

Thursday Walk with Miguel – July 9, 2015

Contributed by Marilyn G

\*\*These notes have not been reviewed by Garden staff\*\*

Miguel's first stop was the *Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea' (golden catalpa) by the Rose Garden. He asked us to study the features of this tree very carefully, as he would refer to them later in the walk.

We then proceeded to the Canadian Heritage Garden along the path that borders 37th. Miguel pointed out that the cypresses planted here by Roy in the early 1970s grew faster than predicted and are now shading other plants, including the scrawny maples that have been attacked by a fungus. Even though the cypresses are healthy, many of them will eventually be removed so that the rest of this garden can grow better. It is hoped that Roy's initial plan for the area can be rejuvenated. Smaller trees will replace the cypresses in order to block the view of the street.

We arrived at the newly mown Medicine Wheel. Miguel had let the grass grow for the solstice ceremony last month, but now you can see the actual Medicine Wheel structure. He pointed out that the Medicine Wheel is not a local First Nations custom but is a part of prairie native culture.

Opposite the Medicine Wheel is the medicinal plant collection that features plants used by First Nations. This area is being re-interpreted, and 50 additional plants will be added, along with improved interpretative signage. Miguel pointed out several interesting plants:

- *Adiantum pedatum* (maidenhair fern) was used as cough medicine and as a hair tonic to prevent baldness (Miguel removed his hat and commented that it didn't work for him). A guide noted that the black stems of this fern were used to create designs in woven baskets.
- *Achillea millefolium* (yarrow) is also good for colds and baldness.
- *Cichorium intybus* (chicory) has light blue flowers but is not native to this area. It was used as an antibiotic and fungicide and also as a coffee substitute.
- *Plantago major* (broadleaf plantain) facilitates wound healing and can be eaten.
- *Actaea rubra* (baneberry) was used for menstrual problems.
- *Myrica gale* is a large shrub whose leaves were used as an insect repellent. In Europe it was used in making beer.
- *Viburnum trilobum* (highbush cranberry) has berries that are rich in vitamin C. Our plants are being attacked by the viburnum leaf beetle.
- *Castilleja miniata* (Indian paintbrush) provided fresh greens.
- *Rhododendron macrophyllum* relieved arthritis and enhanced sexual performance.
- *Goodyera oblongifolia* (rattlesnake plantain) looks like an orchid and is very difficult to establish. It needs a special fungus in the soil to survive.
- *Shepherdia canadensis* (soapberry) produces bitter berries used to make 'Indian ice cream'.
- *Echinacea* was used for treating colds and sexually transmitted diseases. Miguel recently planted a cultivar, *Echinacea purpurea* 'Magnus Superior'.

Miguel has removed some *Gaultheria shallon* (salal) to make room for other plants and moved the invasive *Maianthemum dilatatum* (false lily of the valley) near the cabin. He has installed a plastic barrier to keep it in place. The beds are infested with horsetail, which he tries to remove, but he was told by a visitor that horsetail has medicinal properties as well. A guide mentioned that at Highgate in England, horsetail is steeped like tea and used as fertilizer. Miguel is going to research this and suggested that guides use Google as a tool. He uses the Internet constantly to improve his knowledge of these interesting plants.

Miguel also mentioned the fire ant problem and said that he intentionally let two ants bite him. It hurt for about a day, but it was no worse than a mosquito bite.

We then moved on to the vegetable garden where the theme is heritage vegetables, just like last year. Next year we may have a new theme, perhaps a replay of the coloured vegetable theme a few years back. Miguel overwinters this bed with winter rye, tilling it in in May and letting the soil sit for a couple of weeks before planting. Bruce sowed many of the vegetables in the greenhouse this year, so they got an early start. The heat has also helped them a lot, and this morning Miguel did his first harvest: six big plastic bags full for the food bank! Some of the vegetables are listed in the 'Ark of Taste' ([www.slowfoodfoundation.com/ark](http://www.slowfoodfoundation.com/ark)), an organization that collects and catalogs vegetables and other edibles that are in danger of extinction. The garden is 100% organic; Miguel uses manure for the corn and beans, but he relies on the decomposed winter rye in the soil to fertilize the rest of the vegetables. In the centre of this bed is an Orinoco apple tree that is very healthy. The rest of the orchard will be renovated to remove some of the diseased trees.

The tomatoes are supported by bamboo frames. Miguel does not pinch back the determinate (bush) tomatoes, but with the indeterminate (vining) varieties, he pinches the lateral growth that produces bigger fruit. He has not had a problem with tomato blight. The neighbouring red chili peppers are really hot and are already producing. These are actually last year's plants wintered over in the greenhouse. While all the vegetables go to the food bank, Miguel encouraged us to let visitors taste them (except for the chilis!)

We then visited the island bed in the Alma VanDusen garden. On July 6, Miguel cut the delphiniums down to the ground and removed the bamboo supports. With the heat, the plants are already coming back, and he expects a nice show again in early fall. Now the sunflowers are coming on, and the red amaranths have sprouted on their own. The planted cleomes are just starting to bloom. There are also a number of ornamental corn plants. He cuts the main shoot to make more tri-coloured side shoots (with edible corn, he cuts the lateral shoots to give more energy to the emerging stalks). Miguel said that if the grass is dry, he does not have a problem with the carts driving in this area.

Our final stop was on the path leading up to the top of the reservoir where Miguel asked us to identify two trees with pink blooms, keeping in mind the golden catalpa we saw earlier. These trees are x *Chitalpa taskentensis* 'Pink Dawn', an intergeneric hybrid (hence the 'x' at the beginning of the name) of *Chilopsis linearis* (desert willow) and *Catalpa bignonioides* (southern catalpa). The flowers are reminiscent of its *Catalpa* heritage, but its leaves and drought tolerance come from the *Chilopsis* side of the equation. The flowers attract pollinators (we saw a hummingbird), but it is sterile, so there are no bean pods. It was initially hybridized in Uzbekistan in 1964, introduced in the US in 1977 and planted in our Garden in 1993.

Miguel encouraged us to do our own research on all the interesting plants in his area, and he threatened to give us quiz next year on the medicinal plants he introduced us to.