



The Reader Rock Garden

www.ReaderRock.com



2020 - A Challenging Year!

By Diane M. Dalkin

Winter is a great time for research and planning for the coming Spring. Yet, it's hard to contain one's excitement and dreaming about the growing season ahead, especially when the greenhouse has blooming beauties already!

Daniel (the Head Gardener at Reader's) recently sent us this photo to brighten our weary winter days. This stunning rare beauty is *Cypripedium japonicum* which was planted last fall and over-wintered successfully. Can't help but smile at this happy development! 😊



Furthermore, Daniel's featured article will touch upon additional details on what happens behind the scenes at the Garden. Indeed, "More Than Just Gardening" is only a cursory glance of on-going improvements.

However, 2020 is starting off as a challenging year. With the recent Covid-19 outbreak, we will be taking extra measures to "social distance". Please check our Website, Facebook & Twitter accounts for updates. Erring on caution is a prudent decision for all of us. Consequently, this is how our 2020 calendar looks, at this time. Of course, subject to change:

- ◆ **March 21 – Seedy Saturday – Cancelled.** Alternate plans being discussed.
- ◆ **April 25 & 26 – Calgary Horticultural Society's Garden Show** at Max Bell Centre. - Pending confirmation?
- ◆ **May 2 – (Saturday) Jane's Walk**, 11:00 AM – Noon, at the Garden, in conjunction with the Calgary Foundation. This year, we're planning to make this a "registered event" for those wishing to attend (free & open to the public). More details will be posted on our website soon. - Pending confirmation?
- ◆ **May 17 – (Sunday) Our Annual General Meeting**, held at Reader's Garden Café, lower classroom a.k.a Potato Room, 10:00 AM – Noon. All welcome!
- ◆ **June 13 – (Saturday) Plant Sale & Annual Garden Stroll.** We plan on offering unusual plants for sale and informative walks through the Garden. It's like taking a little bit of historical Reader Rock Garden back to your home garden, so special!

And, of course we can't forget to mention that **Reader's Garden Café** is scheduled to re-open **April 29**.



Lots of fun things planned, but, everyone's health and well-being are our most important priorities. Here's hoping this nasty Coronavirus moves on soon. In the meantime, enjoy reading our newsletter from the comforts of your home. Stay safe & well.

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More Than Just Gardening—Part 2

By Daniel Walker

The following is Part 2 from the featured article in the Winter 2019 edition.

Within our extensive Iris list, the majority is the German bearded iris (*Iris germanica*), with approximately 150 cultivars of this said species. Many of these have become extinct in the commercial grown companies. However, through the Historic Iris Preservation Society (HIPS), that the Garden is now part of, a new rescue group emerged. They call themselves Guardian Gardens, since one of their main purposes is an international effort to find lost cultivars and have them growing in at least 5 different places to ensure that the cultivars aren't lost forever. Naturally I was very supportive of this initiative and thought this was extremely important to join and help be a "growing/holding spot". This would include growing irises that aren't on the original inventory list, hence why we are growing them in our fenced-in depot area and hopefully soon fenced-in main holding beds. Documentation of what filters through and out of the program is kept logged and returned to the HIPS administrator to post and track developments. When clumps of irises are of large enough size they are divided and sent to a new location to grow. I'm hoping that this program may help in getting some of the cultivars that we need in the Garden's inventory.

When I commenced my position at the Garden, I had heard about the past volunteer programs and wondered why they weren't currently happening. To rectify this, I began with reacquainting myself with our garden advocate group, the Friends of Reader Rock Garden Society (FoRRGS), which then in turn sparked up the question, "Can we volunteer?" We addressed this and weighed out the possibilities where assistance was most needed. I decided that these volunteers (a pool of ~11 people) could take care of the bed along 25th Avenue entrance. This flower bed is the first hint of what lies within the Garden and needs to be an enticing show-stopper, but isn't as sensitive as the main part of the garden. These volunteers proved to be competent and keen to learn, so we were able to have them weed in the garden, as well as help plant perennials in specific beds. Another group of volunteers who were completing the Master Gardener program (3 -5 people) helped maintain the switch-back beds that stretch up the first section of the road going up to the Cobblestone Corner. I found out that many hands get a job done efficiently, under the direction and guidance from the City of Calgary staff. Most of the volunteers are retired or semi-retired and have an interest in gardening which really spoke volumes on their hard work ethic and willingness to learn and ask questions. Both groups were onsite once a week, Thursday mornings for 2-3 hours. One of my Parks colleagues, Jim Davies, with the Education Volunteer Team compiled a cost savings analysis with the hours worked by the volunteers that is included in the Garden's year-end report. In the end, this program proved to be successful, definitely building a much stronger team, with the volunteers and between the City Staff as well. The volunteer work days always brought laughter and smiles to the Garden and at the end of the season the #1 question was, "when do you want us to come back next year?" Needless-to-say this volunteer program should be encouraged to continue. We also help support

the FoRRGS group with their annual fundraising initiatives at their Garden Stroll, which highlights the garden's history, and includes a plant sale. We grow plants for this occasion and dig up other plants that need thinning as well. Revenue generated from this event comes back to the garden via special plant orders paid by FoRRGS, as well through the Reader Rock Garden Endowment Fund (set-up by FoRRGS at the Calgary Foundation).

Over the years, due to various restrictions such as budget cuts and lack of staff, the garden became somewhat stagnant, remaining status quo and quite mono-cultured. In the past two years we have begun an extensive rehabilitation program to diversify the plant population within the list as well as restore garden beds. The main purpose is to get rid of the creeping bellflower (a formidable challenge) and other perennial weeds, yes these are on the original plant inventory list and historically accurate; however, the cons outweigh the pros of keeping certain individual plants, particularly like these. Plus, this is where the herbarium proves to be useful, as a collection of preserved plant specimens and associated data, as well as keeping historical records of the Garden's plant inventory. The process of renovating the beds includes removing plant material. Additionally, I put the call out to all other City Parks gardeners to come by and dig out the extras and take plants to their zones, while others are moved elsewhere or volunteer seedlings are bonuses for the annual plant sale. Next, we chemically control the weeds. While we wait for a kill and fallow period, the beds are carefully examined for rock erosion and /or exposure, as some of the rocks have been buried with time. The bed is composted and continued to be fallowed, new weed growth is sprayed once more before we re-plant again. This process takes a complete season. Recently, we had 3 beds that were prepared in the fall 2018, ready for the following spring. We aim to complete 3-4 beds a season and will continue to do so till the whole garden is complete, which should take 9-10 seasons. After this point, we will just recommence at the beginning of the list. This will hopefully ensure that the garden renovations are smaller undertakings in the future.

Before: ►



After: ▼

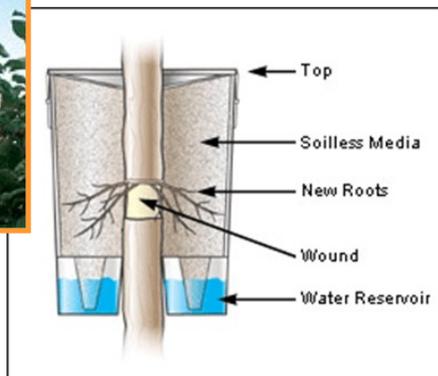


Other projects that we are working on for this season:

- ◆ Hoping to get some capital projects work regarding the upper switch back road heading into the cemetery
- ◆ Working to get some irrigation projects completed along 25th Avenue by the lower parking lot and irrigation to the main entrance bed. Also a few problem areas within the garden fixed.
- ◆ Continuing to maintain our failing sandstone rock working walls and pathways within the garden.
- ◆ Combating the Oyster scale infestation by implementing a spray and rejuvenation program.
- ◆ Working with a City Ecologist by growing native milkweed seeds collected in natural areas to be planted in various locations.



- ◆ Trialing an autonomous mower for the main lawn of the garden – as per the following article on the next page.
- ◆ Propagating some of the failing historic trees throughout the garden by using root grower pots from Lee Valley. Once cutting shave rooted, they will be sent to the Tree Nursery to grow on and be an exact clone of the failing tree replace.



- ◆ Collected Douglas Fir, White Spruce (Shelter belt trees) and the significant Blue Spruce (on Main Lawn) seed from the 3 species in the garden. These are being grown to about 10” before being sent to the nursery. From here, the Douglas Fir and Blue Spruce will be planted throughout the city, while the White Spruce will be grown as replacements for the aging historic shelter belt around the Garden.

White Spruce Seedlings ▶



- ◆ New “What’s in Bloom” signs are replacing the old ones, to help educate the visiting patrons of the garden.



◀ *Old Style*

▼ *New Prototype*



- ▶ Tucked away in the back, the holding bed is being renovated and chain link fencing and gates are being installed to secure the plants.



I hope this little bit of information helps give a better understanding of all the behind-the-scenes projects that are now happening at Reader Rock Garden. It’s such a wonderful place to work and I am very fortunate to be a part of this place, where I get to apply my skills that I learned in school to my daily tasks here at the garden. *Thank you for your time.* 

Celebrating special things with our special team at Reader Rock Garden:



Volunteers' Picks:



Bruce's Pick: Himalayan Blue Poppy

(*Meconopsis betonicifolia* - Reader's list also has as *M. baileyi*)

Calgary's Reader Rock Garden – affectionately known in our Family as “*The Secret Garden*” is truly a magical garden for all to enjoy. We visited for years, with picnics in tow, regardless of the season. My three children have had their wedding photos taken here, and the Garden has provided many happy memories for our family.

As I worked across Spiller Road for The Electric System, I spent most of my lunch hours walking through Reader Rock and the attached Cemeteries. The Garden and Cemeteries were in constant change with the seasons in flowers, trees and grasses, etc. I always enjoyed looking for the rabbits and pheasants and the spectacular Peony blooms in the spring. Little did I know I'd be able to become a Volunteer Parks Gardener in Reader Rock Garden. I remember visiting the City greenhouses at the bottom of the hill to choose indoor plants for our office at the Electric System.

Becoming a FoRRGS Tour Guide at the Garden is an exceptional honour to share the beauty of the interesting flowers, trees and scrubs, as well as the history of William Reader's work. Visitors are always pleased with their tours of the garden and all the varieties that William Reader gathered to grow in the gardens. Keeping flowers, plants and trees on Mr. Reader's list of ~4,000 different varieties is quite a challenge for The Head Gardener I'm sure.

I feel the best view for me is standing on the bridge overlooking the ponds and stream, facing West to capture the essence of what I feel as *The Secret Garden*. Of all the flowers, trees, bushes etc. my favorite flower is The Himalayan Blue Poppy – so far from its natural home. The blue color is spectacular to me, and I'm pleased to have some growing in my home garden.



Photos: DM Dalkin

For Mr. Reader to search out all these different flowers etc. and try to grow them in Calgary is a legacy given to us Citizens of Calgary. Hats off to you Mr. William Reader, and Thank You for sharing your vision with us!

Here He Comes –aka Herman By Diane M. Dalkin

As you may recall in the previous Winter issue, new technology joined the groundskeepers' team at Reader Rock Garden—the *Robotic Auto-Lawn Mower*. In case you didn't encounter the little fella last year, here's the scoop:

The Auto-Mower is a trial pilot project that's being tested at the Garden, hopefully to encourage its use in other parks around the city.

It has a relay sensor burrowed in the ground, a “perimeter wire” around the boundary of the Main Lawn, adjacent to the Café. The mower senses the wire, stops and turns the other way, crisscrossing the entire surface of the lawn. The grass clippings are not bagged, but returned back to the turf's health for decomposition. Besides its functional assistance of cutting the lawn and being a time-saver, Daniel Walker (Head Gardener) likes that “*its green option, as it's getting us away from using fossil fuels and thus more environmentally friendly. One can argue about its carbon footprint with the making of the battery; however the battery life is expected at ~10 years and can be recycled. Plus, we are eliminating potential fuel spills and have zero emissions*”. And, its quiet operation is a welcomed consideration for this tranquil oasis!

It also has various safety features that include ultrasonic sensors to detect an obstacle and stop before it hits the object. There's an alarm that is set off when the mower is picked up, a digital pin code must be entered after being picked up or a manual restart to ensure no tampering has occurred.



- ◆ “*Herman*”, as the mower is affectionately known, is especially captivating when in operation. Visitors usually stop and smile, to watch the action - traversing the Main Lawn, back & forth. But, he's still kinda cute 😊, even in the docking & charging station.

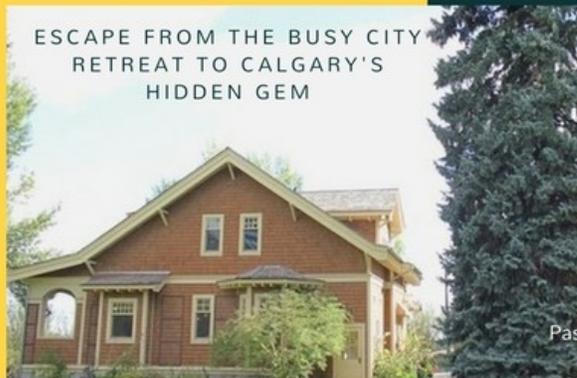


Reader's

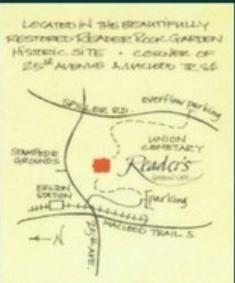
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.....
Wednesday to Sunday
9:30 am to 3:00 pm
.....



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

FoRRGS Annual General Meeting
May 17th - (Sunday), 10:00 AM – Noon,
held at Reader's Garden Café, lower
classroom a.k.a the Potato Room.

Come by to meet the team, get an up-
date of the Board's plans, and enjoy
light refreshments.
Plus, there will be fun door prizes!

All welcome ☺



Kind words are the gardens
Kind thoughts are the roots
Kind words are the flowers
Kind deeds are the fruits
Take care of your garden
And keep out the weeds
Fill it with sunshine, 
Kind words and kind deeds!

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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

- ◆ **Monthly Informative Evening Talks**
2nd Thursday of the month, at 6:30 PM
- ◆ **May 30, 2020—29th Annual Plant
Sale, Noon—3:00 PM**

Lakeview Community Association Hall
6110 - 34 Street SW

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



Spring appears in whispers and hushed tones,
As the bellowing Winter bows away.
Drowsy flowers come to attention,
Waking from their sleep, yawning;
with heads turned upward towards
the Maestro called Sun -
I watch with anticipation as ...
The concert begins.

Susan @SGCC