



Spotlight on Jill Botvinik

I grew up in NY on Long Island in the suburbs with not much interest in gardening but I learned from my mom to be a life-long volunteer. She also instilled in me the importance of giving back to my community wherever I might be. That may be why I worked mostly for not-for-profit organizations in my professional career as both an accountant and manager.



I went to UW Madison to become a glassblower but graduated with a business degree in accounting and became licensed as a CPA. After finding accounting not satisfying enough, I returned to UW and earned a MBA in Arts Administration which combined my passion for the arts with business skills. I have always had a deep love of music and art. I like to think my brain is pretty well balanced - analytical with creativity. I met my husband in Madison and we lived in Dane County until 2000.

We moved to Vancouver, Washington when I was offered a job as Executive Director of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra which was a regional orchestra. I was their first full time professional manager. I helped the organization to grow considerably and prosper financially. It was very rewarding among other things. That was my last experience working for a Board of Directors although I have been on a number of different Boards.

My older sister is a busy Master Gardener who lives in Vancouver, Canada. After a while she talked me into going with her to annual Hardy Plant Study weekends held along the Pacific coast from Eugene, OR to Portland, OR to Seattle, WA to Vancouver, BC. These events were organized by area hardy plant societies. There were hort talks and speakers and food and wine over three

days at a conference center or university campus. The organizers lined up local mostly private gardens to visit. Sort of a combination of our conference and garden walk over three consecutive days. That was my first experience with a large group of gardeners and I loved it.

My favorite event took place in a city called Sidney on Vancouver Island. You had to take a ferry to get there and fabulous gardens were everywhere.

I took the Master Gardener class in 2011 in Vancouver, WA to get my first formal training in horticulture. We moved to Kaukauna, WI at the end of 2012 and I joined OCMGA in 2013. I was the UWEX Horticultural Assistant in 2013. That was a great experience because I learned so much about WI horticulture while helping people.

So far I have gardened in Wisconsin, Washington and Florida where we spent a portion of winter months after retiring. These are three quite different zones and soils and plants. I have happily connected with gardeners in all three states and found that gardeners have much in common. Almost always they are very nice and interesting people who enjoy eating and drinking and fun along with gardening.

Florida is subtropical and has a lot of extreme weather. Orchids and air plants grow in palms. Washington is temperate with much rain. If you stick something in the ground, it will grow. Wisconsin is most challenging. The growing season is short. Many plants grown as annuals in Wisconsin are perennials in Florida and Washington. It took me a while to adapt but making friends in OCMGA really helped to make gardening here rewarding and satisfying.

Florida Master Gardeners stress the importance of growing Florida natives. What I learned in Florida and from The Wild Ones in Wisconsin about the value of natives has stuck with me so I will continue incorporating natives in my gardens.

My garden theme is color and diversity. I have been most involved in perennials with flowers for wow factor plus use a lot of foliage plants. I completely believe in the idea of putting the right plant in the right place. My favorite gardening is with plants that are low maintenance and come back for you without a lot of fuss.

I love garden art from gorgeous to whimsical and have much in my garden. Last year we installed a tiered fountain and the sound of water is magical.

The garden at our house in Kaukauna was started by my mother-in-law. She had lots of herbaceous peonies in white and pink and three types of hostas. We have added a Serviceberry tree, a Bartzella peony, America peony, over 100 natives and many hosta varieties to mention a few. Our lot is about one quarter acre and every year the amount of grass gets smaller.

Gardens are never finished but always a work in progress.