

Thursday Walk with Tomas E. – August 3, 2017
Contributed by Marilyn Goebel

Notes have not been reviewed by staff

Tomas is responsible for the Bentall Garden, Grass Bed, Alpine Garden, Rose Gardens, Laburnum Walk, Black and Gold Garden and Tropical Beds. As we walked from the Plaza, he pointed out the shore pine (*Pinus contorta*) at the end of the bridge, which has a lot of die-back. He thinks this is due to salty water run-off from ice removal on near-by paths. Soil compaction from feet and vehicles is also a factor. He has tried breaking up the soil under the wood chip mulch and will add some fertilizer pellets this fall, so he is optimistic the tree will survive. The top growth looks healthy, which is a positive sign.

Tomas noted that the nearby Bollwiller pear (x *Sorbopyrus auricularis*) in the Grass Bed looked bad last year, but he has been watering it more, and it has recovered. He also weeded the entire bed and put down wood chips to keep the moisture in. He likes chips for this area because they do not add many nutrients to the soil as they decompose, which is a good thing for grasses. He moved the Japanese blood grass (*Imperata cylindrica* 'Rubra') last fall to a better spot, and it is doing better. As we walked into the Bentall area, Tomas said he had repotted three of the pitcher plant pots this spring. Two of the taller pots are cracked and will be replaced. In answer to a question about Venus fly-traps, he said they are too fussy and don't do well here.

In the Bentall perennial beds, Tomas used to mulch with black compost when he cut the plants back, but this year he used clippings from the spent plants, which worked well. The yellow inula will be divided to give more space to the monardas.

Our next stop was the Stanley Smith Alpine Garden, a challenge given the horsetail infestation. Big plans to renovate this area are not in the cards, but Tomas will try digging it out section by section to avoid disturbing the dwarf trees. A mini-excavator may be used to speed up the task. He will then line the cleaned-up sections with some sort of non-woven barrier to discourage the horsetail from returning. He took out some small conifers near the catalpa (*Catalpa bignoniodes* 'Aurea') and planted some alpine rhododendrons. In the middle of that bed is a small, staked tree with a yellow ribbon. This is an Arizona sycamore (*Platanus wrightii*) that was grown from seed he collected on a trip to Arizona in 2012. The catalpa is suffering from soil compaction, and he is giving it a lot of water this summer.

The blue border across the path is overgrown, and Tomas will divide the iris and the chicory next month. He hopes to beef up the salvias and echinops in this bed next year. The soil is mostly clay, so it is very wet in the winter and spring, then dries out in the summer. He mulched it with black compost.

For the first time in two years, Tomas mulched the roses this spring. Since roses are heavy feeders, he has also used compost tea and herbal teas, along with a granular organic fertilizer, to feed them. The roses took a hit from the bad winter. Also, several roses in the middle had to be removed for the Eiffel Tower display in December. This year, he has put those plants in pots in the ground so they can be more easily moved. Roses are expensive to replace, about \$40 a plant.

Tomas noted that the laburnum tree in the Black and Gold Garden split and was bolted back together, but a callous formed, so the tree was radically cut. Some of the trees in the Laburnum Walk also fell over, and a large one at the southwest corner of the Formal Rose Garden fell so hard that the root ball came out of the ground, revealing a layer of gravel and clay that may be causing drainage problems. However, these trees are easy to replace, so it is not a huge deal when we lose one. The borders underneath the trees have been cleared out, leaving the veronica and the hardy geraniums (*Geranium x cantabrigiense*). He has added some pink nepeta (*Nepeta nervosa*) and *Geranium wallichianum* 'Buxton's Blue'. He will plant more *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation' and *A. cristophii* in the fall. He says that allium bulbs tend to decay and need to be continually renewed. He also hopes to tie these beds in better with the fusion border further along the path to the north.

It took a work party five days to clean out the heritage rose beds. The area just beyond the stone arch on the east side of the path was full of bluebells and morning glory and smothering the China roses, and the other beds were very weedy. He hopes to plant more perennials in these beds so that they look like an English country garden. The hollyhocks (*Alcea rosea*) are beautiful this year, and he is tagging the plants by colour so he can use them in the future to obtain certain design effects.

Our last stop was at the Tropical Beds beyond the Glasshouse. Tomas did all three beds this year, using similar colours but varying the planting styles according to the shape of the bed. The seasonal beds are not labeled. The beds contain two different bananas, the hardy *Musa basjoo* and the more tender Red Abyssinian/Ethiopian banana (*Ensete ventricosum* 'Maurelli') which goes into the greenhouse in the winter. *Agave attenuata* adds some interest, and the papyrus, new this year, provides a soft texture. In the back bed to the east is *Albizia julibrissin* 'Summer Chocolate', which was moved from the Black and Gold Garden. There will be no tulips in these beds next spring because this year's tulips suffered from bulb end rot. He will plant drifts of narcissus to give the beds a rest for a few years.

Bruce will talk more about the neighbouring Backyard Bird Garden on the next walk, but Tomas gave us a sneak preview. While the entire Garden is a bird habitat, this area focuses on bird-attractive plants that homeowners can include in their own gardens. The newly placed sandstone rocks are from the top of the garden. Right now the plan is to put stamped concrete on the paths, but Tomas says screenings might work better. The bird garden now has a mulberry and a persimmon tree. The paths are not wide enough for carts. There will be a lot of interpretation.

Tomas also worked a lot on the woodland rockery behind the glass house, adding trilliums, gentians, podophyllums, cardamines, and turk's cap lilies (*Lilium hansonii*). He has seen a lot of California black bumble bees in the Garden this year. They nest in the sword ferns and grasses and are very gentle.

Tomas has had extra help this summer, but this week they are all on pond duty to clear out the waterlilies. The guides were very impressed by all that he has accomplished since our last walk.