

Friends of Reader Rock Garden Society



Spring Newsletter

2025 Issue 1

New Look!

This year we are transitioning our quarterly newsletters to be delivered via Mailchimp rather than PDF format. This will increase security of our content and ensure we are not sending attachments via email which are often a method used for phishing attacks.

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President's Message

By: Diane M. Dalkin

Spring's promise has arrived and so too has the excitement for the season ahead. Some of our plans have germinated for the upcoming activities. Our website will keep you up-to-date with all the details and we'll send out reminders closer to the dates of events. In the next section below, you can find a quick summary for your calendars.

We're also starting off positively as we welcome two new Board members.

Susan Brims is a long-time FoRRGS volunteer and now she has graciously stepped up to become the *Volunteer Gardener Lead*. Susan works closely with the City Head Gardener, Ben, to ensure that the hands-on team brings diligent support and expertise, while maintaining awesome standards at our special garden. In fact, the volunteers have already been hard at work for quite some time attending to the seedlings in the greenhouse.

Rosemary Griebel was featured in our previous issue in the "Volunteer Spotlight" which touched upon what this caring and knowledgeable person brings to the team. *Colleen McCracken*, another long-term FoRRGS volunteer has expanded her role to that of Vice-President. Good things are coming, there's no doubt!

We're definitely thrilled to have all of these highly experienced, accomplished new Directors on our Board. *Thanks for stepping Susan, Rosemary & Colleen!*

A few weeks ago, Ben and I were invited to attend a Calgary Horticultural Society's Master Gardeners' class to pitch our volunteer opportunities at the Garden. And, to our delight, some of these new leaders have answered the call and offered their expertise to FoRRGS & the Garden. *It's great to have such community support and the Garden will benefit from everyone's contributions!*

Upcoming Events for 2025

Welcome 2025!



Mark Your Calendars

Some of our plans for the new season:

- MARCH 22 – Participating at Seedy Saturday
- APRIL 26 – Participating at CHS Gardeners' Market
- MAY 2 – Reader's Garden Café Re-Opens
- MAY 4 – Public AGM
- JUNE 8 – Members-Only Plant Sale & Garden Stroll
- JULY/AUG - TBD – Participating in Historic Calgary Week
- SEPTEMBER 21 – Volunteer Appreciation event

Join Us...



Hope to see you there!



Introducing Ben: The New Head Gardener

By: Diane M. Dalkin

We promised to introduce you to the new Head Gardener at Reader Rock Garden, *Benjamin Suehsschlaf*. So, we posed a few questions to him, just to share some insights with us.

Q: Your hometown?

I grew up in a small-town of ~1100 people called Langenburg, SK. The town is divided by the Trans Canada Highway (Highway 16) a few kilometers before the Manitoba border. I technically grew up 5 km NW of town on a small farm of 160 acres which has been in the family since 1893. My great grandparents immigrated from Germany, where they took advantage of the Homestead Act to lay their roots down here in Canada.

Q: When did you arrive in Calgary?

I moved to Calgary in July of 2007. I had previously been living in Saskatoon, SK for a few years however, I found myself ready to move somewhere a little larger and gain some more experiences. Like many people from Saskatchewan, Calgary was just the next stepping stone to do this, and I am quite content to stay here. I always say, "It's big enough, but not too big".

Q: Favorite book(s)/movie(s)?

Asking me to choose a favourite of anything is always difficult. I have a wide range of likes so it really depends on the given day. For both books and movies, I tend to lean toward Science Fiction/Fantasy. I really didn't develop a love for books until I was a big older, around 20 years old, where I ended up diving into the world of Harry Potter and power reading through all the books. I loved them. Anything that gets my imagination going is a win. Since then, series such as His Dark Materials and A Song of Ice and Fire, have also been a couple favourites of mine. I certainly could name few more though.

Q: Have a favorite saying or perspective?

I probably have two, "It's worth a shot," and "It is what it is". Sometimes these go hand in hand. While I can be a creature of habit, I still tend to like to explore and try new ideas. I've learned over the years no matter how diligent or prepared you think you

are, sometimes life has other ideas and things are out of your control. Sure, you can get upset about it but learning to adapt and change will only benefit you in the end.

Q: Hobbies or non-work related interests?

Outside of gardening, I enjoy playing sports and making my way out to the mountains or camping. I hadn't really been camping since I was a kid so the past couple years, I've tried to get out somewhere for at least a weekend or two each summer. I've been trying to do a few more day trips out to the mountains as well. Sometimes it's a hike or snowshoe trail and sometimes it's just a day trip to walk around in Banff and Canmore, or skate at Lake Louise. For sports, I curl quite a bit in the wintertime. I somehow found myself on 4 different teams which keeps me busy each week. I also play tennis, though, not as often as I used to. I find myself getting out to hit and enjoy the activity instead of tournaments and league play. This frees up a bit more time for me to get into the garden

Q: Where & what did you study in post-secondary school?

This is a fun topic :). Post-secondary was a bit all over the place for me. While I felt like I should be there, I found it hard to pinpoint what I really wanted to do in life. I started at the University of Saskatchewan majoring in Biochemistry (I did switch my major a few times before landing here). I completed 3 years there before transferring to the University of Calgary. While at the U of C, they wanted me to repeat many classes because the course material was "slightly different", so I chose to continue with some of my electives which happened to be in languages at the time. This drew me down a path into majoring in French and Spanish with a minor in biological sciences. I really enjoyed learning languages but since I wasn't truly immersed, I would do well at the writing and grammar but struggle with the conversational skills. Again, I completed 3 years before taking a break. The break extended longer than anticipated of course and I tried an accelerated program at SAIT in Petroleum Land Administration which was quite interesting, but timing was terrible as the oil price plummeted during this program and so did all the jobs. I had wanted to study Horticulture for a few years by this point, so I made the decision to just do it! I was so glad I did. I felt comfortable at Olds College, engaged, and excited to be there. This one felt "right" and my past education in sciences really helped a lot as well. It was quite a journey but I'm glad to have landed where I am today.

Q: Previous work experience? Horticultural or otherwise?

I believe my first job started at age 13, cutting grass for my grandma's town, Shellmouth, MB, and for a few people in her town as well. I did this until I graduated from high school. Around age 16, I also worked at our local CO-OP gas station and in summers, I worked on a honey farm as well, extracting honey. After I left home, I

worked many years in the food and beverage industry. I worked at the Delta Bessborough hotel in Saskatoon for a few years and then at a restaurant on 17th Avenue in Calgary called Fiore for about 10 years. After Olds College, I worked for a local garden company called, Garden Essentials, where I was able to gain some good experience with them before ending up with the city at Reader Rock Garden. I've been with the City of Calgary since 2021, each season with Reader Rock Garden.

Q: Best thing(s) about Reader Rock Garden (RRG)?

For me, this is the diverse plant collection. Even these days, this is a large collection of species for a garden in Calgary and I'm excited to continually learn more about them all. Being able to grow, collect, propagate, and study the plants here is truly exciting. I also love how close it is to the heart of Calgary yet also tucked away. It's truly a hidden gem in Calgary.

**Q: Your cool discoveries at RRG, learnings?
(historical/flora/fauna/insects/etc.?)**

Reader Rock Garden doesn't just have a diverse plant collection, but a diverse micro ecosystem as well. The amount of animal and insect sightings here have been so interesting. I've been able to witness sightings of bobcats, badgers, deer, coyotes, marmots, ermine, eagles, owls, hawks, etc. You just never know what you're going to see some days.

Q: What would you like the public to know about this special place?

I think the history and the importance of this garden back in Reader's time. This really was a place that helped Calgary become what it is today. The importance of trialing what could grow here when there really wasn't much here when Calgary was a young city. Showcasing the many species of plants that could grow in this, sometimes harsh, climate really could influence settlers to want to stay and build a life here.

Q: All-time favorite plant/tree at RRG or in the plant world?

Who can really choose just one? Both the early and late bloomers catch my eye. The early blooming Hepatica species, Adonis amurensis, and Daphne mezereum really let us know that spring is finally here! We sometimes need to be reassured of that.

Q: Must-sees highlights onsite?

Of course I'll say there are many. As you enter the West Garden and climb the pathway up towards the Main Lawn, you'll come across the quaint ponds and stream. The bridge that overlooks the Upper Pond area is a must see and photo opportunity.

The Main Lawn offers up the Reader Rock Garden Café historic replica of William Reader's house and the tranquil gazebo area where you can sit and relax. The Upper Garden, or Nana's Garden, gives you that piece of "secret garden" feeling where you no longer feel inside the big city. The top of the High Rockery will provide a beautiful scenic site of the city's core as a backdrop to the garden itself. You really can't go wrong wherever you walk in the garden.

Q: Your future plans for RRG &/or any insider scoop?

With the National Historic Site designation of the garden, it's really more about maintaining it and keeping it to the high-level which William Reader would have had it back in his time. We do have plans though for the space around our depot area.

While it doesn't technically fall under the historic designation, we want to keep it consistent with the rest of the garden but educational and continue William Reader's work of trialing new plants. Reader Rock Garden was a trial garden so why not continue that legacy of trialing plants in Calgary, especially since the climate here has changed over the past 100 years.

Q: Best eats at the Reader's Garden Café, if applicable?

All I know is I have to work through the delicious smell of onions frying as I work some days which really primes us all for lunch time.

Q: Most challenging task(s) at RRG?

I would have to say just keeping up with the large garden. Plants don't work on our schedule, so we have to adapt to theirs. Maintenance is crucial here and thankfully we have support from volunteers to help keep the garden under control and healthy.

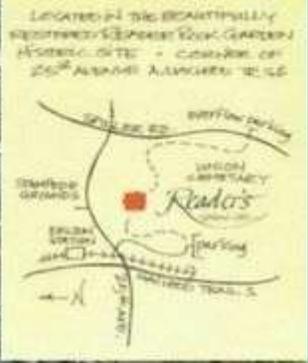
Even something as simple as weeding can quickly become a daunting task if you find yourself even a little bit behind. Aside from that, learning all the many species in the garden is always an ongoing challenge (a good one). I wish I could plug my brain into a database and just download all the information if I could. I have to follow in some pretty substantial footsteps of previous gardeners and trying to keep up with that will also be challenging enough!

Thanks to our corporate supporters!

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Brunch

Open from Mid April to mid October
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Wednesday to Sunday
9:30 am to 3:00 pm
Monday, Tuesday Closed



Reader's Garden Cafe is closed for the winter season. It will reopen May 2, 2025.
10% discount available for FoRRGS members.

[Visit Reader's Garden Cafe website](#)



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Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society (CRAGS)



Hybrid Monthly Meetings hosted 2nd Thursday of each month

Online via Zoom, or in-person at:

Lakeview Community Association Hall

6110 34th Street SW

[Visit CRAGS website for upcoming events](#)

FoRRGS Team

President - Diane Dalkin

Vice-President - Colleen McCracken

Treasurer - Victoria Arling

Membership - Lena Cordell

Secretary - Catherine Ranger

Directors - Susan Brims, Marcy Carlson, Rosemary Griebel, Magdalena Muir, John Percic

Social Media - *Vacant*

Webmaster - *Vacant*

Interested in volunteering with FoRRGS?

Send us an email at info@readerrock.com or visit our website to learn more!

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