



The Reader Rock Garden

www.ReaderRock.com



2019 - Closing Thoughts

By Diane M. Dalkin

Another eventful year comes to a close, with an enchanting Winter interlude just around the corner. Yet, even during this quiet time in the Garden, *Daniel*, the Head Gardener, and the team of volunteers continue to plan ahead for next year's growing season. The featured article, "*More Than Just Gardening*", will touch upon some of the goings-on behind the scenes. Last year at this time, we highlighted the many helpful people that make everything happen annually, with the "*Three Cheers For Volunteers*" article. This focus continues always as we salute their amazing efforts, recognizing the thousands of volunteer hours they clock-in for the Garden's benefit. We can't thank them enough for all their generosity! How very fortunate we are for everyone's support and collaboration.

Additionally, we also want to share with you some other interesting developments onsite at the Garden: We're so excited that loads of new plants have been re-introduced back into the garden; increasing plant diversity annually is the goal for the next few years. As you know this vegetative inventory is based strictly on what Mr. Reader originally planned. FoRRGS fund-raising provides for this initiative by purchasing the required unusual seeds, rare plants, shrubs, etc. in cooperation with the Head Gardener.

You may have also noticed some of the bee hotels that were dotted throughout the entire garden. Everyone knows the importance bees play in our environments. The vitality of our flower, vegetable and fruit gardens depend on the health of this hardworking insect. So we'll touch more upon that too.

Another creative idea that was recently suggested as a regular column for this newsletter is to have "*Volunteers' Picks*". Just like bookstores have "staff picks" for their recommended reading, our Tour Guides and other garden volunteers will share with you their favorite plant or other noteworthy things or places in and about Reader Rock Garden. We hope that these snippets will entice you to come onsite in-person to check out their intriguing suggestions, plus, you'll get to know our diverse and interesting volunteers too! Win-win for all.

Times are indeed changing—the groundskeepers' team expanded to include an innovative project, an automatic lawn trimmer for the Main Lawn. When this cute robot is in operation, visitors stop to take in the entertaining action; or you may have encountered this little fella at its docking station, located close to the Café. Mr. Reader would probably be charmed with this technological upgrade. 😊 It's great that the Garden continues to evolve positively in so many respects!

In closing, may *Holiday magic* surround you in the coming months. On behalf of FoRRGS Board of Directors, *thank-you for your patronage and we extend our sincerest **BEST Wishes** to you, your family and friends. See you in 2020!*



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More Than Just Gardening—Part 1

By Daniel Walker

I always get the impression from individuals that no one remains at the garden throughout the winter and all we do is weed and plant. There is much more behind the scenes that go on in this newly designated National Historic Site.

Yes we do a lot of weeding and maintenance in our short season, but the true bulk of the time consuming work happens during the cold winter months. It begins with research and finding suppliers that can provide the specific plants that I need, many of which are no longer commercially available. This is very time consuming as you get excited only to hit a dead end where they don't ship internationally. We are bound to follow the list of plants that William Reader grew throughout his life time here at the garden. Many of these species are rare, or extinct or caught up in countries that can't ship plants internationally. This is where the seed exchange programs that I have continued to work with, and others that I've recently joined, help in finding these rare beauties from private growers. Below are a list:

- ◆ Scottish Rock Garden Society (SRGC) – Scotland/UK
- ◆ Professional Gardeners Guild (PGG) - UK
- ◆ Ontario Rock Garden Society (ORGS) - Canada
- ◆ North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS) – Based out of the USA

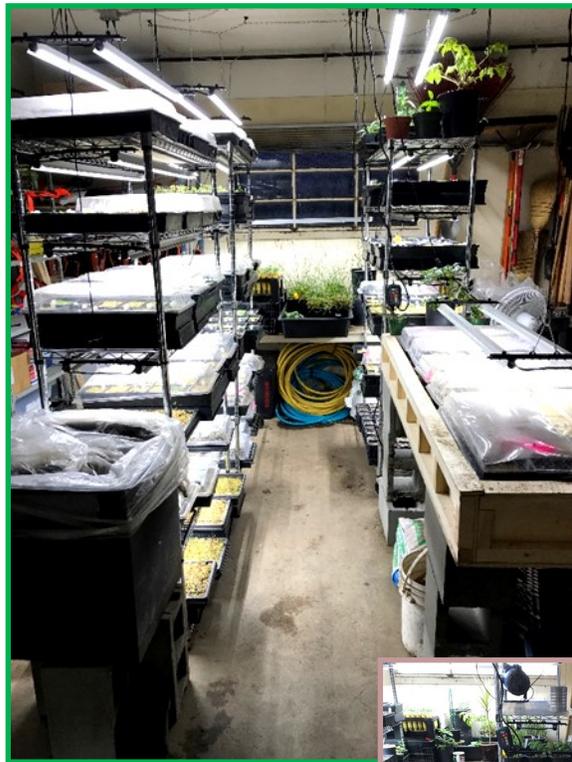
These organizations are truly helpful and usually results in the case of dozens of plant species being introduced to the Garden that have not been since Reader's time. This also helps diversify the gardens collection and strengthen the biodiversity of individual species. The plan is to reciprocate the favor and donate seeds back to these exchanges to keep them active.

I have been communicating with other botanic gardens in hopes that we can begin a plant or seed and information swap. I believe that building these networks will exponentially help bring the garden to the attention that is needed, as well provide information on where to procure certain plants that we need to fulfill our list. Currently I am in discussions with the U of A Botanic Garden as well as VanDusen Gardens in Vancouver. On the list to reach out to are Royal Botanical Gardens & Central Experimental Farm in Hamilton, Butchart Gardens, Victoria. There are many more but these busy institutions are hard to get a response from at times.

In 2017, I asked for the approval to order the majority of my plants through Van Noort which sells plugs and bare roots. Bare root is essentially field grown perennials with large growing eyes/crowns and are dug up and stored in cold storage to impede growth. You do need to buy 24-25 lots of each species and a quick pot up into new Promix; however the cost savings spoke for themselves. I saved about \$3200 on the Van Noort order alone compared to the prices of our preferred vendor at

the time. The plants sent by this company are of the highest quality and I have been so impressed the last few years using Van Noort.

This year we switched over to all LED lighting for our propagating this spring, this helps us be more energy efficient and in turn give the plants a higher quality of full spectrum light for stronger growth. You can link up to eight LED bars per outlet, they use ¼ of the energy of our old T8 bulbs and last 50,000 hours before their efficiency starts to decrease. This year we built a propagation table with heating coil and a bed of sand that has a six flat capacity. This is important for helping our seedlings germinate faster and perennial bare root and tree cuttings root quicker and stronger. Wire shelving racks have maximized the space in the depot garage where I grow the seedlings before they are moved out to our two greenhouses.



Another greenhouse and two heaters were purchased in 2017 to allow for the larger plant orders to be grown earlier in the season in the safety of the warm greenhouses. This new greenhouse is unique in that it can be expanded in the future if need be; this was a main factor in choosing this model.



We've been working with Olds College, specifically Dr. Ken Fry on introducing a parasitic wasp that he rears to help control the ever growing Lily Beetle problem. Ken Fry comes each spring to release the wasps in a specific testing area. We then random sample the test plot (where the wasps are released) throughout the season for Dr. Fry and collect larvae in vials of alcohol to send back at the end of the season to

be dissected and look for parasitism. So far we haven't found any evidence of the wasps overwintering and parasitizing, however we feel it's important to continue on with this partnership with Olds College.



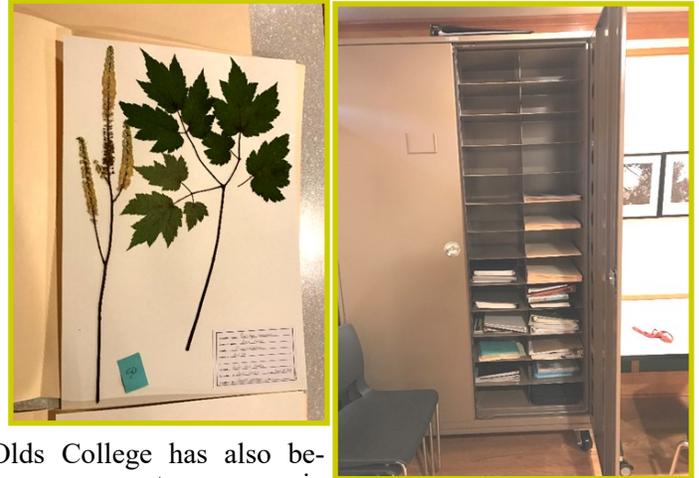
This fall we met with and are partnering with the Alberta Native Bee Council in building and distributing Bumble Bee Boxes throughout the garden. Due to habitat loss and introduction of new bee species that compete with our native bumble bees we are seeing a decline. These boxes if colonized will be sent back to the Native Bee Council to ID and get a better picture of what species we have in the area. We are looking into working with one of our volunteer groups to help monitor the boxes and collect them in the fall for inventory of colonized boxes.

Four mason bee boxes were placed in our fenced-in depot area. We even had a few of the tubes colonized despite the late hanging of these houses. They are currently overwintering in the upper greenhouse.



This brought on the development of an insect collection for the Garden, whereby the biodiversity within this specific site will be highlighted. Insects were collected as we saw them, frozen and then transported to our "Bug Room" at the Corral Depot. Here we set up a small lab where we can work during inclement weather and winter for full time staff to pin, ID and label insects for our growing collection. We have everything from microscopes, computer access, freezer for samples and two display cabinets for our collection. In this environment of peace and quiet, we can secure the collection as well. So far we have two collections in development, the Reader Rock Garden and grasslands (Nose Hill). We plan to use these collections as educational tools within Parks, among different depots, Integrated Pest Management and the Education Teams.

In addition we have created and acquired reference books to start a Parks Library that individuals can come and sign out to use back at their own respective depots. These books include everything from planter designs, basic horticulture knowledge to more specific topic reference books. We are currently taking donations to grow our collection.



Olds College has also become a great resource in helping us build a *Reader Rock Herbarium*. They are more than welcome to answer any questions and help steer us in the right direction. Our goal is to turn all the plants we have growing in the garden into a herbarium for a learning tool to be used by all. Many of the species are quite rare and/or fall into the prohibited noxious weed list so we feel those will be the species that we work on first. The cabinet is located in the "Potato Room" in the basement of the Café. A laminator was purchased and set up in the bug room at Corral Depot. The main focus is to build the Garden's main collection, however other samples/duplicates will be used and laminated for our Education teams to use. Normally lamination is not the standard, however we wanted to make them slightly more durable for all the little hands that might be using them. We collect, press, manipulate, glue and label all our samples during rain days and the winter months. I believe we got a couple dozen species this year, it doesn't seem like a lot. However the pressing and drying can take anywhere from a couple days to a couple weeks. It's a wonderful learning tool that many a gardener hasn't done since their school years and it definitely refreshes your mind on all the different parts of a plant.



Behind the scenes at Reader Rock Garden is a busy place. There's still so much to cover under the heading of "*More Than Just Gardening*", but that will have to wait for Part 2, which is scheduled for the upcoming Spring issue.

Stay tuned.

(Laminator at Corral, laminating Insect ID Key.)

*Introducing our new regular column ...
Celebrating special things with our special team at
Reader Rock Garden:* ★★ ★★
Volunteers' Picks:

Ann's Pick: *Gillenia trifoliata*

Bowman's root or Indian physic

Gillenia trifoliata is a lovely herbaceous perennial for the shade garden, similar in appearance to gaura (*Gaura lindheimeri*), but hardier and more shade tolerant.

G. trifoliata is synonymous with *Porteranthus trifoliata* and *Spiraea trifoliata*; you may see it listed under any of these names.



It was reintroduced to Reader Rock Garden after the restoration of the garden and there are a few nice clumps along the driveway to the Café (Bed 10 & in the lower part of Bed K).

Gillenia trifoliata is native to northeastern Canada and the United States. The indigenous peoples of North America used the dried and powdered root as a laxative and emetic, hence the common names of Bowman's root or Indian physic. A similar species, *G. stipulata* (American ipecac), was also used as a laxative and emetic by Native Americans.

Hardy to zone 4, this clump-forming perennial grows 60-120cm (2-4 feet) tall from a woody root, with a spread of 45-90cm (1.5-3 feet). In late spring and early summer, loose panicles of small starry white flowers dance gracefully in the wind above the slender red stems. The contrasting red calyces remain attractive even after the petals fall and the olive green trifoliate (3-parted) foliage often turns a lovely red in the fall.

Although reputedly difficult to establish, *Gillenia trifoliata* is a relatively low maintenance plant. It may need staking, but pests and diseases are rarely a problem. Propagate by division or by seed planted in early spring. Plant in massed groupings to highlight the airiness of the blooms. This is a beautiful perennial for the woodland garden, shady border or native plant garden.

Glynn's Pick: *Aesculus hippocastanum*

The Horse Chestnut tree

One surprise for many visitors to the Reader Rock Garden is the discovery of a mature Horse Chestnut tree, *Aesculus hippocastanum*, at the western end of the Upper Garden (Nana's Garden) near the cemetery fence. Some may be more familiar with its relative, the Ohio Buckeye (*Aesculus glabra*), grown in Calgary. The latter is easier to grow here, and sometimes offers more



attractive fall colours, but the Horse Chestnut has its own appeal, one of which may be in stimulating the memory of life in warmer, wetter climates than ours.

Before planting a Horse Chestnut we need to anticipate its accumulated nuts and its mature dimensions and as it is too big for many city lots. Planning for the future, it could work well as a shade tree. For me one fascination is the very decorative blossom, but the leaves and their inedible fruit are also interesting ... the leaves may have a unique shape in your garden, unless you grow *Rodgersia aesculifolia*, the perennial Chestnut-leaved Rodgersia.

Originally from the southern Balkans, but over the centuries has extended its range as far north as 60° N in eastern Sweden. Although it was brought to Britain in the early 17th Century, one of the common sights there, especially in the south, is the red-flowered version, *A. x carnea* 'Briotii', a cross between the American *A. pavia* (Red Buckeye) and *A. hippocastanum*.

Positive characteristics: the impressive flowers, the capsules and fruits ("conkers", with their old world history as a competitive pastime for kids), the leaves, and the gender characteristics. It tolerates various light regimes, various soil pH and textural conditions but it does prefer moist, fertile soils. It is synoecious – having male & female flowers on branch tips (monoecious organisms bear both male and female reproductive organs on the same individual plant). The globe-shaped tree leafs out early, has a domed crown of stout branches and on old trees the outer branches are often pendulous with curled-up tips. The ovoid leaf scars left on twigs after the leaves have fallen have a distinctive horseshoe shape, complete with seven horse "nails" (vascular bundle traces): check out the sticky buds in early spring. The fruit is a globular dehiscent capsule enclosing the shiny brown nut-like seeds – the conkers.

Negative characteristics: Horse Chestnuts and Buckeyes are poisonous. (The edible, “sweet”, chestnut is *Castanea sativa*, a species of the Fagaceae family, whereas the horse-chestnuts belong to the Sapindaceae family).

Because of the taproots in this genus, once established they transplant with difficulty. Although there are mature specimens in Calgary, they are more likely to survive in the milder, downtown core, but they may not blossom every year. Confession: the accompanying photograph to the left was taken in Budapest.

Scott's Pick: *Verbascum chaixii*

Mullein



The stately yellow and white spires of this bee magnet attracted numerous comments from garden visitors this year.

With a contrasting purple eye and stamens, the *Verbascum chaixii* really popped as visitors made their way along the Switchback bed and up along the Western Slope.

Flower spikes of 600 mm to 900 mm rise from a rosette of woolly greenish grey oblong leaves. This short lived perennial blooms in late spring through the summer.

Already finished blooming for the summer were the smaller *Verbascum phoeniceum* with their white, pink and rose coloured flowers which grow in the general area of the historic irises (near the Chapel).

There are plans to reintroduce the many varieties that have been lost from the garden. Among the seeds ordered this fall is the *Verbascum olympicum* which is described as being a gigantic specimen with multi-branched spikes of countless golden-yellow flowers.

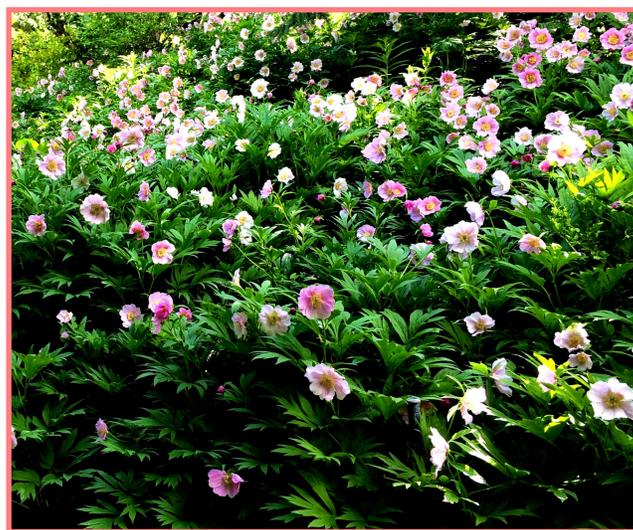
One caution, if you plan to try these statement plants in your own garden, be sure to avoid the Common Mullein, *Verbascum thapus*, as this is listed as a noxious species by the Alberta Invasive Species Council.

Linda's Pick: *Paeonia veitchii*

Veitch's peony

Peonies have long been a mainstay in Calgary gardens. They come up reliably every year, require little tending, and produce showy flowers that tell us the warm season is finally here. Double varieties are especially loved for their voluptuous blooms.

My new favourite peony, though, is not one of these billowing beauties. This year, I fell under the spell of *Paeonia veitchii*, a single peony of understated charm. It is established in pockets around the Reader Rock Garden, and showcased as a mass planting beside a pathway on the Western Slope.

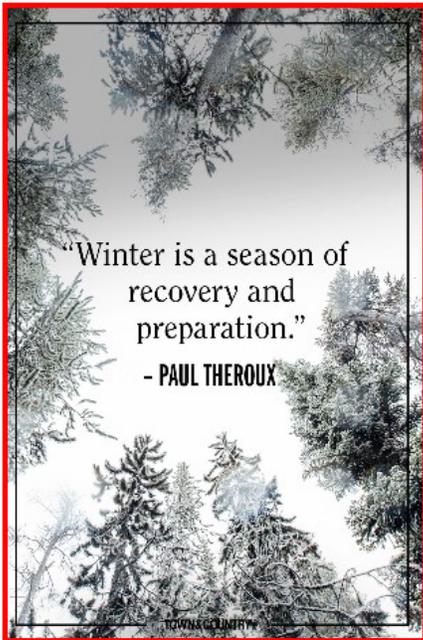


In late May to early June, this peony bears an abundance of fragrant, pink, cup-shaped flowers with prominent yellow centres. In summer, the divided foliage adds graceful texture to a mixed border. And in fall, the ripe seedpods split open to reveal glossy black seeds, like strings of beads. With its ruffles, frills, and polished pearls, *Paeonia veitchii* – also called Veitch's peony - provides interest from spring to frost.

The peony patch on the Western Slope is ringed by mature trees, which means it does not get long hours of sun. It turns out that *Paeonia veitchii* is shade tolerant, making it ideal for gardens whose spreading trees have turned sunny areas into semi-shade. That clinched it for me. I had to have a Veitch's peony.

Unfortunately, this plant is not readily available in garden centres. Fortunately, the Reader Rock Garden holds a plant sale in June, and it was there that I managed to get a healthy division to try in one of my own partially-shaded beds.

William Reader wrote that peonies are “foolproof, of a fair range of color, fragrant, and, in their season, the glory of the garden.” I am looking forward to the glory of *Paeonia veitchii* when I tour Reader's garden again next spring.



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Closed for the season, but private functions reservations are welcomed.

The **Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society (CRAGS)**

Thursday, Jan 9, 2020
Annual Potluck Supper and
Vancouver Rock Gardens
6:30 PM
Lakeview Community Association Hall
6110 - 34 Street SW

See their website for more
details
www.crag.ca/events

Call 403-234-0065 or see the website: www.readersgardencafe.ca