Thursday Gardener Walk with James P. - April 6, 2017
Recorded by Marilyn G
Notes have not been reviewed by staff

James P. is the gardener for the Plaza, Eastern North America Garden (ENA), Mediterranean Garden and Southern Hemisphere Garden. Under challenging meteorological conditions, we started our walk on the Plaza where James noted that the planters are redone three times a year. This year he improvised an early spring bulb display using pieces of fallen limbs as a structural element. The bulbs are mostly white because bulbs of other colours that had been grown in pots in the greenhouse rotted over the winter. In a week he will remove the crocus and plant tulips, with an experimental underplanting of red clover instead of the traditional myosotis. For the summer pots, he plans a red and green theme to attract hummingbirds and will use some red salvias and *Lobelia cardinalis*.

Speaking of hummingbirds, James noted that they have been eating the seeds of the nearby cattails and using the cattail fluff for their nests. This has attracted many photographers. The birds also like the seed heads of the pasque flower (*Pulsatillia vulgaris*), so he planted more of these in the bed just across the path. He also planted some dwarf goldenrod (*Solidago* 'Golden Baby') because these give the impression of native plants. James has a hard time keeping the cattail contained but said that the stand is not big enough to attract redwing blackbirds who nest deep down in the cattail planting. A guide pointed out that you can see the blackbirds nesting in cattails at UBC and Jericho Beach.

We walked north with the Woodland Garden to our left. James pointed out that the plantings in this area come from all over the world. In the northeast corner of this bed, he showed us a small weeping camellia (*Camellia tsaii* 'Elina Cascade') from Asia that could grow to eight feet. It is a little tender but appears to have made it through the winter.

Just north across the path, the plantings are mostly from Eastern North America. This area is one of the few sunny spots in the ENA Garden. In addition to the elderberry bordering the pond, James hopes to plant button bush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) which likes a moist spot but can cope with drought. It's actually in the coffee family, Rubiaceae. Native plant material for this area will be arriving soon from an Ontario nursery, as it is very difficult to source here.

In Bed 16 there is eastern skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus* - the yellow western skunk cabbage is *Lysichiton americanus*) with hooded purple flowers. James wants to add hardy ageratum (*Eupatorium coelestinium*) and mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum* - smells minty) to the mix here. Later in the summer the heleniums planted a few years ago will shine, but they are cultivars, and he is thinking about replacing them with the species *Helenium autumnale*. This bed

collects water in the winter but then dries out quickly, a challenge for a lot of eastern plants. James added that some of the labels on the plants here indicate a 'cosmopolitan' or 'garden' origin, meaning they come from many places, but he would like to focus on plants that are only native to the east. Near the magnolias in this bed, James has planted short asters (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*), grown from seed in the green house, that are definitely eastern natives. The new plants in this bed were planted in the fall but have been slow to come up. He will plant yellowroot (*Xanthorhiza simplicissima*); its foliage looks like celery leaves, and it has intense fall colour. He recently moved a large Carolina allspice (*Calycanthus floridus*) to the edge of this bed so that the flowers and scent could be enjoyed by visitors. He will also add some spicebushes (*Lindera benzoin*) and alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*) for more fragrance. Under the large walnut he will plant several native grasses. There used to be sweetspire (*Itea virginica*) here, but it is gone (perhaps due to the walnut).

As we walked north along the path to the Winter Walk, James pointed out swathes of trout lilies (*Erythronium americanum*), May apple (*Podophyllum peltatum*), solomon's seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*), and ostrich fern (*Mateuccia struthiopteris*). These classic eastern plants are tough and can take the wet and dry conditions. He noted,lthough, that the ostrich fern grows all over the Northern Hemisphere and is harvested for its edible fiddleheads. However, this bed is too wet and shady for another classic plant, trillium. The May apples are now unfolding their umbrella-like leaves and need two leaves to flower. 'May' refers to the flower which blooms in that month; the apples appear later in the summer and are edible, although the roots and leaves are poisonous.

The trout lilies were planted years ago and have reproduced all over this area. The bulbs form stolons and can make new colonies. Even when their flowers are gone, the foliage is beautiful. The name 'trout lily' comes from the spotted leaves that look like the backs of trout. Other common names are yellow adder's tongue (the flowers look like a snake head), fawn lily (the spots also look like the coat of a fawn), and dogtooth violet (the corms are in the shape of dog teeth and the flowers look a bit like violets).

The recently cut stump was a paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*); it did not thrive under the heavy canopy of larger trees. He replaced it with a snakebark maple (*Acer pennsylvanicum*), which is a classic understory tree and will only grow to about 15 feet. This bed will soon contain a hoptree (*Ptelea trifoliata*), a shrub bladdernut (*Staphylea trifolia*), and a leatherwood tree (*Dirca palustris*), which is similar to our Indian plum. All these plants do well in heavy shade.

Around the corner in the Fall Arboretum, James showed us a young tupelo tree (*Nyssa sylvatica* 'Red Rage') in Bed 107T; it has beautiful autumn colour. We

have several in the Garden, but some of them have quirky shapes. They are swamp trees and live in the same environment as *Taxodium*.

In the back of that bed is a beautiful display of white *Trillium grandiflorum*, with a few red *T. erectum* mixed in. There is also a blue cultivar of *Anemone nemerosa* in this area, but it is of European origin. *Jeffersonia diphylla*, a spring ephemeral, likes it here because there is water seepage from the pond, but *Uvularia grandiflora*, planted here in the 1990s, has disappeared, perhaps from too much shade. Hostas and astilbes will come in later; they rebound well even after a dry summer. James planted a sweet bay (*Magnolia virginiana* 'Ned's Northern Belle') here last year. Closer to the bamboo and swamp cypress are several fringe trees (*Chionanthus virginicus*) that have very textural flowers mid-summer. The small kalmias planted along the north path around the pond several years ago are not doing very well and suffer from summer drought. The nearby sweetspire (*Itea virginica*) is doing well in this area and smells great. He has also planted more merrybell (*Uvularia grandiflora*), but it has not come up yet.

As we followed the path around to the east end of the floating bridge, James said that last fall he planted *Asclepsias tuberosa* near the pond in a sunny area and hopes they survived. Nearby, a false indigo (*Amorpha fruticosa*) is just coming up. It will grow to five feet and has purple buddleia-type flowers with orange stamens. This replaces a Washington hawthorn that had blocked the bed. The area around the Eastern North America sign (one of the few remaining original signs in the Garden, soon to be replaced) is one of the few sunny spots in the ENA. There used to be rudbeckia cultivars here, but he plans to transplant Bowman's root (*Gillenia trifoliata*) from a shadier area where it did not do well. He is trying to avoid annuals. *Anemonella thalictroides* is in the buttercup family and is in bloom now. It is more drought-tolerant. The shrubby sweet fern (*Comptonia peregrina*) looks dead but should come back. It fixes nitrogen in the soil.

At the end of the walk, James said that one of his other areas, the Southern Hemisphere Garden, is a big challenge now. Many plants have died and probably should not have been left out over the winter. A big problem is sourcing new plant material. The large eucalyptus tree looks dead and probably won't sucker at the base, so it will have to go. Fifteen years is the longest period a eucalyptus tree has survived here.

It was obvious that James had done a lot of research before our walk, and the group very much appreciated that and his willingness to soldier on in the pouring rain.