

Friends of Reader Rock Garden Society



Winter Newsletter

2025 Issue 4

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President's Message

By: Diane M. Dalkin

Our first snowfall has already blanketed the landscape in a fresh veil of white. The inevitable cold, wintery season is ahead, and outdoor gardening is paused. This year, astronomical winter begins on 21 December 2025 and ends on 20 March 2026.

Winter

reminds us that *everything needs some quiet time*, but in a gardener's optimistic mind, planning and dreaming never really ceases.

Yet, reminiscing about this year's accomplishments is always a good starting point.

Head Gardener, Ben Suehsschlaf covers this in his "2025 year-end review", see following pages. We are so grateful for Ben's passionate dedication, positivity, expertise and professionalism; plus, he's a super nice person too! His first year at the helm was a spectacular success, *bravo to Ben* and his entire team.

Furthermore, *Jeffrey M.*, Zone 5 Superintendent and all the other City teams with Parks & Open Spaces that made our work easier and more meaningful deserve acknowledgement too: *Kyle M. & Lauren G.* with the Communications team, Rental Coordinator *Victoria C.*, the entire Operations team and *Michelle Reid*, the Cultural Landscape Lead. Thank-you so very much!!

The Garden continues to teach us through its history and present-day beauty. Even though I have been volunteering here for over two decades, I still gain new insights virtually every year. That's the rich legacy of this Cultural Landscape; it keeps on giving.

For instance, *Phillip Reader* [one of Mr. Reader's grandsons] recently recalled that his grandfather "*had an impressive mushroom growing operation behind the house; these*

were yummy edible mushrooms". I hadn't heard about this interesting tidbit before, but

this new info challenges us to find some documentation to corroborate this fungi foray.

Mr. Reader left extensive notes on his work, but we are so grateful to his family for sharing their memories of long ago with us. These types of reminiscences truly bring

back the essence of life during the early years of this site's development. There are many other voices from the past that we're uncovering from our archival research and from Mr. Reader's weekly column in the Herald. I touch upon one such amusing topic in the "Spudtacular Finding", see below.

Back to present times ... ALL of our volunteers also added to the favorable outcomes this year; we are delighted to have such an amazing growing team. We're indebted to their heartfelt, generous contributions: the Board of Directors, Colleen's Tour Guides and Susan's Hands-On Gardeners powered the Garden with commendatory energy. Well-done to every single one of you!!

In keeping with our appreciation of the volunteers, this time we're featuring Lorna Hightower, offering a glimpse into who she is and what's her role with FoRRGS. As I've heard from many of you, it is indeed so interesting to learn more about the people behind the scenes. Read on to find out more.

As the final month is now upon us, may I extend to ALL of you, our deepest thanks for your support this year! With such wonderful community patronage, the Garden's legacy lives on, just like Mr. Reader would have wanted.

May the Seasonal Holidays be safe & good to YOU, filled with restful Peace & Joy. Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Enjoy the Winter, and see you in 2026!



Head Gardener's 2025 Year-End Review

By: Benjamin Suchsschlaf

As the season comes to an end, I reflect on what a wonderful past year this has been.

Sure, there will always be a couple blips along the way but overall, the accomplishments made in 2025 far outweigh them.

Spring came right on time, even a little early which had us running out of the gate to get spring clean up done, the weeds under control, and everything set in its place for the season. Before we knew it, the FoRRGS plant sale was among us which once again, the weather was fantastic and so were the many people who joined us that day. I personally was able to take away good insight from the sale and many good memories as well. I look forward to next year's sale.

With little time to waste, the following day had us on our toes, showcasing the garden to the Green Flag Award judges. This was a wonderful experience for everyone involved and the outmost gratitude to all the volunteers who have helped keep the garden looking great all these years. This award was great recognition for the hard work everyone puts in and FoRRGS has always been a big part of that. Well done! For more info check out this article: [Calgary makes history with first green flag awards in Canada](#).

The summer (or not so summer) had us a little wetter and cooler than we were used to, but the Garden didn't mind at all. In fact, it flourished. After years of hot, drought-like weather, and the water restriction debacle last year, the Garden finally got to see a resurgence in its water table. The trees couldn't have been happier, and the denseness of the beds and size of the plants was just their way of showing their appreciation. Unfortunately, the weeds also loved it and made their presence known. This is only a small hurdle we had to overcome, and besides, it keeps us gardeners and volunteers busy and enjoying the garden.

You may have noticed a little work being done on the upper and lower ponds in June as well. With any aging infrastructure, a little facelift to keep it looking great and functioning adequately is needed every few years. As you can imagine, this is a popular site in the garden, so it was nice to get it back up and running, looking great, and photo-worthy in a timely manner.

The rain did slow us down a little with not being able to work in the beds as often as usual, we turned to sodding some of the turf areas (and resodding 😊), and we were

able to begin the next phase of our renovation in bed O. If you're unfamiliar with it, it's the bed at the front of the café which wraps around towards the mobility impaired parking. You might remember some of this area being used as a vegetable garden in the past, but it is in fact, historically part of bed O on William Reader's maps. This allowed us to reintroduce species back into the garden and take advantage of the full sun it gets.

Species like the Himalayan Lilac, *Syringa emodi*, which was started from seed back in 2017 by previous head gardener, Daniel Walker, was able to move from our holding bed and take its place in the garden. These moments are just a great example of the exiting work we get to do here in the garden. We look forward to seeing how Bed O develops over the next few years.

Fall has really given us a 180-degree turn with its lack of moisture. Even after shutting down the irrigation for the season, we found ourselves watering by hand in certain areas until the moisture and/or cold weather came. We quietly put the garden to bed; cutbacks, wrapping shrubs for extra protection, collecting seeds, and putting everything away for the winter. This time also allows me to begin the planning stage for next season with seed orders, plant orders, bed renovation ideas for next year, and help work with the rest of the team in planning the next steps for any "touch ups" that need to happen in the garden.

Despite the plants all going dormant for the season, there's still a surprising number of visitors to the garden as well. Fall brings its own beauty and charm to the garden, and it still showcases what a wonderful place it is to visit.

We were fortunate enough to sneak in a workshop with the Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society (CRAGS) before the weather tuned too cold. With plans to build crevice gardens next year in the trial bed, we took our first steps in learning the process of creating one and discussing all the elements to consider before construction. Rob Staniland put on a fantastic introduction to crevice gardening, and we look forward to working with CRAGS next year and watching it come alive ... pun intended.

Cheers to a successful season and I look forward to what 2026 brings. 😊

Volunteer Focus: Lorna Hightower

In keeping with FoRRGS' appreciation of our fascinating volunteers that have contributed to all the successes along the way ... May we take this opportunity to introduce this special person: **Lorna Hightower, Webmaster and Contributing Photographer**



Question: Your hometown?

I grew up in Maple Ridge, BC.

Q: When did you arrive in Calgary?

1996

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

A couple of my favourite books are *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle, and *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda. My favourite movie genres are Comedies and Science Fiction/Fantasy. My all-time favourite movie would have to be *The Wizard of Oz*.

Q: Have a favorite saying or perspective?

I always try to see the lighter side of life, so one of my favourite quotes is "Eventually all things fall into place. Until then, laugh at the confusion, live for the moments, and know EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON." — Albert Schweitzer.

Q: Hobbies or non-work-related interests?

I like to garden, bike, kayak, paddleboard and rockhound; anything to do with the outdoors and connecting with nature. Some of the hobbies that I enjoy are stained glass, pottery, beading, lapidary, and cross stitching.

Q: Career paths/work experience?

I worked at CP Rail for 39 years and retired in 2023. Over the years, I worked in a number of departments (Law, Occupational Health & Safety, Engineering, and Sourcing & Procurement) which presented me with lots of varied experience in different roles.

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

I studied at the University of British Columbia, Langara College, Mount Royal University, and Bow Valley College. My studies included programs in law, sourcing & procurement, and website development.

Q: Previous/current work experience?

My first job was delivering newspapers at 12 years old.

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

I started volunteering at RRG this year (2025) as Webmaster and Photographer, in addition to sitting on the Board of Directors.

Q: Best thing[s] about RRG?

The volunteers here at RRG are a remarkable group of people; friendly, helpful, and willing to share their vast knowledge of the garden. The annual plant sale is an especially fun event with a wide variety of plants to purchase for your own garden.

Q: Most challenging thing about RRG?

Hearing about the recent thefts from this beautiful garden.

Q: What have you discovered at RRG - learnings, surprises, inspirations, etc.?

I am always amazed at the variety of the plant collection, and I love the different wildlife that passes through the garden.

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

Reader Rock Garden is a beautiful place to visit and enjoy the diversity of plants in the garden. It does not matter what season you are visiting, there will always be something new to see.

Q: Must-see highlight[s] onsite?

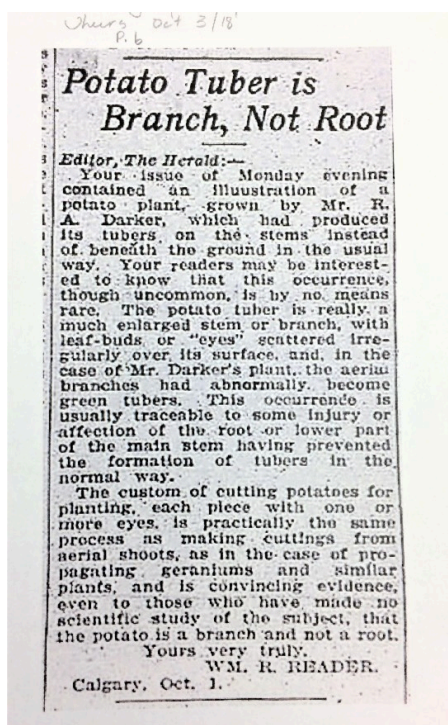
One of my favourite walks is in the West Garden along the pathway that leads from the "Mugo Pine" heritage tree and meanders upwards to the bridge, adjacent to the Lower & Upper ponds.

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

I am excited to see the creation of the two new crevice gardens in the trial area of the garden planned for 2026. This project will be a teaching/educational resource for the garden, carrying on William Reader's work.

Sputacular Findings

By: Diane M. Dalkin



Mr. Reader was committed to life-long education, which isn't a surprise as he was a trained teacher back in his early years in England. He carried this instrumental role into his function as City Superintendent of Parks, Cemeteries & Recreation, as well as in his writings of a weekly gardening advice column in the local newspaper, the Calgary Herald.

In my recent research, one of the things I found was that Mr. Reader was quite fond of "potatoes" for a variety of reasons.

He cites the topic of potatoes in correspondence, planting plans for public areas and private home gardens, for food consumption and prioritizing soil health and sustainability. Additionally, he planted potatoes in parks and as part of the Vacant Lot Club's harvest during difficult war times.

The versatile potato is a ubiquitous vegetable, comes in numerous cultivars, is a staple in a multitude of cultures and is served in many cooked forms. As most of us know, potatoes are underground stem tubers of the plant *Solanum tuberosum*, a perennial in the nightshade family Solanaceae.

In 1918, Mr. Reader took the time to write to the Calgary Herald's Editor to clarify the unusual growing habit of a certain potato, see below:

Editor, The Herald

Your issue of Monday evening contained an illustration of a potato plant grown by Mr. R.A. Darker, which had produced its tubers on the stems instead of beneath the ground in the usual way. Your readers may be interested to know that this occurrence, though uncommon, is by no means rare. The potato tuber is really a much-enlarged stem or branch, with leaf-buds or "eyes" scattered irregularly over its surface, and, in the case of Mr. Darker's plant, the aerial branches had abnormally become green

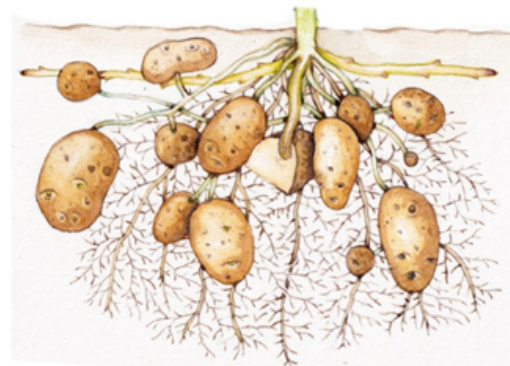
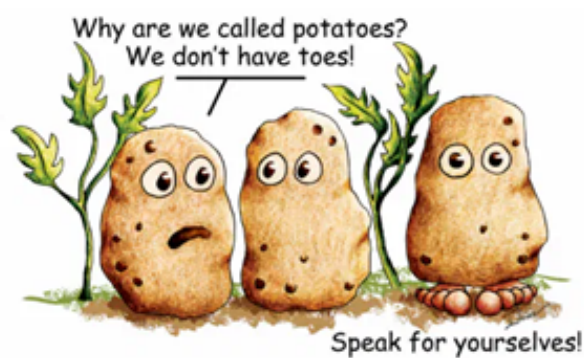
tubers. This occurrence is usually traceable to some injury or affection of the root or lower part of the main stem having prevented the formation of tubers in the normal way.

The custom of cutting potatoes for planting, each piece with one or more eyes, is practically the same process as making cuttings from aerial shoots, as in the case of propagating geraniums and similar plants, and is convincing evidence, even to those who have made no scientific study of the subject, that the potato is a branch and not a root.

Yours very truly,

WM. R. READER

Calgary, Oct. 1, 1918



Illustrator: lizzieharper.co.uk

Looking forward to 2026: NARGS AGM



You may already know that the Calgary Rock and Alpine Garden Society (CRAGS) is planning for exciting times next year. CRAGS will be hosting the North American Rock Garden Society (NARGS) AGM:

High & Dry in the Chinook Zone
NARGS Annual General Meeting
June 25-28, 2026
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

FoRRGS is delighted to be part of CRAGS celebration of rock-loving plants and rock gardens. Stay tuned to CRAGS website for more information and save these dates to participate in this special rock-solid program.

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!

Send us an email

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