

Thursday Walk with Miguel – August 4, 2016

Contributed by Marilyn G

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

Miguel has been with VanDusen eight years, and his areas are the Canadian Heritage Garden, the Medicine Wheel, the Alma VanDusen Garden, the Maze, and the Vegetable Garden. He welcomed the new guides and then gave his annual quiz on provincial flowers - this year we identified 11! Miguel noted that Bill had been eager to improve the provincial flowerbed and its signage, but now that he is gone, this project is up in the air. Miguel also mentioned that fireweed, the flower of the Yukon, is so named because it is the first to bloom after a fire.

We started out in the shady maple grove in the Canadian Heritage Garden where Miguel pointed out the tall cypresses along the street. Roy Forster planted them in the early 1970s as a temporary barrier, but now they cast too much shade, which impacts the understory plantings, including the Canadian hybrid rhododendrons and the sugar maples. A project to remove some of the cypresses has been sidetracked by changes in Garden directorship, construction of the Visitor Centre, and most recently the death of a Parks Board arborist.

We walked down the path to the Medicinal Plant Collection, which has about 50 plants. While there is some interpretation in this area, a plan is in the works to improve it. Miguel suggests that we learn about a plant or two every time we visit this bed. One plant in bloom right now is *Castilleja miniata* (Indian or scarlet paintbrush), which was used as a condiment, a treatment for venereal disease, and an immune-system enhancer. Miguel also pointed out *Plantago major* (broadleaf plantain), which has medicinal purposes. He finds it ironic that he has to keep the plant in the Medicinal Collection but pulls it out in the Medicine Wheel across the path where it is considered a weed. The trees in Medicinal Collection, as well, were used by First Nations peoples to treat illness.

At the entrance to the orchard we passed a tall clump of blue-flowered *Cichorium intybus* (common chicory), whose roots are used as a coffee substitute; the plant is also used as an antibacterial and antifungal agent. The fruit trees in the orchard are in bad shape and will be replaced. However, the Orinoco apple planted a few years ago in the Vegetable Garden is doing well.

Bruce designed and sourced the seed for this year's Vegetable Garden. The Garden was developed nine years ago, and every two years, the display changes. This year the Garden features vegetables from around the world, which are arranged by area of origin. Sam made the informative labels with help from an outside company, and they feature photos that, Miguel noted, are especially helpful if the vegetable doesn't do well here or has already been harvested. He gets very positive feedback about this area, and the summer camp kids really enjoy being here. Miguel suggested we study the signage to learn more about what is planted, but he went into detail about the vegetables he calls "the three sisters," beans, squash and corn grown in the same mound. The corn supports the beans, which fix nitrogen, and the broad leaves of the squash prevent weeds and keep the moisture in. [To learn more about the Vegetable Garden, see the extensive information available on Erica's Book, <http://www.ericanotebook.com/vegetable-garden.html>.]

Miguel also recounted a story from a few summers ago when he was frustrated by crows pulling up vegetable starts to look for worms. A guide told him that a dead crow would discourage the crows from returning, but Miguel did not have the heart to kill one. However, a few days later, he threw a rock at a group of crows to get them to leave but one accidentally died. That afternoon, crows coming to pay their last respects infested the area, but since then they have left the vegetables alone.

Our last stop was the wisteria arbour in the Alma VanDusen Garden. Early in the season the large bed in front of the arbour features a display of New Millennium delphiniums from New

Zealand that are supposed to be dwarf and need no staking, but in our climate they grow up to eight feet. After one season of seeing them flop over, Miguel built a portable bamboo trellis that is removed in early July when the plants are cut back and overshadowed by the sunflower display. However, as the sunflowers decline in late summer, the delphiniums bloom again, so this bed is beautiful from May through October.

The tuberous begonia display along the edge is spectacular this summer, and Miguel said an intern planted it to interweave the different shades of red and pink. The tubers are not overwintered. The tall daisy-flowered perennial in the bed to the east of the sunflowers is *Silphium perfoliatum* (cup plant - the flowers resemble a cup up close).

The final plant on Miguel's tour was *Wisteria sinensis*, which covers the arbour and is growing on neighbouring trees. This vine lives in symbiosis with its environment: the beans that appear after flowering fix nitrogen, and the mycorrhizae fungus on the root helps improve the neighbouring soil. Miguel said that we guides also have a symbiotic relationship with the garden. We enjoy the beauties of nature and learn a lot about plants, but we also help visitors get more out of their visit. He is very appreciative of our contributions to the Garden.