



Getting to know our Communication leader,
VALA ROSS

Born and raised on Orcas, Vala was an independent island kid who developed a love for gardening at an early age. She recalled visiting a friend's home garden. Her friend's mother, Jenny Pederson, who you probably recognize as the owner of Darvill's, had a magical garden. She remembered being amazed at how she could turn a columbine flower into a fairy.



Vala was so inspired by Jenny's passion and energy that the memory of the experience she recalls to this day. She also had the opportunity during her high school years to participate in the FEAST program, which stands for Food, Education and Sustainability for Teens. This hands-on food, farm and community involvement program was her first introduction to growing food.



At present, she and her husband, Tyrus, are the proud owners of the Walker Family Farm. You know the spot! Just look for the little blue refrigerator sitting just outside their fence filled with eggs on Crow Valley road. She laughed and explained that she's raising lots of things on the farm. Chickens, flowers, vegetables and oh yes, children. She is a rockstar mom with five boys, the oldest attending college and her youngest a preschooler, William, who is a "ton of fun."

Walking through her garden, paths playfully entice you and lead you every which way to special little hideaways. She considers herself a steward of her property by repurposing left over building supplies to transform the materials into useful things in her garden such as garden beds, tables and even her greenhouse.

Promoting pollinators is more important than growing vegetables to Vala. She went on to say that "if need be, she could buy the vegetables at the store, but you can't grow a pollinator." She describes herself as a 'hyper local' seed saver and loves growing seeds in order to experience a plant's whole life cycle. With dozens of microclimates on Orcas, it takes experimentation and persistence to be successful. She reflected that she's learned to be flexible about what she can and cannot grow easily. To that point, even though she loves dahlias, she acknowledged that they don't do well in the drought conditions of her garden, but wildflowers do! She has worked hard to support her pollinators all year round by creating a 'shoulder season' garden and has intentionally introduced flowers that release nectar at

different times of the day. But by far her favorite time of the year is spring when you can “go outside and get dirt under your nails.” She looks forward to this time of year as “the season of opportunity and creativity. It is a season for dreamers and possibility, and it is an especially welcome time after winter.”

Today, Vala is an active business savvy lady in our community! She is a founding member of the newly created executive board for Orcas Cooperative Participatory Agriculture, as well as a participant in the program. She is growing her own business -- [Walker Construction](#) -- and leading several significant projects such as installing a solar water pump system at Turtleback and implementing the design and construction of a fairly large greenhouse. She explains that “running a business puts her ‘mom’ skills on hyperdrive with budget, scheduling and problem solving in play.”



Vala has big educational goals as well. She received a Business Sustainability degree from Western Washington University and is just a few months away from completing a certificate in Professional Construction Management. Rumor has it that she’s applied for the SJC Master Gardener’s Program training to begin in January.

And she is the OIGC Communications Chair! The Garden Club is so incredibly fortunate to have Vala leading our communication

interface with the local media, other garden clubs and Chamber of Commerce. Vala is a forward-thinking leader with a keen sense of humor. She's smart, hardworking, and motivated to make a difference in the community. Please try to find an opportunity to get to know her!