

The Reader Rock Garden

www.ReaderRock.com



NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF READER ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

Reader Rock Ramblings



Notes from the Board

By Diane M. Dalkin

It's always tough to let go of carefree summer ... but, *Autumn is whispering* in our coolish mornings. Fall is indeed on the way—a season to celebrate the bountiful harvest, the golden sun rays, long shadows and a “time of plenty” is surely to follow.

Reader Rock Garden is still blooming profusely and remains a feast for the senses! Late summer flowers and seed heads cascade exuberantly throughout. The colors are rich and mellow in the crisp, fresh air. Even though we'll be pulling on our sweaters soon, there's loads of time left to take in all the peaceful beauty.

The Head Gardener, *Daniel*, his team and the volunteers made huge strides tending to the many needs of this labor-intensive site. Their tireless efforts are often sight unseen, usually in the early mornings, but the final results are so appreciated! Take a bow ... standing ovation ... *Bravo to ALL their hard work & dedication!!* Plus, so many new plant species were re-introduced back to the Garden, in keeping up the momentum to increase plant diversity annually. Another highlight from this season, ... we were so pleased to sponsor Daniel's travels to Ottawa's *Central Experimental Farm (CEF)*, where he procured numerous historic lilac cuttings. If you're not familiar with the CEF, it's time to check out their website, see: <https://friendsofthefarm.ca/>. Since 1886, with more than 400 hectares, the CEF has enchanted visitors for more than a century - such a fascinating place and good work being done there. BTW, it's a National Historic Site too. Daniel will provide more exciting insights from this experience, probably in our Winter issue newsletter. Stay tuned.

You may have also noticed that our *Tour Guides* are back in the Garden [post-Covid restrictions]. Thanks to Colleen for leading the charge; she re-established the team and expanded our roster of trained volunteers. You'll likely meet these interesting & knowledgeable folks in the future as we continue to offer garden tours once again.

This year, we trialled our June Plant Sale & Stroll to be a “*private, members-only event*”. We wanted to offer our supporters an exclusive opportunity to purchase the rare and wonderful gems from the Garden. It's our way of saying “*thank-you*” for backing our initiatives through your memberships. Because of this clear success, we'll be keeping this event as a benefit among Friends only, so please remember to maintain your active membership status—especially for next year, when we celebrate FoRRGS' 20th anniversary. Exciting days ahead!

So, ... as we follow Nature's rhythm and prepare to embrace Fall, don't forget that *there's less than one month left* to enjoy some tasty goodness from *Reader's Garden Café*; the scheduled seasonal closing is *October 2nd*. Time to send off summer with style!



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Reader's Experiments— In His Own Words

By Rachel Bedet

William Reader made an enormous contribution to jump-starting prairie horticulture, testing thousands of plant species in our climate for both hardiness and garden-value. In Reader's undated writing, *Horticultural Experimental Work in Calgary*¹, he reflected on what he had observed and learned about gardening in Calgary. It is a testament to his effort that many of the plant choices we make for our gardens today were recommended by Reader nearly 100 years ago.

TREES

"I knew how the gardener in the Old Country hated to have Poplars of any kind growing within the vicinity of any cultivated ground in his garden, for I think there is no greater robber of the soil than the Poplar. I was surprised, therefore, to see that Poplars were such "popular" trees for garden purposes in this neighbourhood." - William Reader

In Calgary's early days, there were not many trees. Reader understood that the people of Calgary had an urgent desire for trees. It followed then that fast-growing ones like the trembling aspen, mountain ash, and birches were good options for gardeners. When native trees like the Manitoba maple were grown from seed, he found that local seed made for a hardier tree.

Reader discovered that the only ash tree that survives in Calgary is the green ash, and because it is long-lived he wished for it to be planted widely. Unfortunately as it is a very slow-growing tree it was not favoured by early Calgarians. However, some of the green ash Reader planted as street trees in 1915 are still with us today.

"The Elm is a tree that everybody seems eager to cultivate and if it could be once established here, would undoubtedly be the best tree we could grow. I have tried numerous experiments with this tree, getting them in all stages from seedlings to fully developed trees, but have not anything very satisfactory to report regarding their hardiness." - William Reader

The American elm is a fast-growing, long-lived, and elegantly branched tree. This made it one of the most desirable landscaping trees in North America in the early 20th century. Reader hoped that he could produce hardy elms from the seeds of any elms planted in our area that managed to survive to reproductive maturity. Despite early failures, progress clearly was made, as we still have some of the elms planted in the city during his time as Superintendent of Parks.

Reader tested evergreen trees such as lodgepole pine and scotch pine without success. He speculated that our alkaline soil was the problem. Our native white spruce was hardy and proved useful, but he preferred its cousin the Colorado blue spruce for its ornamental blue-tinted needles. He planted the very first Colorado Blue Spruce in Calgary which can be found today in the Reader Rock Garden. It was planted in isolation close to the house to maximize its showy quality.



SHRUBS

"When I took charge of the Parks Department, I became heir to, amongst other things, large consignments of Rhododendrons, Azaleas, both mollis and indica, Mulberries, Laburnums, and some others. These were not in evidence after the first winter, and I quickly realized that it was a waste of time and money to attempt any of these or in fact, any of the broad-leaved evergreens in this climate." - William Reader

Reader recommended the use of native shrubs in Calgary's gardens because they thrive in our climate. He recognized the ornamental value of our local species of saskatoons, chokecherry and dogwoods. Some of the exotic shrubs he tested suffered from winter dieback - meaning they survived the winter but not all of their branches did. In some extreme cases, the shrub lost all of its limbs and had to grow anew every spring.

Reader reasoned that a gardener could accept dieback if the plant's annual growth was pretty enough. He felt this way about the golden elder: certain to die to the ground every winter, but still beautiful during the growing season. Other species, such as some of the spirea and barberry he tested, seemed less worthwhile because of their slow recovery to dieback. Flowering shrubs must be able to bloom reliably in our climate. For species that flower on last year's growth, if that growth dies back, there will be no flowers - making them a poor choice for our gardens.



As surprising as this will sound in a city with an annual Lilac Festival, Reader initially found that the lilacs he planted did not bloom reliably. Sudden warm periods in the early spring would trigger the lilac buds to start growing, but these buds would be destroyed as the cold returned. No buds means no flowers. Reader wrote that lilacs ‘could not be



Montreal Ave SW with Elm trees, Lilac & Cotoneaster shrubs

depended on to blossom every year’. Later he found that late-flowering lilac species like the Hungarian or Japanese lilacs avoided this problem.

“I have never known the sharp-leaved Cotoneaster to winter kill. It is a very ornamental shrub of compact growth. I have never used it as a hedge plant but I believe it would make an extremely pretty and useful shrub for this purpose.”
- William Reader

Today cotoneaster hedges are as common in Calgary as cowboy hats during Stampede, so Reader’s insight was keen. Another shrub often used as a hedge or wind break is the common caragana. Reader had a great appreciation for caraganas. He described them as nearly indestructible and had as many as ten different caragana species in his private garden. Reader believed that some caraganas could be used as ornamentals. One of his examples, which is commercially available to us today, is the pygmy caragana which is a small shrub with a larger than usual caragana flower.

PERENNIALS

“I think if I was confined to two species in this climate I would choose the Peony and the so-called German or Bearded Iris. Both of these plants are absolutely hardy and seem quite immune from pests of any kind. The former has a glorious flower and can well take the place of the Rose, and the latter has such a colourful range of delicate and beautiful colours and combinations of colours, that a collection of these is absolutely a fairy-land in blossoming time.”
- William Reader

At the time of his writing, Reader reported to have found 175 different species and varieties of herbaceous perennials that were suitable for gardens in Calgary. He thought that no garden should be without monkshood, bell flowers, larkspur, feverfew, baby’s breath, pinks or veronicas. He suggested that the prolific numbers of seeds produced by desirable species such as the corn marigold, Iceland poppy and sweet rocket could be used for what today we would term ‘guerrilla gardening’ - that method of improving vacant sites by throwing handfuls of seeds at them.

During Reader’s time, his garden, parks, and tree-lined streets demonstrated what was possible to achieve in our climate. We continue to see his hand in our city in the number of hardy and beautiful plants that he originally tested and we still choose to grow today.

¹ Reader, W. R. (n.d.). *Horticultural Experimental Work in Calgary. Planning & Building Department Fonds, Series XIII, Heritage Planning Box 20, File “Reader Rock Garden 325-25 Ave S.E. 06-233”*. City of Calgary Archives

Rachel Bedet is a Landscape Architect, a Master Gardener and a FoRRGS Tour Guide.



* **Did you know ...** *

* There’s a new **Seed Library in Inglewood.** *
* It’s located in the basement of *The Next* *
* *Page* bookstore. The Calgary Seed Library *
* allows members to borrow seed from its *
* collection and then return seeds from their *
* own harvests later. *
* *Source: Avenue Home & Shopping News-* *
* *letter, July issue.* *
* We also have a FoRRGS member planning *
* to do a reconnaissance visit for more details *
* and to see how we can participate. *
* Nonetheless, it’s an intriguing idea & we *
* wish them success! *
* *****





Daniel's Updates:

By Daniel Walker

The focus will be on a specific plant and next issue, I'll provide my story from the *Central Experimental Farm* in Ottawa. There's a lot to share!

It's time to think about bulb planting ... Our *Narcissus bulbocodium*, aka Hoop-Petticoat Daffodil finally bloomed this year, so exciting! These were started from seed in 2020 and grew in the greenhouse. Now that they've bloomed successfully, the plan is to locate some in the High Rockery and others around the Lower Pond. As you can see, they bear cheerful, bright golden blooms with large cups and tiny, pointed perianths, and rush-like foliage.



They are a distinct show-stopper among daffodils, especially when grown in impactful drifts. These hardy bulb perennials belong to the Amaryllidaceae Family. They are not huge [~20 cm /~6 in], but still have special benefits besides the obvious charming uniqueness: they're deer resistant, have non-aggressive & non-invasive growing habits, and thrive on the hottest of rockeries.



We'll see how they overwinter at Reader Rock Garden. Stay tuned for their much-anticipated blooms early next spring 2023.

FoRRGS is all about celebrating Nature's beauty, especially in flowers, so we had to share this upcoming captivating event with you! Numerous vendors too.

Mark your September calendar - See their website at: CalgaryOrchidShow.com

Orchids for Everyone



**Show & Sale
September 17 & 18**

Sundance Ballroom
Deerfoot Inn & Casino
1000, 11500 35 St SE
Saturday, noon to 6, Sunday 10 to 4
Admission \$10 daily, \$15 weekend

Our vendors:

Aroids & Tropicals

Ceramics

Ching Hua Orchids
Clay Necessities
Ecuagenera
Incredigrow
Monica De Wit
Orchid Species Preservation Foundation
Garden Slippers
Ten Shin Gardens
Tropical Life Supply
Tropicals From South America

*Tropical & Garden
Orchids & Supplies*

Hoyas

(see the show webpage, calgaryorchidshow.com, for pre-order details & deadlines)





Annual Field Trip

By Diane M. Dalkin



On a pleasant June morning, FoRRGS had a delightful tour of **Rundle Wood Gardens** in Altadore, in SW Calgary. **Rodney Shaver & Llyn Strelau** provided us an in-depth view of the secret garden that lies within ... and, believe me “treasures” is an understatement. There’s so much to see and experience, I couldn’t possibly do justice to it all—the tried & true tested plants, the fabulous design elements, the successful cultivation practices, and such knowledgeable expertise in their business is truly commendable. And, besides that, it’s always a pleasure to connect with such kindred spirits and passionate gardeners!

Rod & Llyn own this home-based plant nursery specializing in unique and hardy perennials. It was created in 1996, on a 1/4 acre pie-shaped corner property in this quiet residential area.



The front garden (north-facing) consists of a woodland/shade garden. It has several deciduous trees, dwarf conifers, and ferns, Hosta, spring blooming bulbs and lots of other treasures (about 300 varieties of plants). The back gardens consist of 2 rock/crevice gardens, 1 rock wall, a bog/wet bed in full sun, and several general perennial beds in full sun to partial shade. Among some of the noteworthy are hardy, small flowered clematis (such as the Alpina's, Macropetala's, and Viticella's), dwarf conifers, species peonies, alpines and rock garden plants. Others that might grab your attention are: the well-sculptured & pruned smaller trees; a tall, light & airy Climbing Asparagus vine; a

salmon peach-colored fern-leaf peony [photo above]; an Arisaema triphyllum—Jack-in-the-Pulpit [photo below] neatly tucked away in the foliage awaiting to be discovered; unusual cacti & succulents; and, traces of numerous types of spring blooming Hepaticas. Not only is this THE place for experienced “plant-lovers & collectors”, but beginners would learn and be inspired by this special garden. It surely appeals to every gardener and is *highly recommended* as a must-see, in-person place for next year’s growing season.



Their website provides a glimpse into other fascinating details; see:

- ◆ <https://www.rundlewoodgardens.ab.ca/> or
- ◆ Check out this YouTube video for a great summary <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1NCloQOpb8>

Rundle Wood Gardens is located at *1643 Altadore Ave. SW*, Calgary, AB. Free street parking is available, but remember this is a residential area, so please be respectful of the neighbours’ properties. It’s best to check their website for future availability, as they’re closed for the season. I would suggest that you sign-up for notifications, just so you don’t miss when their coveted plant catalogue goes online.



- ♥ Top row L->R : Lindsey, Daniel, Erin, Chris, Fabian, Annette, Richard, Hans, Sue, Julie, Rachel, Linda, Colleen, David, Victoria, Susan, John
- ♥ Middle/Front row L->R : Stephanie, Lena, Luise, Joan, Pat, Rhona, Bruce, Diane, Yingchun, Sharon, Marion, Heather, Ann ♥

Awesome Work at the Plant Sale & Stroll!

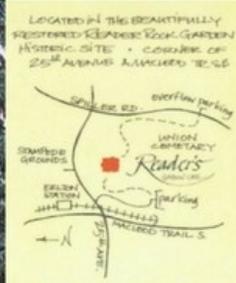


Reader's Garden Café is scheduled to close for the season on Sunday, **October 2nd, 2022.**

More Thanks Again To Helmut & the team at Reader's Garden Cafe
For providing us with yummy refreshments, cookies & lemonade, at our Plant Sale & Stroll These kind folks are so supportive of our initiatives at the Garden.



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 9:30 am to 3:00 pm
 Monday, Tuesday Closed

 Weddings & Functions



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



The Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society (CRAGS)
 2nd Thursday of each month
 (Jan-June and Sept-Nov) meetings
Lakeview Community Association Hall
 6110 34th Street SW.
Best to check their website for an up-to-date listing of events during these unusual times.
 See: www.crag.ca/events