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Pacific Connections Garden's first phase unveiled

By Jim Brunner

Seattle Times staff reporter

The public now can get a peek at what backers are calling the most ambitious garden addition to Seattle's Washington Park Arboretum since its founding in 1934.

The Pacific Connections Garden eventually will cover 14 acres at the south end of the park, across from the Japanese Garden, with new gardens and miniforests representing the Pacific Northwest and four Pacific Rim nations with similar climates.

At a soggy ribbon-cutting ceremony Saturday, volunteers, donors and dignitaries celebrated the opening of the project's first phase, a meadow ringed by entry gardens, trails and an "interpretive shelter" made from carved cedar logs salvaged from within the Arboretum.

That's just a small glimpse of what Pacific Connections Garden eventually will look like, backers say.

The entry gardens will be connected to trails through five forests filled — from ground cover to canopy — with native plants from each of the five regions represented in the project: Cascadia (the Pacific Northwest to Northern California), China, Chile, New Zealand and Australia.

"The intent is, you will feel transported. You will be plunged into a different type of forest, a different type of landscape," said Randall Hitchin, plant-collection manager for University of Washington Botanic Gardens.

Whenever possible, the plants will be grown from seeds plucked by hand from the native forests they represent. The plants will be carefully screened to make sure they don't become invasive. "We think it's something that has not been done anywhere in North America. This will be a genuinely unique experience," Hitchin said.

Each nation's entry garden will feature prominently an "iconic plant" of particular importance to the nation it represents: Chile's monkey-puzzle tree, China's Ginkgo biloba tree, New Zealand flax, Australia's snow-gum eucalyptus and, from here, the western red cedar.

The entire project will take several more years and millions of dollars to complete, said Paige Miller, executive director



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Wearing protective plastic over their ornate costumes, members of Seattle Chinese Community Girls Drill Team perform during Saturday's opening of the first phase of Pacific Connections Garden.



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Members of Seattle Chinese Community Girls Drill Team bow after performing Saturday at festivities at Pacific Connections Garden. When completed, the garden will cover 14 acres, with areas representing the Northwest and four Pacific Rim nations.

Information

Pacific Connections Garden:

<http://depts.washington.edu/urbhort/>

of the Arboretum Foundation, the nonprofit group raising the bulk of the money for the project.

The foundation raised \$2.2 million for the initial phase of the new garden, which also received \$600,000 from the 1999 Pro Parks levy, Miller said. The Arboretum would receive another \$2.5 million from the \$146 million parks levy on the Nov. 4 ballot.

To complete Pacific Connections Garden, Miller said, the Arboretum Foundation hopes to raise \$1 million a year for the next five years in order to open the new forests at a pace of one a year.

Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels praised the new garden for bringing "a new generation of life and vitality" to the 230-acre Arboretum.

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