

Thursday Walk with Miguel M. – July 6, 2017

Contributed by Marilyn G.

These notes have not been reviewed by Garden staff

Miguel welcomed the apprentice guides and said that the gardeners appreciate our hard work. He feels that the guides and gardeners are in a "symbiotic" relationship, as we interpret their work for visitors.

Our first major stop was the sugar maple grove in the Canadian Heritage Garden. Miguel noted that some of the cypresses originally planted by Roy Forster along the south edge of the garden have been removed to provide more light, but there are still a number of trees that need to come out. Once that happens, they will be planting some of Roy's Canadian hybrid rhododendron varieties that he developed early in his career. The area under the maples looks quite bare, but there were some spring ephemerals, like trilliums, which have now gone dormant. The sugar maple is an allelopathic tree. It produces chemicals in its root system which kill off many plants, so very little can grow under it. Other allelopathic trees are black walnut, London plane, and sumac. Miguel also noted that he has had little time to work in the Canadian Heritage this year given the press of other projects.

As we moved towards the Vegetable Garden, Miguel pointed out the Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*) in Bed 135BN. It is not the best location for this oak because it needs a special ecosystem. These trees do better in the "banana belt" areas along the Pacific Coast, especially on Vancouver Island. There is also a whole ecosystem of plants that live in a Garry oak meadow, which has been replicated in the Western North America Garden near the Visitor Centre. The nearby arbutus (*Arbutus menziesii*) is often found with Garry oaks, but our specimen does not look good. These trees are hard to establish in a garden. The Medicinal Garden will have new interpretation, but with the cut in the Plant Technician's hours, Miguel is not sure when that will be.

As we passed through the former apple orchard in Beds 137A & B, Miguel assured us that new species will be replanted here in a few years once they are sure the canker spores in the soil are gone (see the Gardener Walk of October, 2016 for more detail about this project). The Orinoco apple planted a few years ago in the middle of the vegetable beds is now in the nursery until the orchard is replanted.

Miguel has not been working much on the vegetable beds this summer because he has a helper, Camil, on Thursdays and Fridays. Camil is also very involved with Inner City Farms, which partners with local property owners to produce food crops. VanDusen donates its harvest weekly to the Food Bank, and summer campers often help with the picking. Miguel said that the carts are welcome on the track around the vegetable beds.

We moved over to the delphinium "forest" that was late in blooming this year in the Lower Alma VanDusen Garden. It will be finished by mid-month, then Miguel will cut the plants back so that they will bloom again in early fall after the sunflowers are finished. They are a New Millennium variety and were supposed to be short and need no staking. But they grow tall here, and he has to use a bamboo frame for support. He also only waters at the root level, as the weight of water on the heavy flower heads can cause them to collapse. Next year he is going to install a soaker hose to make watering easier. He also said that carts can go around these beds if the grass is dry.

A guide commented on the attractiveness of the hardy begonia bed under the trees. Miguel noted that this display started several years ago when the lower branches on the trees had died, leaving an awkward space. A temporary helper came up with this year's wave design, which is also used at Stanley Park. Miguel mentioned that another temporary came up with the idea for the path in the middle of the delphinium/sunflower bed.

We then moved to the west of this area where Miguel pointed out several young Sitka spruces (*Picea sitchensis*). They were planted a few years ago and look like Christmas trees. A stop earlier on the walk had been at Bed 84 to see the Sitka spruce nurse log, but that spruce is not alive. The Sitka spruce will grow to enormous size, but not in our lifetime. The trees he planted came from a nursery, not the nurse log, which has cedars growing out of it.

The monkey-puzzle tree in the middle of the Maze was dead so was removed. Miguel noted that some of the young visitors to the Maze are very hard on the cedar shrubs because they hide in them and break branches. There was also a lot of damage from snow this past winter, so he has already pruned once and will prune again in the fall.

Our last stop was the Alma VanDusen Upper Meadow which was closed for two years due to fire ants. The streambed has been widened with river rock, which was brought in, but the stepping stones were all on site. The water is circulating constantly. The vegetation in and around the stream was removed, so hopefully the ants will stay on the far side, which has been planted with sunflowers and poppies. The earlier planting of winter rye was left in place and provides a light airy touch to the bed. He will let it go to seed, and then rototill in the fall to break up any ant nests. A question was asked about the nearby gravel garden over the reservoir, and Anne Eng mentioned that she has written an article about this which will appear in the July 2017 *Guide Gazette*.