

Thursday Gardener Walk with James P- Sept. 3, 2015
by Marilyn G

These notes have not been reviewed by Garden staff

We began our walk at the Plaza planters whose displays are designed by James. In past years he has used many drought-tolerant plants, but this year he decided to use more water-lovers, a big mistake in retrospect! The building overhang and dry shade areas are a challenge, but he selects appropriate plants to echo the nearby Eastern North America Garden (ENA) and the herb garden on the café terrace. The spectacular red-flowered *Hibiscus moscheutos* is native to the warmer areas of eastern North America and likes heat; one of its common names is 'swamp hibiscus'. It has flourished in this summer's warmth and probably would not have done so well in a cooler summer. The *Lobelia cardinalis* could possibly overwinter, but he usually does not keep these plants from year to year.

We then moved to the corner bed facing the David Marshall sculptures which is important because it is so visible from the Plaza. It is challenging, given the number of mature trees with extensive root systems that make planting difficult. The soil is quite dry. James was asked to include a new narrow path through this area that limited what he could plant. He opened up the bed by removing a *Rhododendron augustinii* that was in decline. It was very easy to dig it out because its root ball was shallow, perhaps due to seepage from the lake. James pointed out that this bed is part of the Woodland Garden/Magnolia Collection, not the ENA, so the plants come from many areas. In past years, this bed had a huge display of *Colchicum autumnale*, the autumn crocus or naked lady, whose leaves emerge in the spring, then die back before flowering in late summer. A guide pointed out that the seed heads emerge with the leaves. James felt this one-flower display was not very dynamic, so he pull up 'crates and crates' of the crocus, either moving them to other areas or offering them to the Plant Sale. He then renovated this bed to include more plant material, placing small drought-tolerant plants along the path edge. *Sedum sieboldii* is featured here, as well as *Sibbaldiopsis tridentata* (formerly *Potentilla*), which has small white flowers and shiny evergreen foliage that turns bronzy in the fall. *Geranium sanguineum* 'Max Frei' has magenta-pink flowers. Behind them, he made several small, sandy berms with clumps of *Armeria maritima* that echo the grasses at the edge of the nearby holding pond. The berms are also a psychological barrier to prevent visitors from walking into the bed. *Anemone japonica* 'Wild Swan' is a newer cultivar; the back of its white petals is mauve-blue. The golden-leafed plant to the right is the herbaceous *Aralia cordata* 'Sun King'. The feathery *Amsonia hubertii* has blue flowers in early summer and turns gold in the fall. *Iris pallida* 'Variegata' likes the dappled shade of this area. The large planting of *Salvia farinacea* 'Evolution' nicely fills in some of the bare spots. In the area where the rhododendron was, he has planted a witch hazel.

We moved down the path a few steps to look at the *Magnolia macrophylla*, which is leaning. James thinks the roots on one side were damaged during construction of the Visitor Centre so he is keeping an eye on it and has planted another one next to it just in case. It is *M. macrophylla* 'Ashei', which will be shrubbier and shorter than its neighbour. He planted three more behind this bed and noted that these magnolias were given to us by the UBC Botanic Garden.

Turning to face Cypress Pond, James pointed out the log propped up in the crotch of an *Acer rubrum*. He has planted a shade-tolerant vine, *Decumaria barbara*, at the base and hopes that the log support will prevent it from destroying the tree. It has fragrant flowers in the spring and grows happily on the ground but needs verticality to bloom. It will stay leafy all the way to the base, unlike many other vines. The maples here need thinning, and other trees in the area need to be removed or thinned, but this work requires a qualified arbourist. A guide pointed out that the nearby *Juglans cinerea*, white walnut or butternut, is the only one in the Garden and is nearly extinct in North America.

There is no in-ground irrigation in the ENA, and many of the plants need a lot of water. The extensive root system of the trees in this part of the garden compounds the problem. He pointed out *Zenobia pulverulenta*, a semi-evergreen shrub, which is not doing well. He had thought about

planting more mertensias, but they don't like drought either. However, the spring ephemerals here can handle it.

As we moved down the path toward the floating bridge, James noted that the *Aesculus pavia* 'Atrosanguinea' on our right had been moved here during the Centre construction but is not doing well. Drought and insect damage have compounded the problem. He wasn't sure if the lumpy shape of the fruit was normal or if it is due to the tree's other problems. We turned around to view the vine *Aristolochia macrophylla* 'Sipho Select', Dutchman's pipe, engulfing a dead tree in Bed 107C. James said it is too shady for it to bloom. The *Fothergilla gardenii* 'Jane Platt' at its foot, however, is in good shape.

We then followed the north path around the pond to look at a group of kalmias that are also drought-stressed (they have very shallow roots), but James thinks they may bounce back. The North American native, *Hamamelis virginiana*, flowers in October, but its tiny gold flowers are hard to see among its leaves, which turn gold in autumn. A guide noted that most hybrid witch hazels are grafted onto *H. virginiana* rootstock because it is very hardy.

As we followed the soggy path around to the bridge, James wasn't sure why the trail was so wet. Last year, the paved path from the bridge had standing water, but the catch basin for the pond had been blocked, and once that was fixed, the problem went away. We crossed that path to look at the western edge of the pond, and James pointed out *Euphorbia palustris* growing below the weeping beech. Unlike many other *Euphorbia* species, it loves water. Next to it is *Acorus calamus*, sweet flag. James has been adding species tulips to this area, but the horsetail have been choking them out. The 'dandelions' are *Cichorium intybus*, chicory, with bright blue flowers. Its roots have often been used as a coffee substitute.

We walked up the path along the pond through the Mediterranean Garden, and on the left James showed us *Thlaspi macrophyllum* (formerly *Pachyphragma*), Caucasian pennycress, which is a member of the cabbage family. Up on the main path, we detoured to the east where James talked about a small *Crataegus schraderiana*, native to Greece, halfway down the bank. It has bluish foliage and tasty cherry-flavoured berries. There is a bigger specimen in the Autumn Walk garden.

We came back to the streambed, and James showed us where he has been moving rocks to create a new planting area for another species of *Tropaeolum*. The streambed is a problem because it is cemented in, so the stream does not water the surrounding soil and dries up in summer. The oleanders and the aeoniums spend the winter in the greenhouse. There are also clumps of the hardier *Sanguisorba minor*, salad burnet. As we followed the narrow path along the eastern edge of the Chilean bed, James pointed out the *Brugmansia sanguinea*. He said it has had orange flowers in the past but had declined in the greenhouse. It revived when he planted out but not to the point of flowering this year. The *Azara serrata*, however, had lots of jasmine-smelling flowers.

Underneath the Western red cedar on the main path, James is growing Southern Hemisphere shade plants, one of which is the New Zealand native *Fuchsia excorticata*, with green flowers that change to purple and a papery red bark. It is not reliably hardy here.

In Bed 32 where the monkey puzzle tree died, the plan is to put in *Eucalyptus coccifera*, Tasmanian snow gum, which can tolerate colder winters. We are growing them from seed collected by UBC. The longest-living eucalyptus in the Garden is 15 years old, so we have had problems keeping them alive. James has amended this area with lots of sand and gravel and has planted several new grasses to tie in with the pampas grass grown on the Peninsula. One is *Austroderia fulvida*, toetoe grass, which is related to the *Cortaderia* genus of the pampas grasses. The daisy-like flowers sprinkled throughout are Australian straw flowers, cultivars of *Xerochrysum bracteatum*. However, he has lost some of the straw flowers and commented that these plants may do better when they self-seed than when they are bedded out. There are clumps of *Ptilotus*

exaltatus on two sides of this Bed; the south-facing one is doing much better than its north-facing relative. Its common names are lambs-tail or pink mulla-mulla, and it is related to amaranthus and celosia. The seed came from Dominion Seed House.

We walked back up the path to the Chilean bed, and James pointed out the small conifer with lacy foliage, *Fitzroya cupressoides*, under the Antarctic beech. There is also a larger one in Bed 75. In Chile, these trees are very tall. He also mentioned the fragrant annual 'pineapple plant' with little yellow button flowers. At the southern tip of this area, James said that he had planted *Gunnera magellanica* to contrast with the giant *G. manicata* along the water, but it was too hot, so now he has it in a pot under the cedar.

Our last stop was the Peninsula where James has planted annuals and tender perennials to contrast with the hardier shrubs and give this area more eye appeal. He has to be careful what he puts in here because this is a prime spot for Christmas lights, and many delicate plants get trampled. This bed is a mixture of South and Central American plants, although the South African cape fuchsias have stayed since they are reliable performers. The orange *Zinnia elegans* 'Inca', native to Mexico, has large blooms, while its neighbour, *Zinnia tenuifolia* 'Red Spider', sports little red flowers. *Salvia guaranitica* 'Black and Blue' came back this year so may be hardy here, but last year's black-flowered *Salvia discolor*, Peruvian sage, has not flowered again. The slope of the Peninsula is populated by self-seeding amaranthus, which can do battle with the horsetail, and the tall plant on the edge is *Nicotiana glauca*, wild tobacco, with yellow flowers. Nearby, scrambling over some small shrubs, is *Solanum pimpinellifolium*, a species tomato, which is the parent of many cherry tomato hybrids. James would like to continue the food theme by planting quinoa here next year.

At the end of the garden visit, James said that he appreciates the opportunity to do these walks because they motivate him to research the plants he works with every day.