

Thursday Gardener Walk with James P - June 2, 2016

Recorded by Marilyn Goebel

\*\*Notes have not been reviewed by staff\*\*

James P is the gardener for the Plaza, the Eastern North America Garden (ENA), and the multi-faceted Southern Hemisphere Garden. We started our walk on the Plaza, where he noted that the planters are redone three times a year, in addition to a seasonal display in December for the Festival of Lights. He uses mostly annuals and tender perennials in the planters. The overall theme this summer is "herb and country gardens," with a nod toward eastern plants like *Liatrix spicata*, (gayflower). He is experimenting with sunflowers in the planters (the bamboo poles will support the tall plants). He has also planted *Lagurus ovatus* (bunnytail), an annual grass with fluffy flower heads. The light-green plant in the pot on the south side of the Plaza is *Phytolacca americana* (pokeweed), native to the American south. Its poisonous purple berries will appear later in the season, but the leaves, if boiled twice to remove toxins, are similar to spinach and are a traditional southern food. There are pokeweed festivals in the southern US, and in 1968 the song "Poke Salad Annie" by Tony Joe White described the life of the people who ate this dish. There is also a *Phytolacca clavigera* of Asian origin in the Meconopsis Dell. James noted that many North American plants have Asian counterparts since the two continents were originally one landmass. The exotic succulent planter will be moved out to the Plaza soon, according to Bruce McDonald.

We then moved to the ENA area at the northwest side of the Plaza across from the marble sculptures. Because this bed is so noticeable, James has been trying to make it more pleasing to the eye. Originally it was full of *Colchicum autumnale* (autumn crocus or naked lady), but he has been pulling some of it up and replacing it with a more interesting variety of plants, like thyme, blue sedum, and the very hardy *Sieboldiopsis tridentata* 'Nuuk' (three-toothed cinquefoil - formerly in the *Potentilla* genus), native to eastern Canada. These plants have joined a number of fast-growing perennials planted last year. The beautiful *Aralia cordata* 'Sun King' (gold-leaved aralia) has golden foliage and is a cousin to *A. spinosa* (devil's walkingstick). The shoots of another *Aralia* variety, *A. elata*, are eaten in Japan. The twiggy structure is supporting a newly-planted *Clematis x durandii*, which is a cross between *C. integrifolia*, a ground-hugging plant, and *C. 'Jackmanii'*, which has large flowers. It takes a couple of years for clematis to get established, and eventually the twiggy structure will be covered. As we left this area, a guide pointed out the *Liriodendron tulipifera* (tulip tree) in full bloom behind us, as well as the flowering *Magnolia macrophylla* (cucumber tree).

James noted that the ENA is a semi-mature forested garden. The abundant shade and tree roots make planting a challenge, but he is using mulch to expand some understory beds. However, he has to be careful where he mulches because some trees are sensitive to any elevation change around their trunks. Removing tree roots can also negatively impact the tree canopy. He will be planting some ENA material growing in the nursery and has a long list of shady understory shrubs he would like to add. Along the south bank of Cypress Pond he hopes to replace the large elderberry and the damaged twisted filbert with *Sambucus canadensis* and also remove the non-ENA plantings. When asked to name three spectacular plants in this area, he listed *Podophyllum*, the masses of *Matteuccia struthiopteris* (ostrich ferns), and *Gymnocladus dioica* (Kentucky coffeetree) in bed 107a, which just starting to bloom.

Walking up the path towards the Southern Hemisphere Garden, James pointed out the silvery gray *Cynara cardunculus* (cardoon), which overwintered. The cardoon is taller and has more striking flowers than its close relative, the globe artichoke. The cardoon's stem is edible, whereas it is the thistles that are edible on the globe artichoke.

James noted that these beds used to be a mishmash of plants from the southern hemisphere, but more and more they reflect plants from only one region. In the South African area, James said that most of the plants are perennials or bulbous, with strappy leaves. He has added South African annuals such as *Osteospermum* (daisybush), *Gazania*, and *Senecio polyodon* (pink

ragwort). The tall plant in the middle is *Melianthus major* (honey or peanut-butter plant). The pink-flowering *Escallonia* at the back, however, is native to South America. Rather than trying to recreate a South African ecosystem, which is difficult due to our climate and the unavailability of many plants from that part of the world, he hopes to give visitors a taste of what South Africa has to offer.

James was particularly excited about trying to grow *Delosperma* (ice plant) along the rocky ledge by the bench. The ones he planted last year died, but this year he is adapting a technique advocated by Swedish horticulturist Peter Korn, who removes all the soil from alpine plants he transplants, then places them in sand, which forces the plants to quickly grow roots. James is going to use half soil and half sand to see if the *Delosperma* will root better this year.

Moving down the path to the Australia-New Zealand area, James thinks that the giant *Gunnera manicata* is not invasive here, as he has never seen a seedling. A guide-seed collector added that its seed is indeed viable, and it is one of their biggest sellers, but it may not survive in our winters. James pointed out *Wollemia nobilis* (Wollemi pine), recently planted near the eucalyptus trees. We have had two of these pines in the past, but they both died in our wet winters. This one was donated to the Garden two years ago and has been in the greenhouse, so he is keeping his fingers crossed that third time is a charm. This pine was discovered in 1994 by ranger David Noble (hence *nobilis*) in Wollemi National Park north of Sydney, Australia, and was thought to have been extinct. It is part of the Araucariaceae family whose other members include *Araucaria araucana* (monkey puzzle tree) and *A. heterophylla* (Norfolk pine). The Wollemi pine can grow to 130 feet and live a thousand years, but only about 80 mature trees exist in the wild. James also pointed out the monkey puzzle trees in this area and lamented the loss of two large ones a few years ago, probably due to the high water table in this area so close to the lake. When asked about the dying monkey puzzle tree in the maze, James speculated that foot traffic compaction may be the culprit there.

Most of the other plants in this bed are not hardy, although the green *Cordyline australis* appears to have perennialized. The red cordylines are not hardy. James has planted lots of *Xerochrysum bracteatum* (Australian straw flower), *Scaevola aemula*, and *Ptilotus exaltatus* 'Joey', the latter a big hit last summer.

Some of the *Nothofagus antarctica* (Antarctic beech) are dying from the top, but the large *N. dombeyi* (coigüe or Dombey's southern beech) seems happy.

In the Chilean garden, James identified *Eryngium agavaefolium* by the path and mentioned that the *Puya* next to it overwinter in the greenhouse. One year some were left outside but did not do well. We all admired *Tropaeolum polyphyllum* (perennial nasturtium) growing in the rockery at the entrance to the Peninsula. They get better every year, and James thinks the sunny, well-drained location is perfect for them. On the Peninsula (and in some of the Plaza pots) he has planted *Tropaeolum peregrinum* 'Canary Creeper'.

James is also planting seasonal South American plants on the Peninsula, but he is wary of planting anything permanent other than sturdy shrubs because of the traffic from the Festival of Lights. There are some quinoa seedlings on the slope; this plant was domesticated in South America thousands of years ago, even though it is difficult to remove the coating on the edible seeds before they can be processed into food. He also has planted three *Passiflora caerulea* (passionflower) as annuals; if the summer is hot, we may get some bland fruit.

It was obvious that James had done a lot of research before our walk, and the group very much appreciated it.