. She specialized in the more idiosyncratic sides of horticulture. Her endeavors not only included Pacific Northwest natives, many ferns, and plants from New Zealand, but also container gardens set in limestone, tufa beds, cement, and homemade wooden troughs.

In 1987, she held her first Mother's Day Weekend sale, which quickly became a favorite of plant enthusiasts. It is still a major event for the Kruckeberg Botanic Garden. The funds from the sales were Mareen's "play money," which she used to generously provide for her children and fund trips abroad. The sales specialized in shade-tolerant plants, oaks, exotic broad-leaved trees, exotic conifers, ground covers, and plants for bonsai or container gardens.

Many of the nursery plants were propagules taken as seed or cuttings from plants already growing on the grounds. However, Mareen also collected seed on hiking trips and was often

the recipient of seeds gathered by other plant enthusiasts.

Mareen also was well known for her detailed and botanically precise, hand-drawn ads, which often accompanied Arthur's articles in the "Arboretum Bulletin" in the 1970s and early 1980s. Her illustrations were unique in their detail and much sought after. Her daughter Enid proudly shares them. Articles about the nursery and its plants, including writing by both Mareen and Arthur, were regularly found in all of the Northwest horticulture periodicals.

Family Matters

Arthur hated to see trees pruned. He said, "They need to grow into their natural state." So Mareen would wait until Arthur had left to teach class at the University of Washington or to take a trip to do her pruning. Once, recalls Enid, Arthur came home unexpectedly and found Mareen's trimmings. After that, Arthur would only ever find a pile of wood chips on the ground by the time he got home.

Enid remembers Easter as one of her favorite holidays growing up at the Kruckeberg Botanic Garden. Neighbors and family members would convene at the garden for an egg hunt and brunch, complete with one of their neighbor's famous lamb-shaped Easter cakes, adorned with flowers. After Mareen hid the eggs for the group, she and Enid would also hide eggs for each other so they could both join in the fun of the hunt. The Easter egg-hunt tradition continues today in the public garden.

The Garden still follows Mareen's guidelines of not using commercial fertilizer or pesticides. Mareen would collect eggshells for months to enrich the soil. She purchased oyster shells for calcium. The Kruckebergs were the only family



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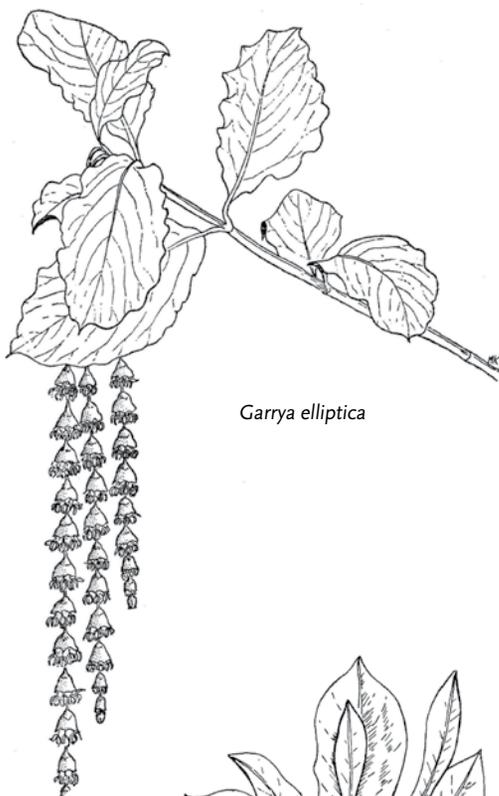
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The Botanical Drawings of MsK

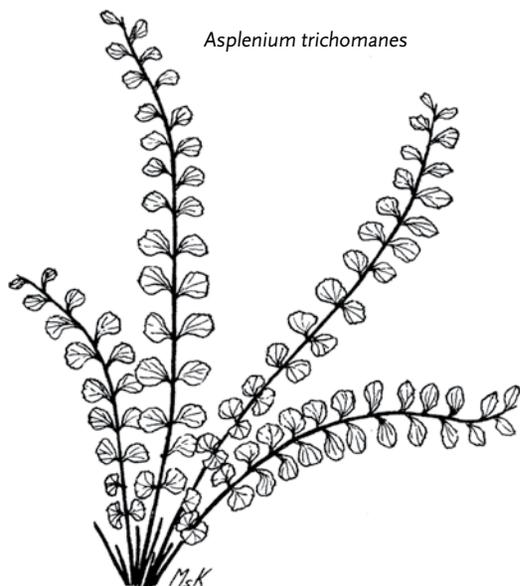


Sequoia sempervirens

In addition to being a pioneer in the fields of horticulture and native plant propagation, Mareen Schultz Kruckeberg was an accomplished botanical artist. Her drawings appeared in the pages of this magazine, as well as in advertising for the nursery. Here are four samples of her work, selected for this issue by Cynthia Welte, a former development officer at the Arboretum Foundation and now the Kruckeberg Botanic Garden's new executive director.



Garrya elliptica



Asplenium trichomanes



Arctostaphylos columbiana

for blocks for whom the mailman delivered boxes of ladybugs or praying mantis, which were used for natural pest control.

A Growing Legacy

Mareen passed away in January 2003, but her botanical legacy continues to flower and bear fruit. The nursery was Mareen's business: She founded it, gave it its scope and style, managed its affairs, and looked to its future. Arthur was an active contributor to the nursery, particularly of propagated material.

The nursery has always enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with the garden, not just in terms of plant material, but also public attention and promotion. For instance, people visiting the nursery have always been free to tour the garden, where they could see the mature forms of the plants, and then they could return to the nursery to purchase them.

In 2008, the City of Shoreline purchased the garden so that it could be preserved for

and enjoyed by the public. The non-profit Kruckeberg Botanic Garden Foundation now operates both the garden and the nursery, and proceeds from the nursery help fund the day-to-day maintenance of the garden and its 2000-plus species of native and exotic plants.

The botanical garden has become one of our region's environmental gems. Arthur Kruckeberg still thrives, at age 95, in the home in the garden.

It has been stated, "Today, the strength of the Kruckeberg Botanic Garden lies in the plants that are in the ground and the large assortment of nursery plants. It also lies in the traditions established by Mareen and Arthur, which include an awareness, appreciation, and exploitation of the land's dynamic history that will keep this collection beautiful, unique, and vital for the next generations." I couldn't agree more. ~

JOHN WOTT is the director emeritus of Washington Park Arboretum and a member of the "Bulletin" Editorial Board.

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