

Thursday Walk with Cynthia Sayre - June 6, 2019
Notes taken by Marilyn Goebel and edited by Cynthia Sayre

Cynthia is the Curator of Collections at VanDusen. She took us to several areas of the Garden to look at new projects:

1. 'Nativar' Garden: Our first stop was at the Garry oak bed in Cascadia Garden (formerly Western North American Garden) on the south side of the Plaza. The Cascadia Garden also includes the ravine and the native border on the east side of the Bentall Garden. This garden was originally designed to contain plants native to the coastal areas from BC to California. However, now that we have the BC Habitat Garden (more about that below), we have new opportunities for the Plaza portion. The original plantings of Garry oak meadow natives here did not work out, so the beds will be planted with North American cultivars (i.e. 'nativars') that will be primarily perennials in drifts of cool colours, with bloom times ranging from April to September. They will include camas, *Agastache*, *Echinacea*, *Monarda*, *Penstemon*, and more. A *Calycanthus* and weeping ceanothus will be the only shrubs added to the bed. The plants have been ordered from Fraser Thimble Farm in the Gulf Islands and will be delivered soon. The ocean spray (*Holodiscus discolor*) and Garry oaks (*Quercus garryana*) will stay.

Cynthia pointed out that most of the Cascadia garden, which contains native plants from the Cascadia region (BC to N California), is outside the Visitor Centre. The island bed in the circle drive on Oak Street was originally conceived to be a Garry oak meadow, but many of the plants in that ecosystem don't do as well here (their main habitat is on Vancouver Island). The bed soon became very weedy, and when turf replaced the groundcover a few years ago, it was infested by the chafer beetle. The oaks are not thriving, so this area needs to be rethought.

2. Our next stop was the Glasshouse, which has been condemned and will be removed soon. This part of the garden west of the *Cornus kousa* allée will become a Pollinator Garden, and the current beds will go away. The new design will be more organic and less formal than the Bentall Garden. There will be shady spots, seating, and an area for tents during big events. A mix of perennials will include some rare and unusual subtropicals provided by Sunset Nursery. The garden will feature different pollination syndromes (i.e. flower traits that have evolved by natural selection to fit different pollen vectors, such as birds, butterflies, bees or other insects). This new garden will be an ideal fit with the neighbouring Backyard Bird Garden. The design process will begin this year, and hopefully work will begin next spring. The first element will be a low profile perennial border atop the stone wall, to be planted once the Glasshouse comes down. The troughs will eventually move to the Stanley Smith Garden across the way, but the Crevice Garden, created in conjunction with UBC, will stay, as it can be moved.

Cynthia noted that when plants are removed, the priority is to move them to other locations in the Garden. If that is not possible, they are shared with other parks and the annual Plant Sale.

3. The Formal Rose Garden will be renovated, with pavers replacing the existing screenings paths. The nepeta will be removed and replaced with boxwood to match the other rose beds.

4. Our next stop was the Astilbe Bed next to Livingstone Lake, which is the biggest new project. Parks management felt that the original Rosaceae Bed was overgrown (it had originally been conceived to highlight various plants from that family, but the eastern section was converted into the Grass Bed several years ago and the remainder of the bed was never finished). The species roses here went to the Sino-Himalayan Garden, and the heritage roses are now in the Heritage Rose Garden. Management decided to create an astilbe display garden which features about 15 astilbe cultivars blooming in rotation and of different heights. Cynthia also added some accent plants, including ferns, carex, hostas, dwarf oakleaf hydrangeas, actaea, and heucheras, which

can tolerate the shadiness of this north-facing bed. *Hakonechloa* was also planted but it has already been eaten by the geese, and *Carex oshimensis* 'Everillo' (golden carex) will replace it.

5. The Yucca Bed above the zig-zag bridge has had problems. It doesn't get enough sun, even though the drainage is good, and the original yuccas were diseased and dying. The yuccas will be relocated to the top of the garden next to the Reservoir and new yuccas will be planted there this fall. This bed is now hosting dry seasonal plants, mostly from Phoenix Perennials. A mangave (*Manifreda x Agave*) has just been planted, and puyas are filling in. More hardy perennials will be planted on the slope down to the water. *Pinus aristata* will stay but the *Pinus longaeva* has been healed in near the conifers until a permanent home can be found. This tree was collected by Roy Forster from a specimen in the White Mountains of California that is the oldest living organism on earth, nearly 5,000 years old! This is James Pickett's area now.

6. We walked over the bridge to the Southern Hemisphere Garden. Extreme weather events have had a big impact here. It has been a big effort to acquire plant material that does okay for a few years, then dies. Recently we tried more seasonal plantings, but that's a lot of work. This year we are focusing on 'semi-permanent' plantings (e.g. the mass planting of *Eucalyptus gunnii*) and a few annuals. The Wollemi Pine will overwinter at Sunset until it gets too big. The New Zealand tree ferns didn't like it here, and the final dead trunk was recently removed. These ferns do well in the Fern Dell, so we will continue to grow them there.

The linden grove on the north side of the Garden is suffering. We recently lost three of the trees, and Cynthia pointed out the gall-infested leaves. She will send an infected leaf to the city entomologist to see if this is what is causing the demise of these trees.

7. Next stop was the BC Habitat Garden that was planted last spring. This garden now extends south to the story poles (commonly known as totem poles) and west to the Ed Centre. The bed was originally planted with native seedlings and conifers to serve as a backdrop for the rest of the garden. Part of this planting will remain to provide a forest backdrop. The Douglas firs, where the barred owls roost, are pre-existing, but the hemlocks were planted in the 1970s. The new plants are a blend of BC natives that support wildlife and offer food, shelter, and nesting materials to native birds and other animals. The newly dug bed just to the north, with the large log, newly planted Sitka spruce and black hawthorn, will continue this concept and will be ideal for the more sun-loving natives to be planted in the fall. The Western red cedar nurse log is the top of a 1000-year-old tree, which fell off in a storm. The labels in this garden contain more information than usual, highlighting the wildlife benefits of the species planted there.

Near the story poles where the turf will be replaced with native understory plants. There will be a few new trees such as *Cornus nuttallii*, cascara, and vine maple, along with sword ferns and deer ferns, some medium-size shrubs, camas, and vanilla leaf groundcover. The robinia, which date from the golf course, will be replaced by a big-leaf maple, which has its own ecosystem of ferns, mosses, and lichens. VBGA and Parks have jointly funded three new semi-circular seating areas for student groups. This area is attracting more visitors, but their presence also causes soil compaction. Getting rid of the invasive plants here is a big challenge, but the ivy busters seemed to have conquered some of the problems in their biannual work projects over the past ten years.

Cynthia pointed out the bumble bee boxes, part of an SFU research project to see if boxes scented with pheromones will encourage the bees to use them. The garden supports scientific work but does not have the resources to carry it out, so links with universities are important.

South on the main road past the nurse log, Cynthia said that non-native hemlocks have been removed to open up this area. They are planning to install a path here and plant some showy BC

natives and ferns. The outdated maps on the old wayfinding signs have been removed, and the signs will be replaced by new signage poles, which will have removable signage.

8. We walked up along the waterfall to the top of the Stone Garden where the bed along the eastern side is being redone. The Sichuan pepper tree and the sorbus will stay, but everything else will go. This is the hottest part of the garden and will be a good home for the transplanted yuccas and some new varieties. The tree removal will begin this fall and the new plantings should happen late fall or early spring.

9. We passed by the Sunflower Garden in what was formerly a wildflower meadow. Cynthia said that this area has been ground-zero of the European fire ant infestation due to the proximity of the service yard and the forest backdrop. The stream was dredged and lined with heavy gravel, large rocks were dug out, and extensive weeding was done to create a barrier that the ants will not cross. The sunflowers have been recently planted in the bed, which is rototilled twice a year to break up ant nests. The new paths are crushed asphalt, which will be compacted by walking. This garden is a big hit with visitors, and Miguel has worked very hard to make it happen. To the west of the maze, the triangular bed formerly had pampas grass, but it was ant-infested. Now it is an attractive seasonal bed. European fire ants can swarm, deliver multiple stings and in some cases cause severe allergic reactions.

10. We ran into Miguel at the Vegetable Garden where he was sadly looking at some toppled-over corn starts that had been chewed by squirrels, a problem in this part of the garden. This year's vegetable theme is the same as last year's: sustainable urban farming. The seed for the foolproof varieties grown here is locally sourced. Unfortunately, we did not get a grant this year for an extra gardener devoted to the vegetable garden, but Miguel has some temporary help. Historically the food grown here has been donated to the Food Bank, but last year it went to Shaughnessy restaurant, who made a donation to the Food Bank. Cynthia noted that the American Public Gardens Association surveyed its members who have large vegetable gardens about where their produce ends up. The largest number donated it to local food banks, while some gave it to their garden restaurants (most of which are nonprofit) or to staff.

11. Next stop was a magnificent hybrid moyesii rose (*Rosa* 'Eddie's Crimson', of the same fame as the Eddie's White Wonder dogwood) in the middle of the Canadian Heritage Garden. The Canadian heritage rose collection features cultivars developed and introduced in Canada such as the Explorer series or Canadian Artist series, which includes the Emily Carr rose. But most of the roses here have suckered and/or disappeared among the many invasive plants. Cynthia is working with an Ontario heritage rose breeder, Paul Olsen, to amass Canadian heritage rose plants to replace this collection, but first an excavator needs to come in and remove all the suckers. The Eddie's Crimson rose will remain. The entire Canadian Heritage Garden needs renovation section by section, but Miguel's time recently has been taken up by the fire ants.

12. Cynthia noted that the apple trees in the Orchard have been removed, and the soil is resting for a few years so that disease spores have a chance to disappear. She has been working with John and Josephine Riley, who for the past 30 years have maintained a heritage apple orchard on Bowen Island, one of the largest collections of apple varieties historically grown in this area (not necessarily Canadian cultivars, however). They donated scions from 15-20 varieties which have been grafted and are growing on until they are large enough to plant in a year or two.

On a final note, Cynthia noted that the new Garden Director, Yann Gagnon, has left for a job on Vancouver Island. A new director will likely be chosen from among Parks staff.

Many, many thanks to Cynthia for taking time out of her busy schedule to meet with the guides and update us on all the directions the Garden is taking.