

Thursday Walk with Bruce McD – Sept. 7, 2017
Contributed by Marilyn G and reviewed by Bruce

Bruce led our final gardener walk of the year, focusing on the Backyard Bird Garden and the Perennial Garden. He allowed us entry into the Bird Garden site that has been closed to the public for the last six months for construction. The Bird Garden was supposed to have been open by May 25th, but there have been, as usual, many delays and it is now about 85-90% finished. Once the benches are installed, the area will be opened to visitors by the end of the month.

An array of bird feeders will be added in the next few weeks to attract many different bird species—hummingbirds, chickadees and finches will be the most common. To attract hummingbirds, specialized feeders that allow many birds to feed at the same time will be included this fall. The big challenge with seed feeders is keeping squirrels and rats out of them. Bruce has not found many commercial feeders and birdhouses that he likes, so there will be some trial and error over the first season. The Parks' machine shop will build some custom stands and hangers for the feeders. He does not view the delay as a big problem because birds have many food sources in the summer.

The new plantings are in place and are beautiful! This is already one of the most colourful parts of the Garden. Bruce provided us with a plant list (see below), and everything on it offers some benefit to birds, e.g. nectar, seeds, cover. Several new trees have been planted to either provide fruit or shelter, and a few new conifers are coming soon. The mulberry was donated by Heather M. and the persimmon by Peter W., Wednesday guides. There are several crab apples and birches, *Cornus mas*, *Tsuga mertensiana*, and some vine maples left over from the City of Vancouver's \$10 Tree Sale. Bruce also pointed out a pink blueberry (*Vaccinium* 'Pink Lemonade') that was planted on the north side of the bird garden and said the berries are delicious.

The new plantings all have accession tags and will have upgraded black display labels with symbols that denote what each plant provides for birds. Due to time and budget constraints only a modest amount of interpretive signage will be installed this year. Fuller interpretation will follow in 2018.

The garden has more light now because the towering Portuguese laurels at the south edge were removed. They are quite invasive, so birds will no longer be eating laurel berries and depositing them elsewhere in the city. A large weeping walnut, which was rare but ugly, did not provide any bird benefit, so it came out too. The walkways were reconfigured and widened, allowing birds to feed without the press of crowds. There was much discussion about how to surface the paths. Pavers would have been attractive but can be a tripping hazard and difficult to maintain because of weeds and sprouted seeds growing between. The screenings on the current paths are easy to maintain. The rock edging between the beds and the paths is basalt wall stone and is packed in mortar for stability. It will be completed soon. Unfortunately, carts will not be able to drive through this area because they will scare the birds and damage the path surfaces, but visitors can easily see it from the main path and can get off the carts for a brief visit.

The Puttino Fountain was kept as a focal point. The interior was "battered" with a thin layer of concrete to reduce leaks, but when the water level is high, it still leaks a bit. The plastic water outflow pipe will be replaced by a gray one so it is less noticeable. Next to the fountain is a very simple stone bowl perched atop a concrete block. It is a little too deep for a bird bath, so some stones will be added to reduce the water depth. The block will be replaced with a mortared stone pillar to blend with the rest of the stonework. Bruce said that recently he saw a chickadee drink from the fish spout at the top of the fountain, then land on the rock supporting the puttino to take a little bath, so the garden is already being discovered by its target population.

There are some nice pots next to the restaurant, which may be moved because the restaurant is considering some changes to its space. Chefs use the herbs in the flower boxes. The large fig tree in the corner is bearing fruit, but it is leaning badly, so its future is uncertain. The fence along the south side has mostly been finished, and the gate and the rest of the old fencing should be replaced soon. On the north side of the Backyard Bird Garden, the Glasshouse is not in good shape nor is it attractive. It is only used for Festival of Lights in the winter and for kids' programs in the summer. It may come down and be replaced with a permanent and more attractive structure that can perform as a revenue-generating space. Once built, the disparate pathways surrounding the Glasshouse will be replaced by one surfacing material to unify the area.

There were three curved lath-like platforms on the ground, which Bruce said are bench seats waiting for bases. Bruce also rolled back the tarp on the "Birdhouse" structure that will be a bird blind for kids. It was constructed by a local custom-home builder. The inside and the roof are natural cedar, but Bruce wanted a bright colour on the siding, and the yellow is very cheerful. The house floats on a steel post embedded in concrete. The rooster weathervane is from the old gazebo. The Birdhouse is wheelchair accessible but will not be formally designated as such because the code is very stringent. The Birdhouse, feeders, plants and benches were all funded by the VBGA.

Phase two of the bird strategy is getting underway, which will focus on the area by the Ed Centre. There will be some custom birdhouses and nesting boxes built for both areas, and additional birdhouses will be scattered throughout the garden. Plant material for the Ed Centre project was ordered a while ago, and planting should begin soon. Bruce wants to use volunteers to maintain the feeders and houses.

Next we headed to the Perennial Garden. This area has not looked good for several years, especially since there have been problems filling the gardener position. Bruce is hoping that the apprentice who is currently maintaining the area, David G., will get the job at the end of his apprenticeship. The Perennial Garden no longer has peak moments and is just a hodgepodge of plants where nothing looks well together. But the biggest challenge is the morning glory creeping in everywhere from the hedge. Bruce noted that the last time these beds were renovated was in 2003 when an excavator dug down four feet to the root line of the hedge and removed all the soil. Landscape fabric was used between the hedge and the beds to stop the resurgence of morning glory, along with a four-foot-wide band of wood chips (one-foot deep). The layer of woodchips allowed for easy removal of any new morning glory shoots, while the wide band left space between the hedge and the plantings for easy access. This method worked for many years until the morning glory jumped the shark.

Next spring they are planning a similar "scalping" of the hedge and will find a better impermeable weed barrier. Removing the hedge won't resolve the problem. It should only take a few days for the excavation, root barrier/landscape fabric installation and soil replacement. The soil needs to settle for a few weeks before it can be replanted. He is planning to buy all new plantings rather than run the risk of transplanting some of the current ones, which could have morning glory runners in them. The turf in front of the border is not in good shape - it may need to be leveled so there are not wet patches along the edges. The island beds across the path are not as bad as the border, but there is still a lot of morning glory, so they will also be renovated but maybe at a later date to stagger the workload.

During our walk, Bruce responded to general questions. He noted that while many of the trees and conifers have a lot of yellowing/browning right now, this seasonal drop is normal for the time of the year but may be exacerbated by the heat and the lack of water. When trees are stressed, nutrients in older tissue migrate to the newer and more productive tissue, letting the older dry

out and drop. When asked about the use of salt this past winter, he said that visitor safety is imperative for the Festival of Lights and salt (with sand) is the only way to keep the paths ice-free. They have used beet juice in the parking lots; it is effective but temporarily stains the paving. The gardener position for the Rhododendron Walk has not yet been posted, but Bruce said that the funds for this position are being used to hire temps, and they will have 4 or 5 this fall.

Bruce's priorities for 2018 are the perennial border renovation, phase 2 of the bird garden strategy, and hopefully beginning a renovation of the Heather Garden lakeside path and the hillside along Livingstone Lake. We were all impressed by how much he has accomplished this year, given money, staffing and bureaucratic constraints. And we were happy to hear that he is going on vacation for a couple of weeks to recharge his batteries. The Garden is lucky to have him.

(Backyard Bird Garden Plant List on the following page)

Backyard Bird Garden Plant List - Fall, 2017

ACER CIRCINATUM
ACER 'KOTO-NO-ITO'
ACHILLEA 'DESERT EVE DEEP ROSE'
AGASTACHE 'APRICOT SPRITE'
AGASTACHE FOENICULUM
AGASTACHE 'GOLDEN JUBILEE'
AMELANCHIER 'OBELISK'
AQUILEGIA FLABELLATA 'ALBA'
AQUILEGIA 'GOLDFINCH'
ARONIA 'AUTUMN MAGIC'
ARUNCUS 'MISTY LACE'
ASARUM EUROPAEUM
ASTILBE 'YOUNIQUE RASPBERRY'

BAPTISIA AUSTRALIS
BETULA 'CULLY'
BOUTELOUA 'BLOND AMBITION'

CHASMANTHIUM 'LITTLE TICKLER'
CLEMATIS 'DR RUPPEL'
CLEMATIS 'GILLIAN BLADES'
CLEMATIS 'H.F. YOUNG'
CLEMATIS 'PINK CHAMPAGNE'
CLEMATIS 'ROUGE CARDINAL'
CLETHRA ALNIFOLIA
CORNUS CANADENSIS
CORNUS 'GOLDEN GLORY'
CORYLUS AVELLANA 'CONTORTA'

DEUTZIA GRACILIS
DIOSPYROS 'HACHIYA'
DRYOPTERIS ERYTHROSORA

ECHINACEA 'DELICIOUS CANDY'
ECHINACEA 'HOT SUMMER'
ECHINACEA 'RUBINSTERN

FUCHSIA MAGELLANICA 'AUREA'

GAILLARDIA 'ARIZONA APRICOT'

HEUCHERA 'BALCAREAN'
HEUCHERA 'CARNIVAL FALL FESTIVAL'
HEUCHERA 'TOKYO'
HOSTA 'GUACAMOLE'

ILEX 'GOLDEN VERBOOM' (FEMALE)
ILEX 'GOLDEN VERBOOM' (MALE)
ILEX 'OOSTERWIJK'

KNIPHOFIA 'MANGO POPSICLE'
KNIPHOFIA 'POCO ORANGE'
KOLKOWITZIA 'PINK CLOUD'

LAGERSTROEMIA 'NATCHEZ'
LAVANDULA 'ANOUK'

LEONOTIS 'SAVANNAH SUNSET'
LEPECHINIA SALVIAE
LIATRIS 'FLORISTAN WEISS'
LOBELIA LAXIFLORA VAR ANGUSTIFOLIA
LOBELIA 'VULCAN RED'
LONICERA 'SINIGLASKA'
LONICERA 'WOJTEK'

MAHONIA AQUIFOLIUM
MAHONIA 'CHARITY'
MAHONIA NERVOSA
MAHONIA NERVOSA
MAHONIA NERVOSA
MALUS 'GLADIATOR'
MONARDA CITRIODORA
MONARDA 'PINK LACE'
MORUS NIGRA

PENNISETUM 'RED HEAD'
PENSTEMON 'HUSKER'S RED'
PHYGELIUS 'PASSIONATE'
PHYSOSTEGIA 'MISS MANNERS'
POLYSTICHUM MUNITUM
POLYSTICHUM POLYBLEPHARUM

RIBES 'CONSORT'
RIBES LACUSTRE
RIBES SANGUINEUM

SALVIA 'AMISTAD'
SALVIA 'BIG PINK'
SALVIA 'CHERRY CHIEF'
SALVIA DORISIANA
SALVIA FRUTICOSA
SALVIA 'HOT LIPS'
5 SALVIA 'HUMMINGBIRD LADY IN RED'
SALVIA LEUCANTHA
SALVIA 'LOWRY'S PEACH'
SALVIA LYRATA
SALVIA 'MARASCHINO'
SALVIA 'MERLEAU BLUE'
SALVIA 'RASPBERRY ROYALE'
SALVIA 'TANGERINE'
SALVIA 'WENDY'S WISH'
SEDUM 'DAZZLEBERRY'
SEDUM 'RAINBOW XENOX'
SEDUM SPATHULIFOLIUM
SPOROBOLUS HETEROLEPIS
STACHYS 'HIDALGO'
SYMPHORICARPUS 'MAGIC BERRY'

TROLLIUS 'ALABASTER'
TSUGA MERTENSIANA

VACCINIUM PARVIFOLIUM
VACCINIUM 'PINK LEMONADE'
VACCINIUM VITIS-IDAEA
VIBURNUM LENTAGO

WEIGELA 'RUMBA'