



# The Neighbors' Gardening Circular

Information for your neighborhood from the people at  
Seattle Transportation Urban Forestry

Fall/Winter 2002



## Kudos for Traffic Circle Contest Winners!

Liz Ellis and Greg Hostetler, editors



Sue Truman shows the trophy that she and neighbors received for their traffic circle garden at 28 Ave NE & NE 62 St. They won in the Circle Garden for Kids category. Photo Jim Bates/The Seattle Times

Thanks to all of you who participated in the first ever Traffic Circle Garden Contest. The awards evening was a great success, with over 100 volunteers attending. We all enjoyed an evening of entertainment with Ciscoe Morris of TV gardening fame serving as master of ceremony. Many lucky attendees took home door prizes, including cook books and gift certificates to local nurseries. The finest examples of traffic calming beauty were awarded engraved watering can trophies.

Our talented judges for the contest represented many aspects of Seattle's horticultural community. Ciscoe Morris is the host of the popular radio and television gardening show "Gardening with Ciscoe." Joyce Moty is involved with Bradner Gardens Park and Seattle Tilth. Mary Gutierrez is the editor of Northwest Garden News and one of the contest's sponsors. Jan Rodda of Rodda and Sons Landscaping, and Maggie O'Halloran, a Seattle Tilth board member and a designer for Distinctive Gardens Inc.

Below are descriptions of the winning traffic circles. A pictorial tour of the winning traffic circles is available on our website at <http://www.cityofseattle.net/td/trafcirc.asp>.

The Seattle Times also did a wonderful piece on the contest, featured in the September 29 local news. It can be viewed online at <http://archives.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/cgi-bin/texis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=bumper29m0&date=20020929>.

### **Best Habitat in the Round: 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE & NE 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Traffic Circle**

The last issue of the Neighbors' Gardening Circular newsletter featured this garden renewal by Nathan Hale High School students Camila Crawford and Anthea Shore. Their good work has created a really neat traffic circle instead of the old overgrown circle that it had been. Some of their fine choices for Northwest native plants include a Garry oak tree, sword ferns, and lupines. Their challenge will be keeping taller plants low in order to retain good visibility.

### **Car Stoppin' Gorgeous: Fremont Avenue N & N 63<sup>rd</sup> Street Traffic Circle**

This circle definitely stopped our van full of judges. Among their comments: "My favorite!" and "Beautiful color combinations and placement." Susan Plahn and Camille McGee have cultivated this circle since it was built in 2000. Their plant choices include blue oat grass, strawberry, oregano, daylily, and dwarf nandina. The circle is living proof that a landscape can be gorgeous AND fit our rigorous height limit of 2-1/2 feet.

### **Circle Garden for Kids: 28th Avenue NE & NE 62nd Street Traffic Circle**

This traffic circle was originally planted in 1996. Since then, Sue Truman has worked with neighbors Doug Plummer, Greg Johnson, and Pete Andersen to turn it into an amazing children's garden. Among the highlights are pavers that the kids helped design and construct. The landscape includes shrubs with edible berries, such as blueberry and salal.

### **Just for Fun: 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue SW & SW Dawson Street Traffic Circle**

Volunteers Roger and LeeAnn McMillen, Frank Peto, Cassie Sawyer, and Ted Kitos have maintained and improved this traffic circle for the last three years. "The multi-season floral display and colorful foliage suggests a neighborhood that cares about its appearance," asserts Ted. The judges found the drought tolerant plant selection especially impressive. The list includes dwarf Escallonia, African daisies, columbine, and tassel fern.

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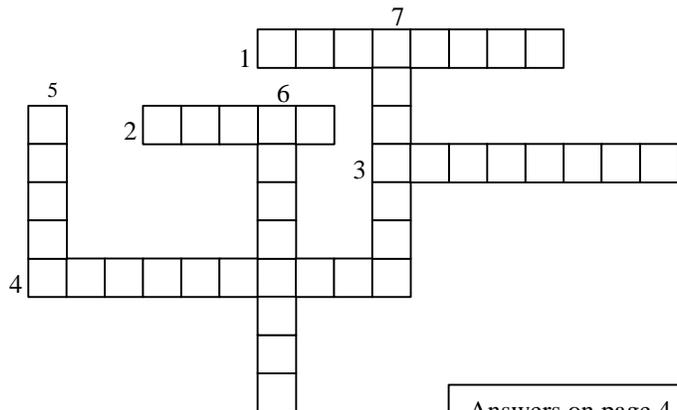
## Traffic Calming Crossword

Across:

1. Semicircular traffic calming devices set up to create a one-lane segment of roadway
2. Protective layer spread on the ground. Bark, wood chips, and compost are examples.
3. Needs to be signed by 60% of neighbors for a traffic circle to be built
4. A traffic calming device where drivers must enter counterclockwise

Down:

5. A flat stone or brick used for paths
6. Improves pedestrian crossing of a street and slows traffic (2 words)
7. Decomposed organic matter



Answers on page 4.

## Community Project Snapshots



**Planting a new traffic circle at 25 Ave S & S Holgate St**  
 Pictured from L-R: Eric Liljegren; Yvonne Sanchez, Director of Department of Neighborhoods; Mayor Greg Nickels; Grace Crunican, Director of Department of Transportation; Liz Ellis, Traffic Circle Queen; Marsha Christophersen and Charlotte Moss.



**Mary Ave NW & NW 77th neighbors recently landscaped their new traffic circle with an array of northwest native plants.**



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Photos	Carrie Sherley, Jeremy Calva, Jim Bates/The Seattle Times
Drawing (mulch)	International Society of Arboriculture

Please submit articles, photos, and artwork to Liz Ellis or Greg Hostetler at the above address. Please pass this newsletter on to your friends and neighbors.

Permits are required for planting, pruning, or removing trees in the planting strip (space between sidewalk and street). For details and applications, call 684-7649 or visit <http://www.cityofseattle.net/td/arborist.asp>.

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**Ruin to Rescue: Dayton Avenue N & N 84<sup>th</sup> Street Traffic Circle**

Jason Reuer and his neighbors received a Department of Neighborhoods grant this year to renovate their neglected traffic circle. Since then, they have set up a schedule where each neighbor takes a week to water and tend the circle. The neighbors adjacent to it have donated water all summer. Says Jason, “we didn’t lose a single plant and the ginkgo trees are actually looking the best they have since I moved into the neighborhood 5-1/2 years ago.” After a summer or two, the traffic circle should need little supplemental water. Rosemary, lavender, blue oat grass, and sedum are some of their drought-tolerant selections.

**Business Gateway: Rainier Avenue S & 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue S Triangle (Professional Gardener)**

When Denise Brown of In Synch Giftware nominated this landscaped triangle, she didn’t realize that it was maintained by Seattle Transportation. Needless to say, we’re proud of SDOT’s SE district gardener, Carolyn Dahle. If you think one traffic circle is a handful, Carolyn maintains over 20 acres of street right-of-way landscaping! This triangle garden is an inviting gateway to the Columbia City neighborhood. The judges were particularly impressed with the colorful front bed. Lavender, alyssum, and annual salvias provided a red, white and blue scheme near the landmark sign.

**Business Gateway: 12th Avenue & E Union Street & E Madison Street Triangle (Volunteer)**

Roberta Falk adopted this triangle three years ago when

she opened the Buzz Stop espresso stand. Since then it has turned into a vibrant gateway to her business and to the rest of the Capitol Hill neighborhood. Roberta explained, “I plant to maintain a healthy color and glow to my surrounding and for the enjoyment of others who pass by.” In the middle of the garden were low growing evergreen shrubs, surrounded by bands of purple salvias, yellow marigolds, and small white petunias.

**Multi-Season Spectacular: 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE & NE 80<sup>th</sup> Street Traffic Circle**

With many walkers in the area and over 20 children on 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE alone, neighbors have been grateful for the traffic circle installed last year. Anne Tuominen organized the petition for the circle and provides water. Tricia Spach regularly tends these new plantings. Anne is happy to be able to see the garden from her house. “The circle looks different from every angle (and each week) as different plants create new scenes,” she remarked. Our judges were equally impressed, noting the beautiful color grouping and nice combination of foliage. Some of the plants are gaura, asters, and euphorbia with a ginkgo tree.

**Ciscoe’s OooLaLa: 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE & NE 113<sup>th</sup> Street Traffic Circle**

Hank Bobala has been caring for this traffic circle for the last three years, changing the plantings every season! His summer selection included lobelia, Joe Pye weed, ornamental banana, and geranium. Hank was out there to show off his garden to the judges when they visited, enthusiastically pointing out plants. He’s a big fan of compost, and waters his circle twice a week. Ciscoe was impressed. In addition to “Ooo La La,” he commented that Hank’s garden reflects his fun personality.

**Thanks to our Sponsors!**

The Following organizations and businesses donated prizes or helped organize the 2002 Traffic Circle Garden Contest:

- Seattle Tilth**
- Plant Amnesty**
- Northwest Garden News**
- El Gallito Restaurant**
- Cedar Grove Composting**
- Walt’s Organic Fertilizer**
- Ravenna Gardens**
- Abundant Life Seed Foundation**
- Sky Nursery**
- Julius Rosso Nursery**
- The Stalk Exchange Restaurant**
- Friends of P-Patch**
- Shannon Collins**



**Planting a new tree?**

Not all trees are suitable for traffic calming devices. For example, sumacs are too bushy and cause visibility problems. Likewise, not all traffic calming devices are large enough to accommodate trees. Before installing a new tree in you traffic circle, curb bulb, or chicane, please give us a call at 684-5008.



**Run over again?!?!**

Streetside gardening is full of challenges. We continually hear from volunteers whose traffic circles are run over by cars, trucks, and buses. What to do? Here are some possible solutions:

- ♣ If you witnessed an accident, call 911. If there is a police report on file, contact us. We might be able to collect damages from the driver.
- ♣ If your streetside garden is continually being run over by a trucking company or bus, get the license plate number and take pictures if possible.
- ♣ Make sure your W-81 reflector sign is visible. If your tree needs to be pruned, give us a call at 684-5008.
- ♣ Don’t give up! Many traffic calming devices have survived multiple run overs and still look beautiful!
- ♣ Do not put in rocks or posts to deter traffic. These also get in the way of fire trucks and ambulances. If you would like to try reflective fiberglass stakes, please contact us.
- ♣ If you have found a good method to reduce run overs, please let us know so that we can share it with others.

# To Mulch or Not To Mulch



Mulch is a protective covering applied to the soil surface. This is usually done after planting new trees, shrubs, and perennials. Mulch should be applied to a depth of 2 inches, taking care to pull it away from the trunks of trees. The most commonly used mulches in Northwest ornamental landscapes are bark, wood chips, and compost. All of these will help conserve soil moisture, prevent extreme fluctuations in soil temperature, and make weed pulling a little easier. Here are the pros and cons of each:

## Wood Chips:

- Wood chips come from chipped up trees and branches, and often contain leaves or conifer needles. Because they are a waste product from tree trimming, they are normally free from tree service companies. One half to one cubic yard is usually enough to cover one 16' traffic circle with 1-2" of mulch.
- Wood chips take 1-2 years to break down, and provide good weed control when used as a mulch.
- If wood chips are applied as a mulch (not incorporated into the soil), they will not compete with plants for nitrogen.

## Bark:

- Bark is a waste product from lumber yards. It is available from most nurseries and garden centers.
- Bark takes 2-4 years to break down and provides good weed control when used as a mulch.
- Bark often contains thin splinters that can pierce leather gloves, making it difficult to work with.
- If bark is applied as a mulch (not incorporated into the soil), it will not compete with plants for nitrogen.

## Compost:

- Compost is decomposed organic matter. It can be made from food waste, yard waste, manure, or straw. Mature compost has a pleasant earthy smell.
- Compost provides the most nutrients to plants, but also provides a favorable environment for weed seeds that blow in.
- Compost can be incorporated into the soil of an entire bed before planting or applied to the soil surface as a mulch after planting.

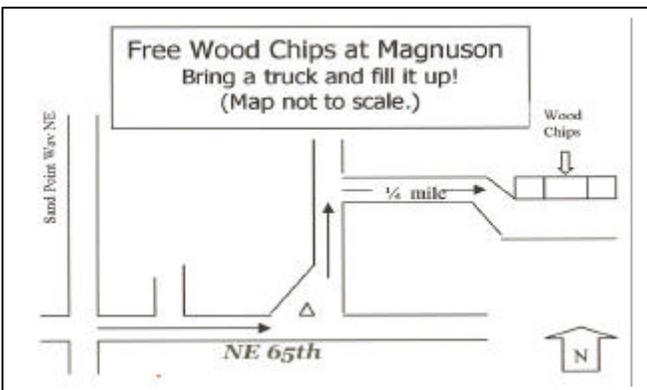
**KUDOS** "Dear Mayor Nickels, I am writing to express my extraordinary appreciation to your Urban forestry team at Seattle Transportation. Liz Ellis and her colleagues have given our neighborhood exemplary assistance with our traffic circle. This dedicated team has been consistently friendly, professional and imaginative – and the result is terrific. Many thanks, as well, for your support of Seattle’s urban Forestry program”.  
Lyle Bicknell

SDOT Urban Forestry staff responds: Thank YOU Lyle! It’s our pleasure to assist you and all our volunteers. Don’t hesitate to let us know if we can lend a hand in the future!

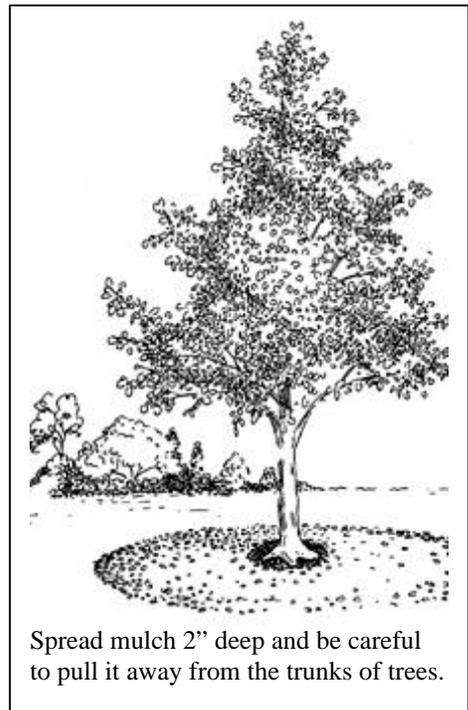
What’s a Yard? Soil and mulches are usually measured by the “yard.” A cubic yard is 27 cubic feet. For reference, compost is normally sold in bags that contain one cubic foot. A cubic yard is enough to fill about seven 30-gallon garbage cans. One cubic yard can fit in the bed of a small pickup



"I frequently tramped eight or ten miles through the deepest snow to keep an appointment with a beech-tree, or a yellow birch, or an old acquaintance among the pines." Henry David Thoreau,



**Plant in the fall!**  
Planting in the fall and winter allows plants to develop a good root system without the stress of summer heat. It also offers the benefit of free irrigation for your new plants. You’ll still need to water next summer, but your plants will have a much easier time of surviving and won’t need to be watered as frequently.



Spread mulch 2” deep and be careful to pull it away from the trunks of trees.

Answers to Traffic Calming Crossword:  
1.chicanes 2.mulch 3.petition  
4.roundabout 5.paver 6.curb bulb  
7.compost

## Liz's Seasonal Gardening Tips for Fall/Winter Plant Care:

Compared to gardening in the backyard, streetside gardening has a few peculiarities. One needs to be on the lookout for oncoming cars, tossed out trash and other unpleasanties not common to the protected confines of a fenced garden space. Plants must be carefully screened for toughness, drought tolerance and maximum height. Even the best plants that meet these stringent criteria, the toughest of the tough, the most drought tolerant will need some care. After enjoying blossoms and foliage through the summer, fall is a fine time to begin to shower these plants with some well directed attention.

In addition to an occasional weeding, Many perennials and grasses continue to do their best with a trim now and then. Evergreen lavenders and heather benefit from having their old flowers trimmed off. You can trim most perennial flowering plants right down to a few inches above the ground. A pair of hand hedgers works great for this. Spring, summer, and spent fall bulb foliage can be cut down to about 4" above the ground.

If you have herbaceous perennials that are more than a few years old, you might consider dividing them. This will give you more plants and give each plant more room to grow.

Dividing is easy. Dig up the plant and lay flat on the ground. If it's small, you can use a trowel; if it's bigger use your shovel to slice through the stems and roots lengthwise so you end up with two clumps of plants with both tops and roots. Replant or swap with friends for something new.

What about ornamental grasses? Their winter color and texture can often be quite striking. Plan to cut them back very early next spring so that the new growth can fill out.

Fall bulbs can be planted from now until the ground freezes. You may still be able to find end of the season sale prices or other bargains!

Watch out, here come the winter weeds! Just when you think your garden should be going dormant, out pop the winter weeds, especially the winter cress, which literally has seeds that pop all over when ripe. These are the small leafed little green guys that flourish in cool, wet weather. I'm also noticing dandelions and grasses trying to make a come back in my garden. Good thing, I've got lots of mulch to keep them down and plenty of time for between weeding winter reading! Have a safe and happy winter! Liz

## Butterflies, Hummingbirds, Birds and Bees Oh MY!

By Nancy Merrill, Tree Steward

Over the past decade or so, I have watched the planting strips in Wallingford and nearby neighborhoods gradually shift away from sod strips to elaborate gardens in miniature.

On my block, curbside gardeners are working toward drought-tolerant, all-season leaf and bloom. While really slow to establish, kinnikinnick is both a native as well as attractive to hummingbirds. I'm a fan of *Rubus calycinoides* myself, and have paired that in my strip with *Akebia* vine, grown as a ground cover (who knew that it was edging toward a place on the invasive species list, but that depends on whom you talk to). *Sedums* of all shapes and sizes have been especially good bee attractors. My most recent plant acquisition is a clump of *Agastache* 'Apricot Sunrise' that I picked up at Arthur Lee Jacobson's annual garden tour and plant sale. It's one of the few perennials on my strip, planted for both its flowering color and attractiveness to hummingbirds.

I have noticed increasing numbers of birds, bees and hummingbirds all over my garden and our block as a whole since that last bit of planting strip sod got removed last year from six strips, including mine. In fact, with just a few little intentional sodded areas left in our gardens, any mowing is of the acoustic variety, adding a bonus to this urban oasis: quiet! And it all started with trees. Several plantings over the past decade or so have left my block with only two spots left where street trees can go. The planted trees are thriving teenagers now, and include a holly oak, zelkovas, a katsura, kousa dogwoods, Thundercloud plums, and several styrax, all of which

complement the existing horsechestnut (talk about wrong tree, wrong place, but it is a beloved fossil from another time). As is typical for many streets, one side needs small trees, while the wire-free other side can accept trees that will get some significant height. With the exception of the oak, all are deciduous, and no one seems to mind raking leaves this time of year, probably because all these trees were planted by the homeowners themselves as part of a tree planting project. (Our trees have come over the years, variously, from SeaTran, Department of Neighborhoods and Seattle City Light.)

Our tree planting pits have become increasingly larger over the years. After that initial sod removal, the rest is like a pan of brownies as one little piece after another gets carved out and replaced with something to attract our winged friends.

To keep various plants to or under the 3-foot height restriction for my mid-block strip, I use small metal U-shaped plant stakes to hold down any plant tendrils that exceed their stated height expectations. To remind myself of how high three feet is, I placed a yardstick vertically on the telephone pole that graces my strip. When it comes to squirrels and bulbs, the humans appear to have an edge after we started laying down strips of hardware cloth on top of clumped bulb plantings, using plant stakes as anchors. One caveat to this transformation from sod to wildlife habitat is those gardeners who are unaware of or ignore the City's planting strip guidelines; dense, high-

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growing plantings have made many corners and residential stretches of roadway unsafe for both cars and pedestrians. If you are not sure whether your plantings meet the code requirements, please check out the guidelines at

### New Paver Guidelines

As many of you already know, there are restrictions on what can be planted and placed in traffic calming devices. Visibility in street intersections is one reason for this. Another is that emergency vehicles occasionally need to come through in a hurry and (yikes!) run a portion of the circle over. Consequently, no posts, statues, logs, or rocks are allowed in traffic circles or other street rights-of-way.

Until recently, this ban on rocks has included pavers. Pavers are bricks and other flat stones designed for paths. Seattle Transportation will now allow pavers *as long as they are sunk into and level with the ground*. We still ask that you check with us before adding any pavers to your streetside garden.

<http://www.cityofseattle.net/td/planstri.asp> or call Urban Forestry at 684-5008 for details.

**Plant Amnesty** offers pruning programs for the public and a gardener and arborist referral service. Call (206) 783-9813 for details.

### ★ Traffic Circle Pass ★

Retired from being a traffic circle steward or know others who are interested in helping out? Please pass along this newsletter. Any information you can provide to new traffic circle stewards is invaluable guidance in continued support for your community.

### Questions?

If you would like to meet with someone about the vegetation in your traffic circle or have any questions at all, contact Liz Ellis or Greg Hostetler at (206) 684-5008. New traffic circle requests should be directed to our office at (206) 684-0817.



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<http://www.cityofseattle.net/td/trafcirc.asp>