

Thursday Gardener Walk with David G. – August 1, 2019
Recorded by Marilyn G **Notes have not been reviewed by staff**
See David in a short video at <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bx03pR1BdvA/>

David is the gardener for the Perennial Garden, Heather Garden, Lavender and Laburnum Walks, 'Cherry Hill', and the *Sorbus* and *Fraxinus* collections. He was also in charge of the Wedding Beds, Maple collection, and BC Habitat Garden, but these areas have now been divvied up among other gardeners. He received his training at Cap College and has been working in the field for 12 years. David first came to VanDusen in 2017 as an apprentice in the Perennial Garden, then was hired permanently in May, 2018. There had been no gardener in his areas for a couple of years, so he has many challenges.

Our first stop was off the Plaza by the lake where we noticed that the *Xanthocyparis nootkatensis* 'Pendula' (weeping Nootka cypress) was leaning. This was caused by a wind storm last month, and they will be taking out at least part of the tree before all of it topples into the lake. The bed under the bench had been covered in gravel a couple of weeks ago to force the nesting bees out, as some visitors had been stung. Now the gravel has been removed, and he thinks the bees will move back in. We moved to the Lavender Walk. David said the heavy soil mulch applied a few years ago was not a good idea, and the shade from the overhead trees is compromising the plants along parts of the path. He often doesn't have time to prune the lavenders in the fall but has found that when he does, they do not come back as strong. The trees on the Laburnum Walk are also suffering from a mulch build-up, and they may not like being underplanted. There is some discussion about doing something different next year with the underplanting. The new laburnum at the western end of the walk is not happy.

At the north end of the Laburnum Walk is the 'Fusion Garden', so named by former gardener Casey because this area is a combination of styles from the Black Garden and the Perennial Garden. David likes the combination of *Pinus parviflora* f. *glauca* (Japanese white pine) with the oakleaf hydrangeas, but the tree's heavy branches are causing some damage to the hydrangeas. The penstemons (the largest genus of flowering plants endemic to North America) flop over easily. Before they bloomed this year, he used a 'Chelsea chop' (where clumps are cut back by a third a few weeks before blooming to keep them more compact – it's a technique often used for the Chelsea Garden Show in England). This didn't work, so next year he is going to build sapling 'cages' (similar to the ones in James P.'s areas) to support the plants. There are two dead sorbus in this area that need to come out. Across the path, the two *Koelreuteria bipinnata* (goldenrain tree) are slowly dying, but he's not sure why. The tulip display he planted underneath them this spring was a big hit, and he will probably repeat it next year, but it was difficult to plant the bulbs with all the tree roots near the surface. The kalmia across the path was cut back to open up a view of the Heather Garden.

Next, we stopped at the Perennial Garden, which was covered in morning glory when he started. David has gotten rid of a lot of it, but it keeps coming back. He thinks the use of landscape fabric when the bed was redone several years ago may be contributing to the problems in this area. The morning glory figures out how to grow around the fabric, which also prevents water from soaking through and turns the deeper soil into sand. He is creating a mulched path along the back of the border, which will allow visitors to get closer to the plants and deter them from stepping into the beds for plant photos. Perhaps the foot traffic will help with the morning glory control. He would also like to add a couple of paths through the border and the island beds but is awaiting permission. The perennial beds need a lot of plant rearranging for optimum bloom, but his time to do this in the fall is limited because of Xmas lights. Late last summer he moved a few plants, but they suffered from that transition because they were still blooming. Mint and aegopodium have become invasive, and the tradescantia reseed like crazy. Because of the sun in this area, some of the shadier plants, like brunnera, are bleaching out. The tall plant with orange, daisy-like flowers in the middle of one of the island beds is *Tithonia rotundifolia* (Mexican sunflower). It's hard to keep up with the labeling. He doesn't do slug control, but the ligularias here look good. David thinks it's because the slugs are chomping away at the hostas around the corner!

As we started up the path toward the flowering cherries, David said he has been trying to create some space in the bordering beds by removing plants. He wants to create a path through the south bed into the Great Lawn to allow easy access. On the north side of the main path, he divided the variegated *Hosta* 'Ivory Coast' into several clumps to add some brightness to the beds, and he removed some overgrown hellebores. There are actually quite a few flowering cherry trees in this bed, but they are overshadowed by taller trees and don't flower well. The striking *Fraxinus excelsior* (European ash) at the eastern tip of this bed is too crowded, and you can't stand back and admire it because of all the competing plantings. Cutting tree wells around some of the trees in this area could improve their overall health, along with thinning out some of the perennials underneath. On the south side of the path, David pointed out the large bed of *Campanula takesimana* (Korean bellflower), which is starting to bloom again because he didn't have time to deadhead it after the first bloom. Across the path there have traditionally been big orange poppies, but those plants were on their last legs, so this year he removed them and planted annuals. A new cherry was planted here, but it doesn't look happy next to the large *Acer nordmanniana* (Caucasian fir). David said that its drooping lower branches are part of the normal growth pattern, which protects the trunk. However, this tree was clipped by a truck, so its overall shape is not perfect.

We walked north across the lawn where the Swedish Fountain is now roped off. This area has an invasive weed, the buttercup-like lesser celandine, that is spreading rapidly over this part of the garden. David thinks that leaf blowers may be inadvertently spreading the seeds. They are now removing the weeds, bagging them and discarding them in the trash so they don't spread further.

The 'blue' tree collection across the road is suffering. Many of the trees are losing branches, especially the *Pinus flexilis* 'Vanderwolf's Pyramid' (limber pine). The *Picea chihuahuana* (Chichuahuan spruce) look better, but the biggest one, planted in 1991, has been cut back because it is too close to the road. Behind these trees, David planted lots of cosmos to hide the horsetail. Across the path, he took out two of the three shrubby dogwoods (moved to the bed across the path) and some hellebores and ferns to open the area up. He also dug out some tree wells around several sorbus.

As we crossed into the Heather Garden, we saw gravel along the lake edge, which had washed down because of a broken pipe. David is not sure what to do here. There are some ideas for this garden. A wedding chapel has been proposed to replace the gazebo, which is falling down. Another idea is a version of a Scottish 'standing stone', which will be flat and allow for viewing the Garden from above. David does not like the *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii* (Himalayan birch) here; they are too close together, unhealthy, and their falling branches have destroyed plants underneath. On the slope next to the shelter, two small pines are planted too close together. He says Cynthia would like to remove some of the big trees here to make this area look more authentic. David doesn't prune the heathers. Bruce is growing some new ones in the nursery that will be used to fill in gaps. The stand of *Pinus mugo* (mountain pine) on the other side of the Grotto is overgrown and should come out. We walked along the path to the north where the *Myrica gale* (bog myrtle) can't compete with the *Spiraea douglassi* (hardhack). He has taken out a lot of *Gunnera magellanica* along the water bank to open up the space and wants to use plants that will add to the feel of the Heather Garden. A lot of weedy plants need to come out first.

Across the stepping stone bridge in Bed 52T, more trees need to be removed. Walking west, we saw the sad-looking *Pinus longaeva* (ancient pine), propagated by Roy from a cutting from the oldest living nonclonal organism on earth (4,850 years old), which was recently heeled in here after the renovation of the succulent bed. It is mostly brown, but there are spots of green, and David is hopeful it will survive. In the streambed to the west, he has planted a 'canoe garden', reminiscent of the garden plants Polynesians carried in canoes from one island to another, using *Colocasia esculenta* (taro or elephant ear) in what looks like a rice paddy. On the stream bank he has planted lots of salmonberry.

This was David's first walk with the guides, and he was afraid he didn't have much to tell us. He was wrong!