

# The Reader Rock Garden

www.ReaderRock.com



NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF READER ROCK GARDEN SOCIETY

## Reader Rock Ramblings



### President's Message:

By Diane M. Dalkin

Sweater weather is around the corner ... the season is definitely changing, but there's still plenty of time for outdoor activities - perhaps a visit to **Reader Rock Garden & the Café** [before the *Cafe closes* for the season on *October 1st*].

This summer, Head Gardener, *Daniel*, his fabulous team and the dedicated volunteers made huge strides with the new Native Plants Garden. *Rosemary* introduces us to this long-planned-for area in her featured article [Pgs.2 & 3]. If you're not exactly sure where it is located [east side of Union Cemetery Chapel], ask our Tour Guides or the gardeners onsite, next time you're visiting. But, admittedly, the plants are tiny babies this year; stay tuned for flourishing growth and maturity in the coming years!

Another noteworthy highlight from this season ... You may have also noticed that our *Tour Guides* are back in the Garden. Thanks to *Rachel & Colleen* for leading this charge! They have championed re-establishing the team, expanded our roster of trained volunteers and started monthly public garden tours via Eventbrite. You'll likely meet these interesting & knowledgeable folks in the future as we continue to offer garden tours once again.

As you know, we often focus on the historical aspects of the site, the unique plant material and the wildlife that frequents the Garden, which are all very important; but there's also another part that deserves recognition ... *our awesome volunteers!* We need to celebrate them too. So, we're proudly starting a *Volunteers' Spotlight* to introduce some of our stars to you [see Pgs. 4 & 5]. I'm sure you'll agree that our energetic team consists of a captivating, illustrious cast. *Bravo indeed!!!*

This year, our "private, members-only" Plant Sale & Stroll event was also the ideal opportunity to celebrate *FoRRGS' 20th anniversary*. It was the perfect time for cake [shown right - *Glamorgan Bakery's* yummy art] and draw prizes from our community corporate supporters: A huge "*thank-you*" to *Greengate Garden Centres, Plantation Garden Centre, Lee Valley tools, Rocky Mountain Soap Co.[Southcentre]* and *Reader's Garden Café* for generously providing their quality gifts that our lucky members won on that day!



Even though we may be a few heartbeats away from Summer's end, Autumn brings its own beauty and respite. Let's embrace Nature's quieter pace and abundant harvests.

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#### FoRRGS Team

President - Diane Dalkin  
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## Reader Rock Native Plant Garden

By Rosemary Griebel

As an immigrant to Canada, **William Reader** brought a curiosity and fresh eyes to the native flora in his new home. He viewed species such as the shooting star (*Dodecatheon spp.*) and plains prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia polyacantha*) as horticultural gems that rivaled the exotic plant species he procured from Britain, France, Switzerland, New Zealand, India, and China.

Reader's goal was in his words, to make "*Calgary, the city beautiful of the west.*" To achieve this he sourced plants from around the world, as he wanted to explore the scope of horticultural possibilities in Calgary using plants found in similar environments around the world.

But Reader also recognized the value of local flora and was an authority on native plants of western Canada and the Canadian Rockies, where he spent weeks collecting new specimens. His knowledge of alpine plants in particular, essential for rock garden design, was well respected locally and internationally.

In the lectures that William Reader delivered and in his regular newspaper columns, he would encourage the use of local plants. For example, in a column about shrubs, he wrote: "*I think a great deal use should be made of native material. Many of these are quite as desirable as exotic species. What could be more pleasing, for instance, than the saskatoon both in its blossoming and its fruiting stage, also the chokecherry.*" (*Calgary Daily Herald*, 1911)

While the Reader Rock Garden provided citizens an opportunity to view rare and foreign plants it also allowed newcomers to the prairies an opportunity to get to know the natural and diverse beauty growing right in their own backyard. Perennials such as anise hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) took pride of place alongside exotic plants such as the Himalayan blue poppy (*Meconopsis betonicifolia*).

Over the past decade there has been a growing awareness and understanding of the importance of native plants, not only for how they celebrate a "sense of place" but also because they are adapted to native soils and have evolved with local insect, bird, and mammal populations over thousands of years, thus providing an important food source and shelter for diminishing populations of pollinators, beneficial insects, and the birds that feed on them.

In March 2022, Friends of Reader Rock Garden Society (FoRRGS) volunteer, *Colleen McCracken*, successfully applied for a grant from the Alberta Native Plant Council to support the design and development of a native plant bed in the underused site by the Union Cemetery chapel. Additional funds from FoRRGS supported the project.

Head Gardener and horticulturalist, *Daniel Walker*, then undertook the work of designing the site and securing the plants for the garden. With the support of staff and volunteers, the site was prepared and planted in late July 2023.

The following is an interview with Daniel Walker regarding the Reader Rock Native Garden:

**Q:** Can you talk about what inspired the development of the Reader Rock Native Garden?

**DW:** With the climate changing there is a push to plant local or native plant material that can adjust and adapt to lower water usage and the extreme temperature changes that are occurring on the prairies. This bed was chosen as it is open to full sun for almost the entire day and would be best to showcase the native plants "natural growing conditions". This area has no automated irrigation, so it seemed fitting to plant plants that are adapted to the harsh growing conditions.



**Q:** How many native species are included in the garden?

**DW:** There are approximately 103 native species on Reader's list. Currently the Native Plant Bed has 56 species. There are plans to add more of the Reader listed native plants in the years to come.

**Q:** What were some of the challenges with the site, and how did you prepare the site for planting?

**DW:** NO irrigation, and existing trees and shrubs were factors with water usage. I knew that the southeast facing site that was sloped would prove to be a challenge, moisture wise. The large spruce is part of the shelterbelt and could not be removed but we decided to remove some of the non-native shrubs to make space for some native ones. Nanking cherry (*Prunus tomentosa*), cotoneaster, and caragana were removed, while saskatoon (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), shrubby cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruticosa*), silver buffaloberry (*Shepherdia argentea*) and wolf willow (*Eleagnus commutata*) were planted instead. More native shrubs are planned for 2024.

The soil had been baked for years and the moisture sucked out by the spruce. We added some shredded leaves collected from the garden and spaded them into the bed. The site was sprayed in the fall of 2022 and spring of 2023 for perennial weeds with a nonselective herbicide. After these applications, hand pulling will be the main source of control. I know a lot of native plants prefer leaner soils, so we thought this was the best method of having leaves breaking down into the soil rather than bringing in loads of compost. Once the soil was turned and raked flat we added some above ground supplemental irrigation (Lee Valley system) that we will use for the next two years to help get the plants established. We will continue to apply a thin layer of shredded leaves each spring to help return nutrients to the soil. This will be the only "food" that the plants will receive.

**Q:** Were many of the native plants from Reader Rock Garden stock, and/or did you source from other native plant growers?





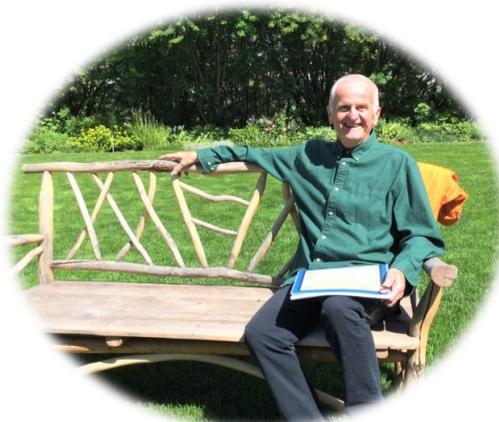
## Volunteers' Spotlight!

By Diane M. Dalkin

In keeping with this year's **20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration** of FoRRGS efforts at the Garden, it's the perfect opportunity to focus on some of the special individuals with BIG hearts that make the Garden thrive with personality!

May we introduce you to:

### **Bruce Dunlop - Volunteer Gardener Lead**



**Q:** *Your hometown?* I was born and raised in L A - Lethbridge Alberta - The Windy City.

**Q:** *When did you arrive in Calgary?* I've been in Calgary since 1962.

**Q:** *Favorite Book[s]/movie[s]?* I am a DUNE FAN - along with SCIENCE FICTION and FANTASY stories.

**Q:** *Have a favorite saying or perspective?* "When One Door Closes - Another Door Opens".

**Q:** *Hobbies or non-work related interests?*

I do love gardening. Hiking was my favourite pastime - Oh the places I saw!

**Q:** *Career paths/work experience?*

I entered Accounting with Bank of Montreal - took a break in Sales at The Palliser Hotel, and returned to Accounting at The City of Calgary for 50 years.

**Q:** *Where & what did you study as an adult?*

My Accounting courses were taken at SAIT, University of Calgary and correspondence courses.

**Q:** *What do you do at Reader Rock Garden [RRG] & how long have you volunteered?*

I volunteer [for many years] with Friends of Reader Rock Garden - Garden Volunteers, helping to have volunteers lined up to help each week. I enjoy any help I can do at Reader Rock.

**Q:** *Best thing[s] about RRG?*

The Serenity and Peace it offers. "The Secret Garden" has been a Family favourite for years - for picnics, my children's location for their Wedding Photos, and now a important part of my life.

**Q:** *Most challenging thing about RRG?*

Getting up and down the paths with my walker - BUT, it can be done especially with Daniel Walker's help - Also, all the challenging work is done so well by The Executive Board.

**Q:** *What have you discovered at RRG, learnings?* I have discovered a gold mine of information and great pleasure in seeing so many different plants and flowers. Its amazing how pleasant and interesting the friendly Volunteers are - a real pleasure to visit with in the garden while we work along.

**Q:** *What would you like the public to know about this special place?* Just visit once and see how special the garden is - then they would return to continue enjoying it.

**Q:** *Must-see highlight[s] onsite?* It starts when you enter the little gate and start up on the path - the spectacular view draws you into the garden. The bridge and pergola continue to draw you up to the Main Lawn and all the other pathways. There is so much to see and enjoy here - plus, rare and different plants. The view back down from the little bridge is mesmerizing and still so much to see and enjoy.

**Q:** *Other things you'd like to share with us?* Its a pleasure to be able to help out as a Volunteer at Reader Rock Garden. I tell everyone I talk to ... Come and visit the garden!





Continued ... Volunteers' Spotlight - Part 2:

*May we also introduce you to:*

### **Colleen McCracken - Tour Guide Lead**

**Q:** *Your hometown?* Toronto

**Q:** *When did you arrive in Calgary?* Fall of 1979

**Q:** *Favorite Book[s]/movie[s]?* I have been in a book club for many years. I enjoy a good mystery, books by First Nation authors and a wide variety of fiction.

**Q:** *Have a favorite saying or perspective?* Do the best you can - given the circumstances and resources available.

**Q:** *Hobbies or non-work related interests?* I love being outside gardening, paddling, skiing and hiking.

**Q:** *Career paths/work experience?* Worked at the Calgary Horticultural Society for 10 years – five as the Volunteer Manager and five as the Executive Director. My work background before that was land use and organizational planning.

**Q:** *Where & what did you study as an adult?* I am a Master Gardener and group facilitator. I studied public engagement in decision making processes. At the University of Calgary, in Geography my focus was water resource management. At the Faculty of Environmental Design here in Calgary my focus was socio-economic impact assessment in energy projects.

**Q:** *Previous/current work experience?* I had a contract consulting business specializing in research and planning services such as needs assessments, program development and evaluations, public engagement and facilitation processes.

**Q:** *Professional affiliations or publications?* I published two articles about vegetable gardening in the Dawson City Yukon Arctic publication of the Arctic Institute.

**Q:** *What do you do at Reader Rock Garden [RRG] & how long have you volunteered?* I am a Director-at-Large, Tour Guide and help organize the tour guide program. I also assist with fundraising & research grant possibilities. This is my third year volunteering with RRG.

**Q:** *Best thing[s] about RRG?* The strong group of staff and volunteers committed to supporting and restoring Reader's vision.

**Q:** *Most challenging thing about RRG?* Keeping up-to-date on the extensive number of plants.

**Q:** *What have you discovered at RRG, learnings?* A lovely group of like-minded people.

**Q:** *What would you like the public to know about this special place?* RRG is more than a flower garden. This Provincial and National Historic Site is important and worthy of the restoration and education work underway. As a tour guide, I share information about past and future plans, design, heritage plants, and the important contributions William Reader made as a horticulturist, plant collector and educator.

**Q:** *Must-see highlight[s] onsite?* Staff and volunteers working in the garden; they are the heart and soul of the garden.

**Q:** *Other things you'd like to share with us?* RRG is a special gem in Calgary. Come and visit the garden and share the experience with your friends.





**Thank You Corporate Supporters!!!**

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*Reader's Garden Café is scheduled to close for the season on Sunday, **October 1st, 2023.***

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Call 403-234-0065 or see the website:  
[www.readersgardencafe.ca](http://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.

**Sept 14 - "Last Chance Plant Sale" @6:00 pm & Medicinal Native Plants talk @7:00 pm.** Check their website for an up-to-date listing.

See: [www.crag.ca/events](http://www.crag.ca/events)

