

Summer 2015

Issue 2

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NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF READER ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

Reader Rock Ramblings

The Reader Rock Garden

www.ReaderRock.com



Time to go out and play

By Diane Dalkin

With the warmth of the sun, Mother Nature beckons us outdoors ... and we all should heed her call. So much to see and do!

In late April, our group had a training session, to view the first blush of color in the Garden. The plant identification exercise quickly changed its focus to bird-watching as we marveled in the beauty of this raptor. She/he patiently tolerated our spying and attempts at confirming it's identity. Was it a Cooper's or a Sharp-shinned hawk? Even with the many photos that were taken from this sighting and observing the behavior, it's tricky making a conclusive identification. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has a very informative website, see: http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Coopers_Hawk/id. Perhaps one of our members has the expertise to shed more insights about this amazing winged visitor at Reader's? If you do, please email us and share the details about our majestic feathered friend. As always, this Garden offers many treasures for all to discover.



Winged Visitor @ Reader's

We were also out and about in April at the Calgary Horticultural Society's Garden Show at Spruce Meadows. It was an ideal opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with you, our supporters, and to meet new friends. Thanks to the many volunteers for making this a successful event, once again.

On May 24th, our Annual General Meeting was held, with the election of the Board. Virtually all our dedicated team members stood for re-election for another two year term. However, Diana Pommen, former VP has chosen to move on to other adventures. *Thank-you, Diana for your invaluable contributions over these past two years. FoRRGS is a better team as a result of your efforts; a whole-hearted thanks from us all! You will indeed be missed.* But, as one chapter ends, another begins ... We were very fortunate to have Jacob Gryzenhout, a new member, raise his hand to offer his assistance with our website developments. It's always remarkable how *together* we can make good things happen. Please consider sharing your talents with us too! Giving back to the community has many rewards. All welcomed.

Later on in May, we were represented at the popular 4th Street Lilac Festival, handing out fliers and providing info about the Garden. Thank-you to our own Susan Gryzenhout and Bob Lang from the Cliff Bungalow Mission Community Association for helping us to profile the Garden to the public. The spectacular sunny day brought out record crowds partaking in the merriment.

Back at the Garden ... As the seasons progress, the spring blossoms fade and the lushness of summer leaps out in their stead. This year our ...

- ◆ **Annual Garden Stroll** is Sunday, **July 26th, 1:00-3:00 pm**; the Garden will be showing off striking summer blooms. We're also pleased to be part of the Historic Week focus with our affiliate, the Chinook Country Historical Society

We hope you'll join us for this event or make the Garden a destination at your convenience. Enjoy its peaceful beauty and the variety of interests it offers. *See you soon and stay safe!*

FoRRGS Team

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President - Diane Dalkin
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Springtime in the Rockeries.

By Marilyn Mayall

Early photos of Reader's sandy hill give little indication of what now grows there, but they do give a daunting idea of the amount of work needed to transform the hill into a rock garden.



Beginnings of the High Rockery, NW corner of Union Cemetery ~ 1913

Care is required to navigate the pathways in the High Rockery to the south of the road leading up the hill. On the plus side, the terrain gives a perfect excuse to get down on your backside where you really need to be to enjoy the tiny arrays of alpine and rock garden specimens nestled among the rocks.



The High Rockery ... sometime later.

By the time this article goes to print, some of the earliest alpines will have finished blooming. In fact, when I visited in April, the blooms of the *Saxifraga oppositifolia* were almost complete.

As a native of cold temperate and arctic habitats, the purple saxifrage flowers almost as soon as the snow melts. To the Inuit its bloom time is an indicator of caribou calving time and is known by the (unpronounceable) name of *aupilaktunnguaq*. Its significance is also recognized by being the floral emblem of Nunavut.

The edible flowers are said to be bitter when first consumed, but become sweet as they are chewed

As a plant of significance to our northern inhabitants, we can claim it as a native, but this tiny plant is circumpolar and occurs as far north as Greenland.



Draba aizoides & Saxifraga oppositifolia
Photo by Janet Washburn.

In Arctic regions it presents as a low growing (3-5 cm.) dense cushion, but further south it is a more sprawling plant with somewhat woody branches. In Calgary, it is suitable for a north facing rock garden where it is sheltered from the hottest mid-day sun. Although needing moisture, like most alpines it requires good drainage, gritty soil and a coarse stone mulch.

The bright yellow of *Draba aizoides* (See photo above) is a sure sign that Spring has arrived in the High Rockery (where it self seeds happily, but not aggressively).



Higher in the rockery is the tiny *Draba rigida*, a small and slow

Draba rigida Photo by Alison King

growing cushion of moss-like foliage which sends up wiry stems topped by racemes of diminutive yellow flowers (4-5mm.) in early Spring

Like the purple saxifrage, Drabas require free draining soil, but will take full sun and *D. rigida* is suitable for trough planting.

A lesser known alpine, *Vitaliana primuliflora*, also forms a mat of fine leaves which look attractive even after the yellow flowers have faded. The fragrant, single flowers usually appear in early May.

Sometimes called a golden primrose, this plant is one of a number of alpines that have been classified and re-classified into different genera over the years. (eg. *Douglasia*, *Androsace*).



Vitaliana primuliflora Photo by Alison King

At the top of the High Rockery (and also south-west of the lower pool) you may come across a mat of grey-green evergreen rosettes. *Androsace sarmentosa/primuloides* is one of my all-time favourites. Like *Vitaliana*, this species has undergone numerous name changes. As well as *sarmentosa* and *primuloides* it is sometimes identified as *limprichtii* and *watkinsii*. Just now (mid-May) the centres of the rosettes are elongating and from these centres will emerge fragrant clusters of pink, yellow-eyed flowers. The centres will turn red after pollination. From the rosettes of leaves, bright red stolons terminating in new rosettes will be sent out to extend the mat. These runners will root and in time produce their own clusters of dainty flowers.



Elongating rosettes of *Androsace sarmentosa/primuloides* Photo by Alison King

Described as “easy and rewarding” by the Alpine Garden Society, it is one of the classic rock plants. It will also grow in woodland conditions .

With Spring comes the excitement of new specimens to be trialled in the Gardens. A new shipment of alpines will arrive mid-May. Among the arrivals there will be another *Androsace* - *Androsace sempervivoides*. In my garden, *A.sempervivoides* blooms a few weeks ahead of *A. sarmentosa*.



Androsace sempervivoides Photo by Marilyn Mayall

This year the head gardener will be trialling other new alpines. From the Dolomites comes a low growing species of cinquefoil, *Potentilla nitida*. If you miss the early rockery bloomers, you might catch the rose-pink blooms of the shining cinquefoil in mid-late summer. The low cushion, mat-forming clump has the typical palmate cinquefoil foliage of a silvery-grey.

Also blooming later in the season, a new addition will be *Sedum populifolium*, a member of the CRASSULACEAE family. This deciduous sedum has woody branches with succulent holly like leaves. The white (or near white) flowers are fragrant.

If you're tired of staking your sea holly, look for a new addition of *Eryngium glaciale*-a dwarf sea holly - which is, like its taller cousin, attractive to bees and butterflies. Or search for *Euphorbia capitulata*, a low-growing relative of the poinsettia. Or even more exotic, the cactus-like flowers of *Lewisia rediviva*.



Lewisia rediviva Photo by Marilyn Mayall

All in all, good reasons not to put off your visit to one of Calgary's most wonderful gardens.

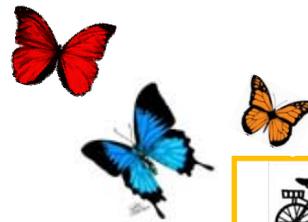
Our thanks, as usual, go to Janet Washburn , Head City Gardener at Reader Rock Garden, for her deep knowledge of all things botanical and especially things Reader.





Rhubarb leaf stepping stones can add a special touch to your garden.

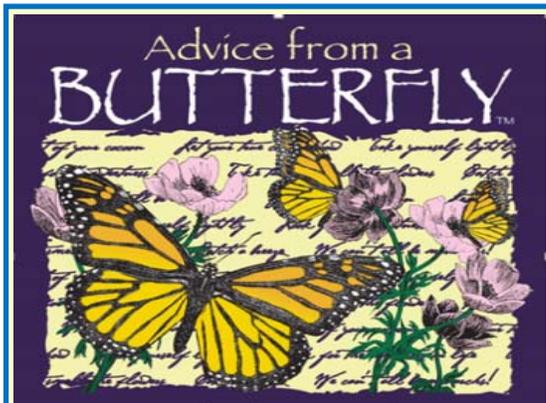
As part of our fund-raising initiatives, we'll be selling these again at our Garden Stroll in July.



Mark your calendars. Remember ...

- ◆ **July 26, 2015**—Join us at the FoRRGS Annual Garden Stroll when we welcome the public to the Garden, 1:00-3:00 pm, onsite at Reader Rock Garden. This year we're pleased to be part of the Historic Week focus with our affiliate, the Chinook Country Historical Society.
- ◆ Come by and check out this fun-filled afternoon:
 - ◆ Free event & parking
 - ◆ Knowledgeable volunteers onsite to answer your questions
 - ◆ Used **Book Sale**, downstairs in the Potato Room
 - ◆ **Plein air painters** from the *Calgary Sketch Club* displaying their creative art
 - ◆ **Draw prizes**
 - ◆ Membership sales

See you there!



Let your true colors show. Get out of your cocoon. Take yourself lightly. Look for the sweetness in life. Take time to smell the flowers. Catch a breeze. We can't all be monarchs!



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The Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society (CRAGS)

2nd Thursday of each month
(Jan-June and Sept-Nov)
Lakeview Community Association Hall
6110 34th Street SW.
6:30 pm Social & Refreshments
7:00 pm Q&A
7:30 pm Presentation

◆ **Thursday, June 11, 2015**

Speaker: David Sellars
**Topic: King Laurin's Garden:
Following In The Footsteps of Reginald Farrer In The Dolomites**

See: www.crag.ca/events

