

Virtual Gardener Walk with Brent – June 16, 2021  
Notes by Marilyn Goebel, Photos by Tresa Horney, Reviewed by Brent

We met new Gardener Brent C. in the Formal Rose Garden on a beautiful sunny day. This area is only one of his many responsibilities, which include the Backyard Bird Garden, Tropical Beds, Rhodo and Laburnum Walks, Perennial Garden and Great Lawn Hydrangea Beds. Brent has an impressive background in horticulture, having worked in private landscaping and for the Surrey and Burnaby Park Departments before joining Vancouver Parks. He also has extensive training, particularly at BCIT and Kwantlen. He was previously a temp at VanDusen in the early 2000s before joining us permanently this past January. In between, he worked at many other Vancouver parks, including the Queen Elizabeth Park Rose Garden, and was responsible for the rose plantings around the False Creek parks.

Roses are a passion for Brent. In the Formal Rose Garden, he applied a heavy, woody mulch to keep the weeds down. The mulch also means he hasn't had to water yet, and he thinks he can hold off for another couple of weeks until there some signs of water stress. He dead-heads on Mondays and Fridays. He did a light pruning in the winter to keep some height on the rose bushes so that they rise above the hedging. A few of the roses have reverted to rootstock [roses are usually grafted to a very hardy rootstock to improve their survival rate, but if rootstock suckers are not removed, they will eventually overwhelm the grafted part.] All in all, the Rose Garden is looking good, but unfortunately every single plant is suffering from crown gall disease. You can see its gnarly tumours if you look at the rose roots. It is spread by the water in the soil and by improperly cleaned tools, and it restricts the flow of water to the plant. Roses can cope for a while but will eventually succumb. You can see this happening in Bed 50B where the red roses are stunted, while the yellow ones [his favourite, *Rosa* 'Sterntaler'] appear to thrive, but probably not for long. He is very careful to keep his tools cleaned and throws any clippings from this area directly into the garbage.

There is a plan to remedy this situation, perhaps next year. The entire Formal Rose Garden will be dug up, and all plants and soil will be replaced. They will replant with more fragrant and disease-resistant roses, and new hedging around the beds will be shorter and narrower so that visitors don't have to lean over to smell the flowers. There will be different roses for Bed 50M which is much more shaded than the other beds. The irrigation will be improved, probably with a new drip system, so that they can avoid overhead watering. Brent noted that the human sense of smell is subjective, and two people smelling the same rose will have different sensations. He thinks women have a more acute sense than men.

We climbed the steps into the Heritage Rose Garden, where Brent has also been busy. He is cutting back rootstock sprouts, which in some cases have overwhelmed the original rose. *Rosa* 'Félicité Parmentier' was about 90% overwhelmed and now has a single tall stem with a few flowers on it. It will fill out next year. He also cut *R. x centifolia* back to the ground and will see what comes back next year. *R.* 'Ispahan' was cut back 50%, and he will do another pruning when it finishes flowering. Some of the roses have been misidentified over the years. He just relabeled *R.* 'Hansa' in Bed 50C and moved its old label for *R.* 'Indigo' to the Portland damask rose across the path. Brent showed us that if you rub the 'mossy' bud of moss roses, you will find a piney fragrance...and sticky fingers. In the far corner, the rambling, fast-growing *R.* 'Darlow's Enigma' blooms nicely even though shaded by the laburnums. It has wicked thorns. He doesn't think there is crown gall disease in the heritage roses, and he always sterilizes his tools when he moves from garden to garden. The tall perennials have been removed and shorter ones planted so that they don't overwhelm the rose bushes.

Brent also noted that his responsibilities include the pruning of the hedges between the Rose Gardens and also around the Perennial Garden. The Laburnum Walk needs to be widened, and the trees will be replanted. They will also improve the drainage here, as excessive water has caused a number of laburnums to die.

We walked down the Lavender Walk which is being replanted with more shade-tolerant varieties. This area is not a good location for sun-loving lavenders. It's too shady, and water drains down the slope and settles in this area. It is blasted by the irrigation system, which doesn't help either. The nearby weeping beech was cut back recently to allow for more light.

There has been a tendency to plant taller perennials in the Perennial Border, and Brent is adding a variety of new perennials. In the Island Beds, he is planting more *Crambe maritima*, some purple phlomis and baptisia, and a taller accent of *Inula magnifica* 'Sonnenstrahl'. He will reduce the patches of the black-purple *Ligularia* 'Britt Marie Crawford.' Because it was allowed to form seed heads in recent years, it has self-sown like mad, but this year he will cut the flowers down immediately after blooming. The big problem in the main border is the morning glory, which is impossible to keep on top of. If he sees it twining around a plant, he pinches the morning glory off at soil level but doesn't remove it until it has dried out. This way he doesn't take part of the plant out with the vine. He weeds these beds every week. Some robinias were removed recently from the high side of this Garden, and he will be replanting them with albizias in the near future.

As we walked over to the Rhodo Walk, Brent pointed out that the Oak Knoll and the grass under the beeches have been reseeded. It is a challenge to grow grass here given the lack of sun and toxicity of the beech leaves. Brent has also been busy clearing many of the trails along the Rhodo Walk and laying down woodchips. He removed more than 150 cartfuls of leaves. Now that the Rhodo Walk has mostly finished flowering, he will start pruning back the bushes. He has removed all the yellow poppies and will start cutting back the alchemilla and the ostrich ferns which are overwhelming the rhodos. Some dead trees in this area will be removed, and he hopes to add some of the trees along 37<sup>th</sup> to the removal list. It is a challenge getting trees removed, given the limited resources and differing priorities of all the departments involved. He pointed out the *Prunus* (Sato-zakura Group) 'Jo-nioi' overhanging Bed 73. UBC has taken cuttings from it, as it is a rare cultivar. Some of the branches are dead and will be cut back. The viburnum at the foot of the Walk has been devastated by caterpillars, but he thinks it will come back. A bigger problem is that it has been misidentified, and he is trying to figure out what it really is. At the beginning of the Rhodo Walk, he has weighed down the lower branches of some of the Loderi rhododendrons to propagate them

Brent has also been busy in the Backyard Bird Garden and Tropical Beds. He had to do the trenching for the new irrigation system, and the Tropical Bed closest to the Bird Garden has been converted to a Bird Garden bed.

Cynthia talked recently about the changes in the Hydrangea Beds in the Great Lawn. Brent said that some trees and stumps have been removed, and there are a lot of interesting new hydrangeas waiting to be planted.

Brent does some work every week in all his areas to keep on top of problems, and his areas have never looked better, despite all the challenges. He is a great addition to the VanDusen team.