Plans and Developments for a Better Garden

What’s happening with Phase One of the Master Plan? At what stage is planning for construction of the new entrance experience?

Since November our team worked with Lees + Associates to move from Conceptual Plans to Construction Drawings – filling in many details, designing elements, specifying materials, ensuring every part connects rationally to the whole, and keeping the potential costs within reach. We want a highly functional and beautiful way to welcome members and visitors.

The Mason Road entrance is more welcoming, with an added walking path in. The parking lot layout has been much improved from the conceptual plan, the number of spots increased with minimal expansion area. The rain garden that filters runoff water is more effective.

Continued on page 4
As with most of you, I’m ready for the rain and snow to pass and get on with all the great gardening plans I’ve made over the past few months. The same is true for the Botanical Garden. Exciting changes are on the way and we need that warmer weather to begin the planting for the new Pavilion gardens.

In the last Salal, we welcomed new board members as we said goodbye to others. This is an important part of the cycle of change and renewal that strong boards go through on a continual basis. Bringing new members onto our board brings new ideas, new perspectives and new energy. But it occurred to me that, for many people, the board is a remote thing. We understand the role of volunteers who plant and weed, who organize events and workshops for schoolchildren. But what does a board do, and why does it matter?

The Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden’s board is a mix of a working board and a governance board – something quite common in relatively new non-profits. Our garden is pretty young, something I was reminded of when I attended the American Public Garden’s Symposium for Small Gardens. Many of the attendees at the event came from gardens that had been in operation for decades.

But back to our board. I mentioned the word governance. By that I mean the board’s role in setting the vision and direction for the garden’s growth and development. We do this by setting annual goals and then checking back to see how effective we’ve been in achieving them. And the board plays key roles in fundraising and in overseeing the budget. Sound pretty dry? Not really – because we get to talk about ideas for how the garden should grow, what things are most critical to do and, most important, how to let our members and friends know about all the incredible things that have happened and continue to happen on our 40 acres. We also make sure we take time to laugh and share food and have been known to share the occasional bottle of wine together. Working as a team that respects and enjoys meeting together is another key to board success.

We are a mixed board because, in addition to governance, some of our board members have taken on specific jobs such as editor of this newsletter, leading garden development and bookkeeping. It’s not a requirement, though. Personally, I’m happy pulling invasive species out of the native plant gardens and enjoying our spectacular setting. After all, having this garden as a space for rejuvenation and respite for ourselves and the species that share it – that’s what it’s all about.

If you’re interested in joining our board, send me an email c/o info@coastbotanicalgarden.org — Jean Bennett, President, Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden

Wheelbarrows of thanks go out to the following:

- Swanson’s Ready Mix for bringing their most excellent cement mixer out to Winter Lights.
The word for this winter has been WET! It seemed the rain would never stop, and dodging puddles was almost declared an Olympic sport throughout the Garden. A late winter storm has just left us with over 10 cm of snow, but by mid-morning, the sky was the most brilliant blue, the sun was shining, and the snow-laden trees were sparkling. Winter might not be over yet, but surely spring is on the way!

Speaking of spring, our volunteer teams are breaking dormancy and heading back to work. Our Potting Up crew has already been busy collecting, dividing, and repotting treasures for our May 6 Plant Sale. If you are making some changes to your home garden and have perennials, shrubs or small trees you no longer need, please let us know.

The great crew who tend the veggie garden will be back as soon as the weather permits. Already, the garlic planted last fall has popped up, and it looks like we’ll have another bumper crop. If you have some time to spare Monday mornings or Thursday afternoons, the team would love some more help. Contact the Garden office for details.

The beds on the west side of the Pavilion are having a major overhaul this spring. Nadine has been leading volunteer work parties as they remove all the existing plants, amend the soil, and replant. We’ve been so lucky to have well-respected garden designer Kathy Leishman spearheading this project. Watch for some exciting new plant combinations with longer seasons of interest as we move forward.

We’re headed towards our busiest year yet for facility rentals. Weddings, concerts, board retreats, birthday parties, and gala dinners all provide much needed operational revenue for the Garden. If you have an event in mind, consider the Pavilion for your venue. I’d be delighted to work with you to make your special occasion a success!

— Mary Blockberger, Garden Manager
developing the garden

A draft plan for the Pedestrian Plaza. Click on the graphic to see a full-sized version.

From page 1

The Plaza design has far more detail, with a gently ramped walkway from the parking lot on graceful paved surfaces suitable for all visitors, and a curved bench on one side. Gardens line the route. We’ve discussed which trees must be protected during construction (and how to do that) and alas, which must go. Many more trees are slated for planting, and with a planting scheme to inspire visitors year round. Electrical and lighting plans are still to come, too.

Each aspect of the plan must be “field proofed” – that is, we must ensure that what is agreed to on paper actually works in the specified location for our visitors, staff and volunteers.

We expect the construction plans before the next issue of Salal, and we’ll keep posting new plans as they are completed. Drop by to see the drawings.

Bulldozers are not imminent! Construction may entail reducing Garden availability or closing it for a time, which must be scheduled more than a year ahead. But you will see changes this summer as we prepare the land.

With construction drawings in hand, we will seek more accurate estimates for what each component will cost. This is vital for the Fund Development team. After all, we need to raise the money. Your help makes all the difference! To contribute to the Master Plan, drop in, mail a cheque, or click here to donate right away. Make a note that your donation is earmarked for Phase One.

– Paddy Wales, Garden Development Chair
perennial friends are very good friends indeed!

Our 12 Perennial Friends are those who commit to monthly donations to the Botanical Garden. Understanding the importance of a predictable income each month, these donors are a vital part of our thriving garden.

Sometimes it’s easier to give smaller amounts each month than a larger annual donation. That’s how one of our members became a donor. She wanted to help, and our perennial friends program made it easy.

Knowing they would contribute anyway, another couple divided their annual gift into 12 payments and put it on their credit card. They understood the added value of monthly donations to the Garden for annual budgeting.

And wanting to support garden maintenance, another committed member increased her monthly donation. She chose to have direct deposits come from her bank account, to lower the processing fees.

Perennial Friends all have different reasons to give and have their own connections to the Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden. Most Friends are members, some are active volunteers, some are not able to visit often. Some live full-time on the Coast, others are seasonal residents. Most do not specify how the money should be spent, but some have a dialogue with the Manager about what matters most to them. Each one has added the value of consistency to their support, boosting the Garden’s financial stability and facilitating responsible planning and spending.

Some Perennial Friends pay through their credit card, others through direct deposit from a bank account. Either way is simple to set up or, if needed, to stop.

upcoming events

Pollination and Pollinators with Linda Gilkeson

Sunday, April 8, 2 pm
Crops from apples to zucchini and all seed saving depends on successful fertilization of flowers. This presentation reviews the different types of flowers, pollinating agents, and other factors that affect fertilization of vegetables and fruit. Learn to recognize common pollinators (native bees, flies and other insects) and how to attract them to your garden.

Linda earned a Ph.D. in Entomology from McGill University in 1986 and has served as head of the provincial State of Environment Reporting Unit, the Executive Director of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, President of the Entomological Society of Canada, the Professional Pest Management Association of BC, the Entomological Society of BC and the Salt Spring Island Garden Club. She is a regular instructor in Master Gardener programs in BC. Admission by donation, $15 suggested.

Plant Sale

Sunday, May 6, 10 am - 1 pm
This is the big one! Bring along a barrow or tote and choose from hundreds of small trees, shrubs, and perennials. Check our website for a plant list the week before the sale.

Summer Garden Party

Wednesday, July 18
Save the date for the fundraiser of the year! Details to come!

Tickets and registration for all events through the Garden office:
Call 604-740-3969. Email info@coastbotanicalgarden.org
Planners at the Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden are exploring funding possibilities to build the next phase of our Coastal Garden. The new Mt. Elphinstone Garden will be representative of the plant communities found at higher elevations of Mt. Elphinstone, the Caren Range and the Tetrahedrums.

The sub-alpine areas of the Sunshine Coast are usually only visited for reasons of recreation and logging. In summer, hikers frequent the high country in Tetrahedron Park to enjoy the expansive views and displays of wildflowers and to harvest black huckleberries. In winter, outdoor enthusiasts like to cross-country ski and snowshoe among the gnarly old-growth trees on Dakota Ridge.

The sub-alpine forest in our region starts at about 1,000 metres and is dominated by yellow cedar, mountain hemlock and Pacific silver fir (known locally as balsam). Because of the slowly melting winter snow pack, these areas often remain moist through the summer while it is very dry at sea level.

Some of the oldest yellow cedar and western hemlock in western Canada grow in the Caren Range on the Sechelt Peninsula. A stump of a yellow cedar there yielded 1,835 growth rings, meaning that it was Canada’s oldest tree – and a seedling back in 160 AD!

A section of the new garden will be devoted to the Pacific rhododendron, with all examples being grown from seed collected from the wild on the slopes of Mt. Elphinstone. We hope to establish this satellite population away from the mountain to ensure the survival of the local ecotype.

The current plan is to create the garden over a three-year period, starting in the summer of 2018 with some tree removal, mounding and path building. We hope to involve the community through planting and propagation workshops for students, community groups and the general public.

– Harry Hill, Native Plant Garden Coordinator

A late visit from Old Man Winter has stopped spring in its tracks. Just as the gardens are submerged in a blanket of white, so too are the bee hives in the club yard, capped with their top hats of snow, and a wintery quiet has descended once more at the apiary.

Of course, a common question is, what happens to bees in winter? Do they hibernate? Do they go dormant? Do they die?

A healthy colony of bees will manage winter very well. If they are in good health, if they have enough food stores, if there is a healthy queen and their nest is dry with sufficient protection from the elements (including good ventilation), they can keep themselves warm and alive right through to spring.

Honey bees do not hibernate, nor go dormant – instead they do something called cluster. As the temperature drops and the days grow short, the queen slows and will stop her production of brood. The eggs she put down in the fall are now the winter bees, and they are physiologically different from summer bees.

Winter bees can live as long as six months, whereas summer bees live only for six weeks. But these winter bees are the ones that will tend to the queen over the winter and to nurture the first of the spring brood.

As outside temperatures become cold, the colony forms into a ball-shaped cluster within the hive. They keep themselves warm and thermoregulate by disengaging their flight muscles and then vibrate to generate body heat. The outside of the cluster is tightly packed to keep the cold at bay, but if you were to progress towards the centre, the bees open or loosen just enough to keep the temperature at a toasty 35 degrees Celsius; and in the middle of that nearly perfectly regulated temperature zone, you will find the queen. The cluster will move and shift within the hive over the course of the winter, consuming food stores. All the while, the cold bees on the outside will move inwards, and warm bees on the inside will move outwards to take their turn on the outside.

If you are out for a winter walk in the gardens and you find yourself at the apiary, stop for a moment, and in the quiet of winter imagine the activity and life going on within each of those bee hives. If you listen closely, you can hear the hum.

– Kathleen Suddes, President, Sunshine Coast Beekeepers Association
coastbeekeepers@gmail.com
birding in the garden

As I write this, a February snow fall is melting. The air is still, the melted snow collects on the future blooms of the cherry trees like crystals. The sky is clear and the waning sun amplifies the droplets’ electric glow. Most birds have gone to sleep, and the scenery would be like a photograph if it wasn’t for the whizzing of Anna’s hummingbirds getting their final meals of the night.

Below one of the cherry trees, in a bay laurel, the hummers have a nest. A couple metres over, I know there is another nest. I can see the birds returning to their eggs, and every time they come to the feeder, I can see their brood patch betraying the hours spent sitting on eggs. Like bed head discloses a lazy Sunday, the birds’ bellies have pushed the feathers off to the side to allow the maximum heat to connect with their precious eggs. One of our earliest to nest, the Anna’s hummingbird will have three or four clutches in a season. They seem to see no reason for warmer weather to get started.

As the Anna’s are mid-cycle with their eggs, I am starting to collect my seed packets thinking of the spring ahead. I will start my peas soon, so I can ensure they are pushed out of the ground by end of March. Migrating golden-crowned sparrows have given me five stars in previous years for my supply of this tasty nourishment on their travels north. I will cover a few of the seedlings with cloth to save them for myself.

Swallows have already left their over wintering homes of Costa Rica or Panama heading in our direction. The tree swallow and violet-green swallow will begin to arrive in the second week of March, heralding warmer days of fly catching soon to come. By the end of March, the open areas of the Garden over the vegetable beds and around the Pavilion will be full of swallows competing for space in the nest boxes. These swallows will stay with us until August cleaning the air for mosquitoes to feed their young. Watch for them next time you’re at the Garden. They will poke their head outside the box inspecting for predators and then — whoosh! Off they fly in a blink, gone into the air. They will return just as quickly and come late June, the ‘peep peep peep’ of the little ones begging can be heard if you listen carefully from under the box.

— Alexis Harrington

critters’ paradise

Did you ever wonder, within the vast amount of flora in one’s garden, just what kind of fauna also lived there? Is it time now for the fauna – often known as enemies of the gardener – to emerge? How ready are we with our ammunition?

A thriving, healthy garden is a paradise for numerous species of fauna of all sizes and types, and it is with a great amount of patience and care that we have to be on the lookout for the destructive species and remove them before they cause serious problems for our flora.

Amongst the myriad denizens you can anticipate, perhaps the most common would be mice, of which there are more than 48,000 varieties worldwide. For their size, they are the strongest and fastest critter on the planet, being able to carry more than 1,200 times their own weight. How many of them are to be found on the Sunshine Coast is a project worthy of research.

In the damp wooden walls surrounding the strawberry patch, there are the tiny jelly-like balls of the common invader who munches on ripening fruit overnight. After scraping away this slime, an appetizing beer dish is arranged amongst the plants. My father, who enjoyed his glass of ale at the neighbourhood English pub, would have declared this ploy as “a wicked waste of good beer.” However the slugs are on the move and now seem to have migrated to the hosta bed, getting there before the slowly sliding snails.

Upturning ornamental driftwood edging the garden borders, exposes nests of sow bugs (they are prolific breeders, but do aid in the production of soil and compost) dozily writhing around, wondering which way to escape the onslaught of fresh air. Of course, I could use baits, but the box I had last season is damp and nearly empty — maybe I’ll try salt instead.

“Look! Look!” a young boy called as he was running around the garden paths. “A butterfly! It’s white, too.” While the magic of its fluttering delighted the child, it was headed towards the young cabbages that were showing small compact heads in the centre of the plant. Sure enough, investigation a few weeks later revealed telltale holes that had emerged through several layers of encasing green leaves. As more of these cabbage butterflies came to the garden, their undulating dance reminded me of the Swan Lake ballet.

There is always a dramatic scene when uninvited critters arrive unexpectedly. Last summer a vase of dahlias was placed at the centre of our table where guests were enjoying a simple lunch. Suddenly there was a squeal from one of the women: “What is that? There it is! Catch it quickly!” There, scurrying across the white damask tablecloth, was the earwig, its horns sensing an escape and its legs scurrying to reinforce a rapid getaway.

From swinging spiders on silken threads, wasps that disturb hummingbirds sipping on nectar, spittle bugs encased in white froth, crickets making rhythmic cadences, centipedes racing for cover, aphids decorating prize plants, tiger caterpillars bumping over the open patio to find cover in foliage and dragon flies skimming down to the pond (indeed the haven for mosquitoes and their quivering larvae), you will be amazed at the critters you can discover in your garden.

Notice only a few varieties of these invaders have been mentioned. We are all too familiar with bears, raccoons and deer, whose forays keep the gardeners, we must all be prepared to discover, learn and live with those who come to visit.

— June Meyer
Although this is the spring issue of Salal, the news this month was winter! The Garden looks lovely covered in a blanket of white (February 18).

Far right are photos of the rhodos getting ready for spring. The top photo was taken on February 5, the bottom one on February 18.

At right are happy spring bulbs poking their heads out on January 14. The same bulbs are buried on February 19.

Below is a Cinnamomum tree, one of the casualties of the cold snap. The crown split under the weight of snow on the branches. Careful pruning (and a bit of warmth) may revive it.
The barred owl has become a regular visitor to the Garden. S/he likes to hang around the Pavilion and pose for photos.

All photos on this page by Mary Blockberger

The garlic knows spring is on the way. It will be ready for sale at the Harvest Festival September 3.

Story-tellers Sophie Gawn and June Meyer, and the big man in red, made visitors smile at Woodland Christmas on December 11.

Eevee (right) was the favourite Hair of the Dog Day visitor paws down, and Barney (who never misses a Dog Day) was a close second. A record number of 26 very good dogs came out to explore the Botanical Garden on January 1. The next dog-friendly day in the garden is Dog Day of Summer on BC Day (August 6).

Click on the photos to see more Hair of the Dog Day guests.
Our potting up crew is now gratefully accepting donations for the big Plant Sale coming up May 6. If you have perennials, shrubs, or small trees looking for good homes, please let us know. Our volunteers will tend and repot to make ready for sale. The Plant Sale is one of our biggest fundraisers of the year, and helps keep the Garden growing.

**Picture this:**

A welcoming, beautiful entrance encourages visitors to find out what is in the Garden. It sets the stage for them to explore paths and habitats, learn about plants and nature, and enjoy themselves. The new entrance route features:

- Clear road signs
- A four-season planting along driveway, with an iconic sculpture
- Increased handicap parking
- More parking spaces by sensible layout of rows
- Welcoming walkway from parking to garden and pavilion entrance
- Bioswales and permeable surfacing for best environmental practice

★ Funding Opportunities ★

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Landscape Architects

Click here to find out about donation options
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West Coast Nuts

Along with our incredible volunteers and committed staff, you’ve enabled us to make the Garden a welcoming place to enjoy, a diverse place to experience and learn, and a perfect place for people to celebrate. THANK YOU!

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