



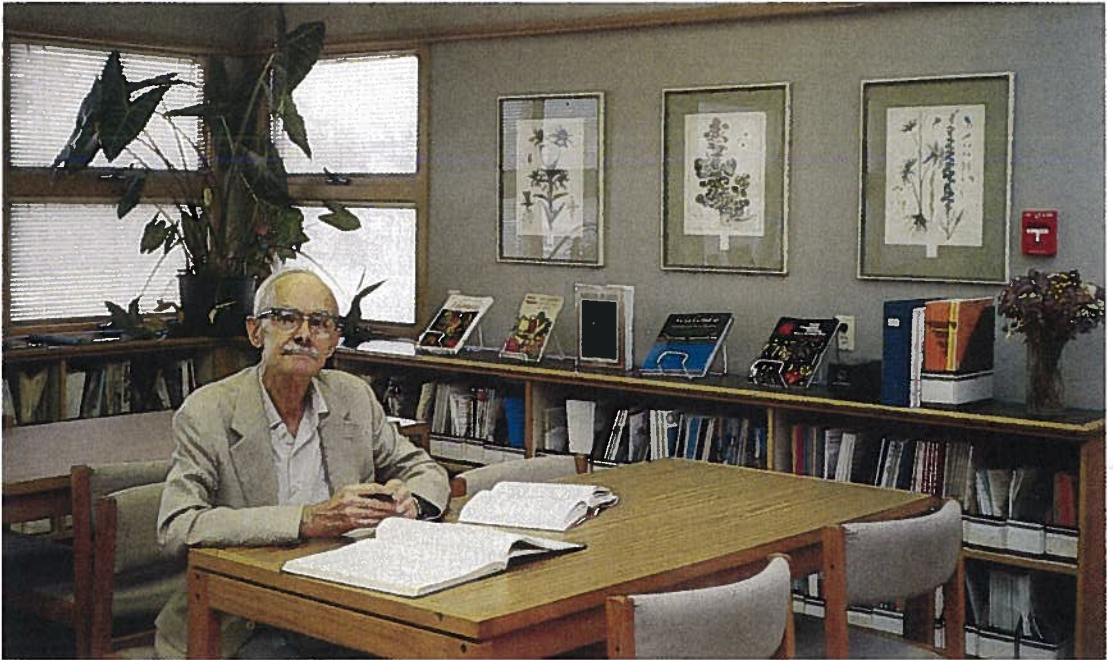
The Elisabeth C. Miller Horticultural Library of the University of Washington Center for Urban Horticulture, looking out to the McVay Courtyard. Photo courtesy CUH.

# The Elisabeth C. Miller Horticultural Library

## A Library for Gardeners

by Steven R. Lorton

*The Miller Library is mentioned in each issue of the Bulletin as a place to find the titles in the book review section and it is home to Book Review Editor Valerie Easton. A unique and innovative facility in the Northwest, the library can be used by all. Learn how on the next page.*



Brian O. Mulligan, Director Emeritus of the Washington Park Arboretum, reading in a comfortable corner of the Miller Horticultural Library. Photo by Laura Lipton.

Feeling a sense of regional pride comes easy these days in the Pacific Northwest, especially in horticultural matters. Consider the Elisabeth C. Miller Horticultural Library at the University of Washington's Center for Urban Horticulture. There is nothing like it for miles around.

The place quietly bustles with library users. Patrons move through the stacks. Others sit at study tables, looking, between paragraphs, out through generous windows to view the Union Bay wetlands, which are used for both study and recreation. Some sink deep into research in an easy chair or at one of the study carrels. Designed by Jones and Jones Architects, Seattle, the library is a visually soothing place, with richly grained woods and soft colors taken from Northwest lichens and mosses. Opposite the wetlands view, windows look out on the Center's McVay Courtyard, an intimate space filled with many textures and colors of grasses, designed by Iain Robertson as a setting for both people and plants.

Opened in 1985, expanded in 1990, the 4,500-square-foot facility is the only public horticultural library west of Denver and north of San Francisco. It holds 7,200 volumes (500 of which are in a lending library). You can find 300 journals and newsletters, and 850 current nursery catalogs. Or perhaps you would like to examine one of the five-hundred volumes comprising the old and rare book collection: *Gerard's Herbal* was first printed in 1597; the oversized three-volume *Genus Pinus* by Alymer Lambert was published in 1829.

And the venerable books are well used. Researchers and graphic artists, in particular, flock to the library to use the excellent reference collection, to read about what grew when, and to look at the vivid, hand-colored illustrations. Volunteers from the Washington Park Arboretum's Saplings Program for elementary school students regularly visit the library to use the children's collection of books established for this program—but available to all. In addition to books for children, there are books that aid in the teaching and development of children's gardening. This kind of accessibility, and the public use it generates, is the library's greatest claim to fame.

Librarian Valerie Easton estimates that 75 to 80 percent of her work deals with the general public. Confirms co-librarian Laura Lipton, "We're particularly proud of the range of our collections and the variety of clientele it serves, from serious researchers to beginning gardeners, hob-

byists, and horticultural professionals."

Northwest gardeners bring an amazing array of questions to the Miller Horticultural Library. Questions range from the specific, such as "What is the Latin name for the Canada thistle?" (*Cirsium arvense*) or "How can I kill a stump?" to the so general as to be unanswerable, such as "I need a list of all the best plants to grow in the Pacific Northwest."

"How do I take cuttings from my fig?" "Is there a local source for bees?" "What is ethnobotany?" and "Why hasn't my wisteria bloomed?" are a few of the hundreds of other inquiries answered by Easton, Lipton, and the library staff in May 1993.

Every Monday night, excluding holidays, the library hosts the Washington Garden Clinic, from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. A pair of Washington State University Master Gardeners and a University of Washington plant identification expert team up to answer your gardening questions. If you have something unidentifiable growing, munching, taking over, keeling over, or simply adding beauty to your garden, take in a sample and expect to walk away with more information, if not a full answer to your questions.

Most of the construction funds for the library and an endowment to support its staffing were the gift of Pendleton Miller in honor of his wife, Elisabeth (Betty). Later, the 1990 expansion was made possible by a gift from Betty Miller herself. But public support keeps the library going, along with a small annual stipend from the University of Washington. Books, used and new, roll into the library office regularly to be cataloged and added to the shelves. If duplications are made, excess books are given to the Arboretum for its annual book sale. Financial contributions large and small are funneled directly into specific projects or materials.

"I continue to be amazed at the level of support in the horticultural community for the library. Its growth really is a reflection of peoples' generosity," says Valerie Easton.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Miller Library or in making a contribution, call, write, or visit: (206) 543-8616; Center for Urban Horticulture, GF-15, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195; 3501 N.E. 41st, Seattle.

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