

Friends of Reader Rock Garden Society



Fall Newsletter

2025 Issue 3

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President's Message

By: Diane M. Dalkin

The summer of 2025 was a sharp contrast to last year's hot, drought-like, water-restricted scenario when we scrounged around for that very precious resource of moisture and hydration. This year's abundance of record-breaking rain was most beneficial to our landscapes, although those dealing with leaky basements would balk at the suggestion that this unusual weather pattern was a reprieve. Some other parks, like Confederation, got flooded several times and this presented all sorts of unique challenges. Additionally, the clouds of wicked mosquitoes certainly sent us running for the safety of indoors or creating innovative barriers to their bites. Yikes, what nasty buggers! Slugs and snails have proliferated under these wet conditions, eating their ways through leaves and stems.

Still, on the bright side ... wildfire damage and smoke were lessened, our water reservoirs are full, our gardens are lush and green, and plants' growth seems to be in extra-large mode. From a gardener's perspective, generally, all is good. But a tad more sunshine would be well received to ripen up the veggie patch.

Yet, despite these grumblings/blessings, we must remember to accept the things we cannot change like the weather and focus on all the good things too. For instance, the recent honor of the international **Green Flag Award**, a prestigious achievement for the Garden!! We're still beaming with pride for this accomplishment in June – *first in Canada, no less!*

See this link for more details: <https://www.greenflagaward.org/news/calgary-makes-history-with-first-green-flag-awards-in-canada/>

Plus, an increase in visitors to the Garden was a welcome development too.

And, then there are our fabulous volunteers ... we have been truly fortunate to welcome many new, generous, and capable individuals joining our team. You've probably noticed that our Social Media has been more active in the past few months. *Janis Isaman*, the person behind these initiatives is featured in this issue of our "Volunteer Focus". We're delighted to introduce her to you.

Our new Webmaster, *Lorna Hightower*, is making sure our online technology is operating as intended and ensuring that our website remains healthy.

Another new Board Director, *Vita Leung*, will be sharing her talents with us too. We also salute *Maura Hamill* for the expertise she brings to our Tour Guide team.

The hands-on volunteer gardeners' team has blossomed under *Susan Brims'* and *Ben Suehsschlaf's* leaderships. To say that *the Garden is powered by volunteers* wouldn't be an exaggeration.

Our annual Plant Sale on June 8th was a resounding success, with record revenue from plant sales. Credit is due to Ben and his team for their dedication, above and beyond the call of duty. *Sincerest thanks to ALL who made it happen!!*

So many of our tasks are behind the scenes, yet these "invisible" efforts are mighty in the grand scheme of things. We never take this impact for granted but remain forever appreciative to our volunteers and supporters, *Bravo!*

Oh No, Not Again!

By Diane M. Dalkin



I am really disheartened to be writing about this unsavory topic once again. It is not unique to Reader Rock Garden, as many other parks and gardens experience it too. Our recent social media feed stated that we are “*speechless*” about this, but really we were just being polite in addressing the nonsense. However, “angry choice words” did come to mind, but don’t bear repeating out of respect for our audience. Yet, as supporters of the Garden, you deserve to know the goings-on. And as a first step, we are acknowledging that plant theft and disregard for garden etiquette is an ongoing problem:

When valued green spaces are the victim of crimes, this is not a mere aesthetic problem.

This year’s incidents at Reader’s included another break-in to the Café, reckless littering after using the park, stealing seeds, snipping flowers, trampling into flower beds for photo opportunities, and these are only the things we’re aware of. I’m certain additional nasty offences have gone undetected. Given that the park/garden is quite large and secluded it’s difficult to ascertain if other things are missing. The true scale is challenging to accurately estimate given that so much is hidden. Nonetheless, wait until you hear about the next effrontery ...

Sometime between the evening of Friday, June 27th or the early morning hours of Saturday, June 28th, *unscrupulous thugs stole grass sod* from Reader Rock Garden. Yes, that is correct – ridiculous as it seems, the target was turf, also known as grass!

Head Gardener, Ben, stated that *“while the cost of the sod seems minor compared to other items in the Garden that could have been stolen, the labour and time put into re-sodding is also an expense. Plus, the cost to replace the inventory and repair the site. This is really unfortunate for all of us to have to deal with and it’s not trivial.”*

The stolen sod came from the grassy area in the vicinity of the High Rockery and the entrance to the Western Slope area [near Bed 26/top of Bed 15]. Evidence suggests that the scoundrels may have used the isolated proximity of the north road by the Union Cemetery Chapel for their unobserved vandalism and sneaky get-away.

I certainly can’t make any sense of this incident and the other pre-planned boorishness at the Garden. Perhaps these cads were re-selling the stolen plant material for a profit? Or maybe it was a false sense of entitlement or lack of awareness of others’ enjoyment and privilege of this National Historic Site.

Whether it’s theft or vandalism, other public gardens *“tell the same story of lucrative illicit opportunities for criminals where law enforcement and potential sanctions are low. It’s most likely that people steal local plants to sell on for profit.”*²

Yet, it’s not any one specific incident that is the problem, it’s the patterns, the annual trends that are worrisome. I recently read an article which echoed similar concerns and provided numerous other examples. *“The Discourtesy Epidemic”* touches upon that *“small cracks are showing in our veneer of civility; they may be signals of a deeper fracture; a breakdown in common courtesy”*. I agree with the author that *“human relations are coarsening; there’s a binary political culture turning us into adversaries; and a numbing of empathy prevails.”* Many conditions have fostered this sad disregard: *“social media is partly to blame, with its inauthentic connectivity and hollow communication”*. Still, the bigger societal problem is *“our dwindling sense of obligation to one another”* and our environments. This is not a debt owed but a responsibility to treat each other with respect. And it is a responsibility, not an option.”

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Furthermore, *“it is likely that these crimes get dismissed as only a minor nuisance because -only plants- were stolen, but this attitude serves to mask the broader trend of growing environmental crime and the damage this brings to communities. Unfortunately, this dismissal may exacerbate further the likelihood of such crimes spreading in future.”*⁴

So, the real question is *“what are we going to do about it”*? Clearly, we need a plan. Firstly, ongoing continuing education efforts are essential; we need to remind the

public about valuable social mores, i.e. what is acceptable here at the Garden. The City of Calgary's website offers clear "*garden etiquette*" guidelines; and signage throughout the garden also attempts to get the message out. See link below:

<https://www.calgary.ca/parks/reader-rock-garden.html>

But when these subtle strategies aren't enough and clearly don't work, which increasingly seems to be the case with annual disappointing incidents, perhaps it's time to *proactively take on stronger initiatives to protect the Garden*. Increased security and surveillance need to be encouraged and explored further [update city by-laws with substantial consequences for violations, visible patrolling, CCTV cameras, limiting site access, ensure pathways are clear, motion detector lighting, fencing, community-focused neighbourhood watch, etc. ... should all be considered and revisited].

Even Mr. Reader, way back in his day, recognized the need for proactive prevention, as he often noted in his annual reports as *Superintendent of Parks, Cemeteries, & Recreation 1913-43* :

- These areas were policed using **Commissionaires on motor bikes** - patrolled the parks and playgrounds, responding to complaints, issuing warnings and citations pertaining to all sorts of things:
e.g. the "**vicious nature of vandalism**", use of "**bad obscene language**", *unruliness, noise, horses roaming-at-large, stray dogs & cats, mischievous children, throwing stones, stolen plants, cattle ranging in parks, wild driving and speeding indulged at night, parking violations, careless uncontrolled fires, malicious persons, carrying firearms, destruction of lamp globes, driving into shrubbery, damage done by ignorant and mischievous elements visiting the parks, flagpole ropes stolen, stealing golf balls, unsanitary conditions, personal cleanliness, littering, to ensure that bathers were properly clothed, rough play, other forms of hooliganism, and preventing the development of jungle communities.*"

While our current problems with minimizing bad behavior in public are not exactly the same as Mr. Reader's era, there still is a timeless element of control we must not forgo. Have we not learned anything in the last hundred years? Do we have to continue to accept this unacceptable deviance? We, individually and as a society, need to adopt new strategies to build on the positive, with respect and kindness being paramount on our awareness list. This *National Historic Site* deserves all our individual attentions and stewardship efforts. It is also vital that City Parks' oversight needs to prioritise this safety too. Real consequences for these types of crimes must be enforced, and proactive prevention/deterrents must be in-place!

The joy of gardening and this serene space should not be marred by vandalism and theft. Surely, we can all do better?!

References:

1.2.4. Cauvain, Jenni “*Plant theft is often overlooked - that’s why it’s on the rise*”. July 14, 2025 – available online at The Conversation.com.

3. Gillespie, Curtis “*The Discourtesy Epidemic*”, University of Alberta Magazine Spring/Summer 2025, pgs. 10 & 11.

Did You Know?

By Diane M. Dalkin



Did you know that Fall bird migration has already started? Experts note the approximate timeline for this annual event is August 1 to November 15, but of course there are regional variations. Plus, there are nocturnal migrating flocks, which leads us to consider “lights out” initiatives.

Studies have shown that “*attracted by artificial light at night, particularly when there is low cloud, fog, rain or when flying at lower altitudes, migrating birds become disorientated and may end up circling in illuminated areas. Depleted energy reserves put them at risk of exhaustion, predation and fatal collision with buildings.*”

A solution could be as simple as turning off the lights at night, according to Jordan-McLachlan, who said 80 per cent of migratory birds fly at night. Not only does this support birds and other wildlife but also reduce energy consumption.¹

For years, each morning when I went to my office on the 43rd floor in downtown Calgary, regrettably I witnessed a staggering number of dead birds that had collided with the high-rise buildings’ reflective windows. Building maintenance staff had the unenviable daily task of sweeping up all these tiny victims. Fortunately, new awareness in the downtown has helped to minimize these unnecessary bird deaths.

But that still leaves us with our own responsibility at home. Too many decorative outdoor lights are on timers in our neighbourhoods. Just turn these off and consider motion sensor lights instead. There are other resources noted below that offer simple solutions to co-existing with birds, definitely worthy reading on those sites.

As for enjoying our local feathered friends, Reader Rock Garden is often an ideal habitat and refuge perfect for bird-watching these winged visitors. Albeit the resident raptors may scare away certain oiseaux. Furthermore, “Merlin” is a free global bird ID and field guide app powered by sightings and media. It is a worthy addition to your migration observation tools.

More resources:

1. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/conservation-group-suggests-lights-out-by-law-to-protect-migrating-birds>
2. Check out these wonderful local initiatives: <https://www.birdfriendlycalgary.ca/>
3. More helpful resources from Audubon, download free brochures & other useful tools: <https://www.audubon.org/news/reducing-collisions-glass>



Volunteer Focus: Janis Isaman

We would like to introduce our new Social Media Director & Contributing Photographer, *Janis Isaman*! If you follow us on Instagram, you will know that she has already made a big impact on our social media accounts. To get to know Janis better, read on below for a Q & A. And don't forget to

follow us on Instagram

[@readerrockgarden!](#)



Question: Your hometown?

I'm a small-town Alberta girl at heart; I grew up in Consort.

Q: When did you arrive in Calgary?

I made the move to Calgary in 2012, and it's been wonderful to put down roots and become so involved in this community.

Q: Favorite Book[s]/movie[s]?

I almost exclusively read non-fiction. You can usually find me surrounded by books about psychology—anything related to the work of experts like Gabor Maté or Bessel van der Kolk—or curled up with a cookbook looking for inspiration. I don't even use them to cook!

Q: Have a favorite saying or perspective?

My entire professional philosophy is built on the idea that true vitality comes from agency, choice, and capacity. It's not about forcing ourselves to conform; it's about listening to our bodies and empowering ourselves through what is authentically of interest.

Q: Hobbies or non-work-related interests?

Well, my passion for photography is a big one, which is why I'm so thrilled to be in this role! Beyond that, I love writing, listening to podcasts, weight training, and, as you might guess, volunteering with a number of fantastic local organizations.

Q: Career paths/work experience?

My career has had two beautiful, intertwining paths. I am the founder of My Body Couture, where I work as a Trauma Sensitive Movement Specialist, helping individuals with chronic pain and movement limitations. Parallel to that, I've built a

second career in photography and social media, capturing events for organizations like TELUS Spark, Globalfest, and The Confluence, which has now led me here.

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

I hold a Bachelor of Commerce in Marketing from the University of Alberta. But my real passion for learning is in continuous education. I've pursued extensive certifications in trauma therapy—like Compassionate Inquiry and Trauma Centre Trauma Sensitive Movement—in movement modalities like STOTT Pilates and Yamuna Body Rolling, and in nutrition from places like the Institute of Integrative Nutrition. I'm almost always enrolled in a course!

Q: Previous/current work experience?

Currently, I run my private practice, My Body Couture, and I serve on several boards of directors, including the 17th Avenue Business District and Globalfest. Previously, I spent over a decade in the fashion and magazine world in New York City and Toronto, working as a Fashion Director for companies like Hearst Magazines and IMG. That experience in branding and visual storytelling deeply informs the work I do today.

Q: Professional affiliations or publications?

I've been fortunate to be featured as a health expert in publications like Reader's Digest, Women's Health, and Prevention. I'm also an award-winning writer for Elephant Journal and have been a guest on over 300 podcasts to discuss my trauma-sensitive approach to movement.

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

As of 2025, I am a proud member of the Board of Directors for Reader Rock Garden; in my capacity as Social Media Director, I help provide governance and strategic direction to preserve and promote this incredible historic site.

Q: Best thing[s] about RRG?

It is an absolute oasis. The best thing is the unique combination of stunning, curated gardens and profound Calgary history, all sitting on a hilltop with these breathtaking views of the city. It's a place of peace and beauty.

Q: Most challenging thing about RRG?

I think the biggest challenge is balancing its role as a preserved heritage site with the need to make it vibrant, accessible, and relevant for the public. We want everyone to know about this gem and to feel welcome to experience it.

Q: What have you discovered at RRG?

As a photographer, I'm constantly inspired by the light and the landscapes there. Every season offers a new perspective and a new beauty to capture. It's been a wonderful lesson in seeing the same place with fresh eyes again and again.

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

I want them to know that it's so much more than just a garden. It's a living piece of Calgary's history. It's a place for quiet contemplation, for inspiration, and to truly appreciate the artistry of landscape and design. It's our very own secret garden.

Q: Must-see highlight[s] onsite?

You absolutely must see the historic Reader House itself—it's beautiful. Then, just wander the paths and take in the specific plantings; they change so beautifully throughout the year. And don't forget to pause and enjoy the panoramic view of the downtown skyline from the grounds.

Q: Other things you'd like to share with us?

I'm a deeply engaged community volunteer; beyond RRG, I'm involved with the Calgary Stampede on their Royalty and Concessions & Exhibits Committees in a social media capacity, Heritage Park, The Confluence, and many arts organizations like Theatre Calgary. But my most important and rewarding role is being an engaged and connected mother. All of these pieces—my professional work, my volunteering, and my photography—are all connected by a desire to help people find beauty, strength, and connection

Thanks to our corporate supporters!

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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 - Magdalena Muir (*acting*)

Directors - Susan Brims, Marcy Carlson, Rosemary Griebel, Sue Gryzenhout, Vita Leung,
John Percic

Social Media - Janis Isaman

Webmaster - Lorna Hightower

Interested in volunteering with FoRRGS?

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

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