



# Newsletter

Volume 10, Issue 4

April 2007

## NEXT MEETING

Monday April 16, 2007

Railway Heritage Park

6:30 Plant Exchange

7:00 Speaker

**Gwen Odermatt**

**Butterfly Gardens**



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## Letter From The Editor

### Down the Garden Path

*“What sunshine is to flowers, smiles are to humanity .They are but trifles, to be sure, but scattered along life’s pathway, the good they do is inconceivable”.* Joseph Addison

What March took away in miserable spring weather has suddenly been replaced by this beautiful first week of April. Never have I seen Easter bloom with such an abundance. Usually we have a gradual building of the floral display but this year everything seems to have come at once. I circled the garden taking photos on Good Friday and I’m sure each round there were even more blossoms. The early bulbs such as crocus and squill are still in flower while the daffodils and tulips are just starting. The trout lilies spread beneath the magnolias and the purple violets and forsythia don their Easter hues. But it isn’t just the plants that are suddenly bursting forth. The pond is full of frogs and salamanders. The turtles have crawled from their muddy beds and the mallards and wood ducks are searching out prime nesting spots. Hummingbirds are doing their territorial kamikaze bombing maneuvers over the garden while the red-winged blackbirds are singing their mating songs and the troops of robins do a thatching job on my lawn as they search for worms. We have even had a great horned owl cruising over the property. I had to keep Louise, our old hen, in the sunroom all of March. She finally died at the unheard of age of about 22 years.

We have had many ducks and chickens over the years but we have never had a chicken or duck meal. I have raised mallards on the pond since I was a teenager and a friend sent me a batch of ducklings that had been left orphaned when a dog had killed the mother. The chickens were my husband’s idea of a great Easter present for our young children. We got a dozen chicks that had been colored with vegetable dye. They were suppose to all be hens and were suppose to provide us with eggs as they grew older. Unfortunately they turned out to be mainly roosters. We couldn’t even give them away since by that time the children had made pets of them. Eventually we managed to trade some for banty chicks. The chicken fertilizer was good for the garden and the duck eggs made the greatest cakes possible. But they also meant that we never

## Letter From The Editor Cont'd



vacationed for more than a couple of days at a time. The ducks refused to come in from the pond at night when we were not home and the chickens would roost in the trees and ignore pleas from strangers to go into their pens. We lost some of our feathered friends to raccoons so we simply decided to vacation at home and care for the flocks. Soon we added a dog, fish, turtles, canaries and finches to our menagerie and a swimming pool to the back yard and spent summers at home. Frequently we cared for wild birds that had fallen out of their nests or who had been injured. My greenhouse was seldom used to grow plants but as a hospital for baby ducks, grouse, robins, crows and even a woodpecker.

That building is now ready to be replaced. The last occupant, a black bear, managed to ransack the place as he looked for a place to shelter out of the winter winds. This bruin wandered the neighborhood all winter, just like the tiny hummingbird that came to my feeder. I have had to refrain from putting out the usual feast for my feather friends so the bear will leave us alone. With two beekeepers on our street I think it is the smell of sweet honey that attracts him. I think he still prowls the streets at night as often we hear frantic dogs barking, and loud crashing sounds in the woods behind our plot but he hasn't returned to the old shed.

The clean-up from winter has reached the stage where we can actually see that things may return to normal in a few years. We still have branches that need to be taken down and plants that are not likely to survive a hot summer. I have propped up plants that had taken on quite a lean and I hope they will, in time, grow straight again. Several of my clematis, especially the early blooming species, received serious damage, not from the winter cold and wet but from our last frosts. They had started to leaf out but have been killed right back. They may come from the roots but the display for this year has been lost. I have learned from other years to wait patiently. Sometimes the new growth doesn't appear until May. I thought that I had lost many of the Casablanca lilies from the bed by the small pond so I bought some more. This bed is by the patio that we use for summer meals and the scent was always so appreciated on summer evenings. However I had just purchased the replacement bulbs when I noticed a few more red tips bursting through the soil. I will wait a few more days to see if I may be able to plant up another group of these oriental lilies beside another path.

I enjoyed our March speaker and his interesting dissertation on the soils and native plants of our province. I have always been aware of the need to keep replenishing our soils in order to maintain the vitality of our gardens. However I did not realize how shallow the fertility of our land is. Composting is a vital activity for every gardener and after a winter of rain it is so important to replenish your beds with compost and humus. Fertilizers with lots of phosphates and iron are also beneficial. Lime helps to keep the soil from becoming too acidic and aids plants in acquiring nutrients locked in the soils. Barry Belec also reminded us that we should cut back the old leaves of the sword ferns and other native ferns to allow the new growth to progress properly. I have many plants so it has been quite a task. I hope it will keep them from flopping in the warm summer weather. I cut the lady ferns several times during the growing season to maintain the fresh greenery of the newly unfurled fronds. It doesn't seem to hurt them. Our guest stressed the importance of including native drought tolerant plants in our gardens. They are adaptive to our climate and generally require a minimum of care. We have many colorful native flora and plants such as goat's beard and Oregon grape are prized by many gardeners world-wide but ignored by British Columbians.

With all the reports of dire consequences of global warming gardeners are going to have to rethink our use of water and choice of landscape materials. Those club members living in the Highlands already know the water restrictions limit plant materials. The changes in the water table for those on the flood plain will also require new gardening methods. I watched a T.V. show that featured the drought stricken areas of Austra-

## Letter Cont'd

pots of tomatoes with the grey water from washing clothes and dishes. All that was once green was now brown and grey. It seems impossible that we could have such conditions after the record wet month of March but who knows. Or we could see the valley area plagued by floods and lose not only our gardens but also our homes. Or the gardeners perched on the hillsides find their yards have slipped into their down-hill neighbor's yards. Nothing is forever but tomorrow seems to be coming at us more rapidly than we can adjust. I don't think it is just because I am growing older. Our communication network keeps us informed and the world is in our living room. All our knowledge just reminds us how small we are. We are still ruled by the weather as when the depression of the 1930's swept across the wheat belt of the Prairies and affected our nation. In years to come it will be the vegetable gardens that will be the highlight of our Garden Tour. We will be turning every patio and plot of land into our own grocery and the Brackendale Farmers' Institute will flourish with new members unwilling to pay the expensive price of imported produce. I can hear Chicken Little's call now. "Who is going to help me plant my corn?"

Across the street a neighbor has heard the call. He has turned growing early crops of tomatoes, cucumber, salad greens, squash, and watermelon into a hobby. A plastic covered nook on the south side of his house shelters a raised platform bed that already has some of these plants hardening off. A small green house with a heated floor helps to get seedlings started. While this is just a small plot now the amount of produce is remarkable. I'm lucky to have this gardener nearby. He keeps us supplied with cucumber, tomatoes and grapes in the summer. He and his wife also have many fruit trees and berry plants that enrich their diet and provide delicious jams and jellies for the winter months. His wife is one of our bee keepers .so the crops are

## Plant Exchange



Our April plant exchange will take place at 6:30pm Monday April 16th at the Railway Museum before our monthly meeting. Please try to label your plant, seeds, shrubs, cuttings, bedding plants. Or be prepared to answer questions from members as to name, size, color, height, and spread of your items. Bring bags or boxes to take home your selections and any plants that remain as the Museum is not yet ready to re-landscape the areas disturbed by the building program that is in progress.

## April Speaker

-After the plant exchange and a short business meeting at he Railway Museum April 16 starting at 6:30pm we willll have a guest speaker.

- The speaker will be Gwen Odermatt, who will speak on the topic of Butterfly Gardens.

- Gwen and her husband, who will accompany her, have for more than a decade operated Petals and Butterflies Farm Nurseries in Langley. They specialize in growing and selling plants that attract butterflies and hummingbirds to the garden. Gwen is one of the instructors at the Van Dusen Botanical Garden.



# March Meeting Minutes

- Carol Robson opened the meeting and welcomed those present.
- **Correspondence:** Information on the Spring Plant Sale to be held on April 28th by The Friends of Park and Telford Shops and Gardens was sent to the Club. The Bulletin of the B.C. Council of Garden Clubs was also received, together with a further notice about the March 24th meeting. Carol said that she would be going, together with Marcie Phillips, a long-time member.
- The February **Minutes** were passed – motion moved by Beth Fitzgerald and seconded by Ellen Grant.
- Colleen Polowich reported for the **Programme Committee**. The speaker at the April 16th meeting will be Gwen Odermatt on *Butterfly Gardens*. That will also be the plant exchange. It is not yet known if the meeting will be at the Railway Park, due to a change of personnel there. The speaker at the May 7th meeting will be Steve Kovacs, on *Creating a Paradise with Water Features*.
- Carol mentioned that the increased cost of speakers will be discussed at the next meeting of the Executive.
- Dot Diotte reported on the **Garden Tour**. Prizes for the raffle have been obtained from Howe Sound Equipment Rental, Spectrum Landscaping, Nursery Land, The Garden Centre, Cut'n'Loose, Home Hardware, Xocolatl, The Bee Hive Hairdressing and Mostly Books.
- **Newsletter:** Ellen reported that correct addresses are still needed for some members.
- **Webpage:** Dave encouraged members to keep visiting the site, at [squamishgardeners.com](http://squamishgardeners.com).
- Carol thanked Judy Gordon for bringing the evening's goodies. She also thanked committee members for their hard work. She reminded members that weeding at the library prior to the meeting is in lieu of rent to the library. A meeting of the Executive will be held at the beginning of April. She has been contacted by a student at Capilano College who is doing a study of native gardens and would appreciate receiving pictures of any local gardens with native plants, to be included in her presentation. Members should contact the Programme Committee. She welcomed Marcie back to the meetings.
- Dorte Froslev did not have **Treasurer's Report**, as such. She asked that memberships be renewed. She also asked whether there would be a problem with privacy issues if the membership list was sent out to all members. She moved that the list be sent out; seconded by Astrid Andersen. All in agreement.
- **Garden questions:** Are the small slugs seen in the garden baby slugs or a different species? They are baby slugs. It was suggested that eggshells be used to surround susceptible plants. Barry Belec, the evening's presenter, suggested using finely chopped hair (e.g. from shaving).
- **Programme:** Colleen introduced the evening's presenter, Barry Belec, from White Rock, who has received many awards for gardening. He currently works for Art's Nursery as a Horticultural Consultant, on native plants for garden development.
- Barry gave a wide-ranging and entertaining talk on the topic of native plants and their role in gardens. A native plant is an endemic genus, that occurs naturally in the system in which one lives. They are specific to a particular locale. He mentioned that the B.C. environment consists of mountains, forests and flood plains. The area surrounding a house should be included in the scope of design for that house; most houses do not accord with their natural surroundings. Many need trees to bring things into proportion. Matters are complicated by the fact that we have such poor soil.
- Native species are infinitely well-suited to their local area and conditions. However, there can be a problem with native plants in that they tend to be monocultures and susceptible to disease. He mentioned that arbutus trees are being attacked by a virus and will likely disappear within 10 years. There is a similar problem with birch.
- He had brought a number of examples of native species which are excellent in gardens. These included *Ribes sanguinea* (flowering currant, excellent for humming birds), *Amelanchier* (service berry), *Oemleria cerasiformis* (Indian Plum), *Fragaria Chilensis* (strawberry), *Calmia* (?) (loved by hummingbirds), *Cornus sericea* var. *kelseyii* (which should be cut back in the Spring), Western vine maple, Sword and deer ferns, *Arctostaphylos* (Vancouver Jade), Snowberry, Sweet Gale, *Rosa physocarpus* and *Rosa woodsii* (good for hedges); and the perennials goats beard, rattlesnake plantain orchid and coltsfoot. All the plants were for sale.