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Newsletter of the Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden Society



Photos by Paddy Wales

TWO OF THE FIRST PLANT SALES: The initial plant sales were held in the fall of 2003 in the parking lot of Gibsons’ Heritage Playhouse, and spring of 2005 in the parking lot of what was then the Beach Buoy restaurant (now The Wobbly Canoe) in Davis Bay.

In Conversation: The Early Years of Potting Up Group

“Queen Victoria here...”

Nancy Webber recalls one afternoon in 2005 at Gibsons’ Heritage Playhouse, when England-born Verity Goodier, one of the Potting Up Group’s original volunteers, had jumped up on stage pretending to be the long-reigning monarch.

Nancy adds, “And Bill Terry, well, he had dyed his hair blue, so it was Madmen against Englishmen that day.”

This event was one of the Potting Group’s first unofficial plant sales, where silliness and fun were on order and all kinds of plants, trees, and shrubs were sold out of truck beds and car boots in the Playhouse’s parking lot. That day, David Tarrant from the UBC Botanical Garden had been invited to speak, and the group had sold pots of *Meconopsis* (blue poppy), of which Bill Terry had been a dedicated cultivator – hence his choice for bright blue locks.

Today Garden historians Barb Mason, Karin Tigges, Nancy Webber, Paddy Wales, and Verity Goodier have met to reminisce about the start of the Potting Up Group and the early years of the Plant Sale. This group and others, including Beverley Merryfield and Harry Hill, joined forces to raise funds so the Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden Society could offer workshops and speaker presentations, and one day, even purchase some land for the pie-in-the-sky dream botanical garden.

At first, plants were sold tailgate-style at events where the group was invited to set up; the locale changed to the Heritage Playhouse parking lot, then the parking lot of the Beach Buoy (now The Wobbly Canoe) restaurant in Davis Bay.

“Everyone was always so helpful. All the volunteers would help load the pickup trucks. And Mike from Sunshine Coast Nursery

helped move plants for us – he was wonderful,” Karin Tigges reflects.

Paddy Wales notes, “We used to get leftover plants from Southlands Nursery.”

“We still do,” Karin interjects.

“Thanks to Lindsay MacPherson,” Nancy adds.

This group is quick to give credit where it’s due, noting many people, organizations, and businesses have donated plants and soil over the years, including VanDusen Botanical Garden, Rona, Independent Grocer, Top Quality Top Soil, and Canadian Tire, and donors such as Liz MacPhail and sisters Arlene Watson and Eileen Beck.

“Things are changing in what people want these days – people are becoming more savvy about drought-tolerant plants and native plants,” Nancy says. “Remember that one year at the Beach Buoy, every plant had a tag, and this little boy and his sister came along and were pulling out all the tags and rearranging them.”

The group laughs, and Barb adds, “And trying to keep the people out of the parking lot before we opened...”

“Oh yes. That was difficult.” Verity chimes in, laughing. “And because we were set up in the parking lot, there was no parking, so the highway would be lined with cars,” says Nancy.

Potting and labelling for the early-years plant sales were all done in the backyard of Paddy’s home in Roberts Creek. The group reflects on the resident bear that would occasionally observe them from the trees as they worked behind Paddy’s shed.

Barb looks at Nancy, “Do you remember your dog eating Karin’s baking?” Nancy throws her head back and says, “The best part

Continued on page 3

President's Message

"In an age of lies and illusions, the garden is one way to ground yourself in the realm of the processes of growth and the passage of time, the rules of physics, meteorology, hydrology and biology, and the realm of the senses."

— Rebecca Solnit

Over the past couple of months, I've heard more and more people talking about the anxiety they are experiencing in the face of global uncertainty and the continuing chaos south of the border. In a time when many of us are fearful about what our collective future holds, it's important to remember that gardens offer us a space for peace, comfort and connection. During the pandemic, many people came for walks here at the Botanical Garden. They came to ground themselves in the turning of the seasons, the sounds of birdsong, the beauty of blossoms unfolding, the smells, sights and sounds of the natural world carrying on.

Starting a tree from seed is a fierce act of optimism, of hope that it will find where it's planted hospitable, and a belief that it has a future vaster than our own.

Though the heavy snowfall caused some significant damage to the Garden and we'll be cleaning up for some time, we also continue to move forward, imagining new spaces on our 40 acres. As a Botanical Garden, it's crucial for us to know the provenance of our plants, and the best way to ensure that is to grow them from seed whose provenance we can also trace. Now that our Prop House is fully functional, our propagation team is deep in conversation about the intensity



and unpredictability of climate change impacts and how that affects what to propagate. Will some plants that we grow not be viable in the future? Which ones?

One of the big questions is which trees will have the best chance of thriving in our uncertain future. We estimate that it will take on average seven years from seed to a sapling that can be planted in the Garden. Some species will likely take much longer. While challenging to consider these questions, it's also tremendously exciting.

Starting a tree from seed is a fierce act of optimism, of hope that it will find where it's planted hospitable, and a belief that it has a future vaster than our own.

— Jean Bennett, Botanical Garden President

Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden

Salal Newsletter

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To advertise in *Salal*, please contact the editor
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The Garden acknowledges its responsibilities as an occupant of this land in the swiya of the shíshálh people. We pledge to treat this land with respect and welcome all to share in our journey of learning and knowledge sharing.

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President: Jean Bennett

Vice-President: Cathy Hallam

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Salal

is looking for a
NEW EDITOR

- Do you have a masterful command of the English language (spelling, punctuation, grammar)?
- Do you have access to your own computer system with desktop publishing software (InDesign and Photoshop or equivalent)?
- Are you creative and artistic?
- Would you like to work from home at your own pace (within given deadlines)?
- Are you organised and detail-oriented?
- Are you a good communicator? **If you have answered yes to all these questions, you might be the person we're looking for!**

Current editor Heather Till says, "I have loved producing the newsletter, but after more than 11 years, I feel it's time to pass the torch. This is a very rewarding volunteer experience for the right person."

Please contact Garden Manager Mary Blockberger for details: operations@coastbotanicalgarden.org • 604.740.3969

Notes from the Office

Even though it felt like we would never dig ourselves out of the snow, spring is just around the corner. This means it's time for starting seeds, conserving water, removing invasive plant species, and registering for one or all of the fantastic presentations we have scheduled for this season. Read on to get prepared for another potential drought season (page 8), learn from Shirley Samples, President of Sunshine Coast Streamkeepers, about how plants can affect the health of salmon and other species in riparian and watershed areas (page 5), and see tips from David McIlwraith, SCRCD's FireSmart Coordinator, to ensure your home and garden are fire safe (page 3).

Many thanks to all who supported our year-end holiday campaign to raise \$45,000 for the makeover of our volunteer-led Veggie Garden. With the help of a generous donor matching all gifts made in December, plus donations that came in with the mail in January, we were able to meet our target.

The heavy snowfall in early February led to the temporary closing

of the Garden. Although our outside staff worked very hard through challenging conditions, we still suffered some damage. Sean and Paula spent hours shaking snow from shrubs and trees, and we know our losses would have been greater without their efforts. Still, we did have many branches down and some of our larger trees broke or fell under the weight of the snow. The cleanup was delayed as access to many parts of the Garden was impossible until the rains arrived and the great melt started. Cleanup is ongoing, and we are experiencing some flooding, so we hope we will be able to open our gates and welcome visitors back on March 1.

Our Veggie Garden makeover has been delayed by the weather, but we're delighted that our Sproutbox garden beds have arrived and we anticipate work to start soon on this project.

Our goal is to have a large part of the vegetable garden complete in time for spring planting.

— *Mary Blockberger, Garden Manager*
& *Heather Vince, Development Officer*

Potting Up Group (cont.)

From page 1

about being in this Potting Up Group was that Karin always brought something yummy. One day she brought a lemon loaf – a big one for the six of us potting. At the time, I had this lovely little dog, and he took a bite right out of the centre. Karin took one look around, said “shush” and quickly cut out the bit in the middle and served the rest.”

Over the years, the group's plant sale events had become increasingly popular and more detailed, and required more attention. Karin stepped forward to lead this new endeavour.

Once the Garden property had been purchased, the area of the Works Yard and Potting Shed was designated as the home base for what would become the Garden's annual Plant Sale. Karin's husband Heinz Tigges built the potting tables and shelves and helped to connect irrigation.

“The people sure came”, Paddy notes, recalling the first event at its new location in 2010. “Well, except for the mayor.”

Nancy explains, “He [Darren Inkster] was supposed to cut the ribbon and open the gate for everyone, but he arrived late and there was NO parking,” Paddy adds. “We must have had 200 people waiting in the line-up, so when he finally came, everyone was already shopping.”

Karin shared that Beverley Merryfield designed the promotional posters and made the labels. “She also made egg salad sandwiches,” adds Paddy. “And someone gave us those wonderful aprons too.”

Barb comments it was Verity who first thought to put together a list of everything available for sale. “Then Amanda Offers took it over and has kept up the spreadsheet since then. It's a lot of work,” Karin adds.

Nancy nods, “The community rallied around us for that Plant Sale, with food, plants, aprons and wheelbarrows.”

The Plant Sale has grown every year since and has become more organized with the help of many volunteers, many of whom have been longtime supporters. Barb says, “And someone is always watching to make sure nobody goes to the cashier without their tally sheet.”

“That would be Pat McDowell,” Paddy credits.

The popular bags of fertilizer – always a sell-out – are carefully prepared and packaged by Judy Garrett, Master Gardeners are on hand for advice, and June Meyer always volunteers to supervise the Plant Hold area.

“Being at cash is fun,” says Nancy. “People are so excited about their



Plant Sale volunteers in 2011.

plants. You could say to one guy ‘nice selection,’ and they'd rattle off about everything they know about their purchases. But then the next guy would be so excited they forgot to ask any questions and when they get to us they ask ‘Do you know what this plant is?’”

The group laughs. “And this is why we have plant labels.”

Barb shares that the labels are essential and hold a lot of detail outside of the plant name and price. “Ali [Forbes], our new lead, likes to track who it came from and the day it was potted,” noting it all supports the Potting Up Group's learning about growing conditions and plant health.

In June of 2023, Karin handed the reins of Potting Up Group lead to Allison Forbes, who owns and operates Spirithouse Gardens, a micro-nursery in Roberts Creek.

“Ali's got some great methods, and we have some fantastic new volunteers who have joined us recently,” Nancy says, expressing gratitude to longtime volunteers Ali Thompson, Evelyn Schimmel, Sheila Watkins, Tracy Lund, and Judy Trapp.

Barb laughs recalling a time when the letters PS were written on the labels. “We finally stopped and questioned, ‘Does this mean it's part-shade, or part-sun?’”

“We're still perfecting it,” Paddy says.

— *Heather Vince, Development Officer*

FireSmart BC Gardening: Protecting your home and landscape

The beauty of the Sunshine Coast is matched by its natural risks, particularly wildfires. As a community dedicated to sustainable gardening, the Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden Society encourages homeowners to adopt FireSmart landscaping practices to minimize fire risks while maintaining a thriving, drought-resistant garden.

Up to 90% of structural fires during a wildfire come from embers that are blown ahead of the fire front. These embers can travel more than two kilometres ahead of the fire, igniting homes, trees, shrubs and landscaping around homes. The FireSmart approach divides the home's surroundings into three **Home Ignition Zones**, each with specific strategies to reduce flammability.

1. Immediate Zone (0-1.5m from the home). This is the most critical area, where materials and plants should be carefully selected to prevent ignition.

Regularly clear gutters, roofs, and decks of debris.

Maintain a 1.5-metre non-combustible zone around a structure.

Ideally this should be cleared of all vegetation, with only have hard scaping applied (i.e. gravel, sand, concrete) or down to mineral soil.

Remove all combustible materials, such as dry leaves, pine needles, and firewood stacks, from this zone. Wood mulch should not be used within 10 metres of a structure.

If there are plants present in this area, make sure they are fire-resistant plants with high moisture content, such as succulents, sedums, and broadleaf evergreens.

Outbuildings and sheds, whether attached to the home or detached as a separate building, can threaten homes if they catch on fire. Since it is normal to store combustible materials in these types of structures, steps should be taken to reduce the potential for these materials to ignite. Windows, vents and other construction components should be treated as if they were part of the home.

2. Intermediate Zone (1.5-10m from the home). The goal here is to reduce fire intensity before it reaches the house.

Exposed firewood, whether freestanding or partially exposed, poses a significant risk of producing embers, fire spread, and significant radiant heat if ignited. Store your wood in a FireSmart mitigated shed. This should include fire-resistant roofing (metal, asphalt, or composite rubber) and fire-resistant siding (opt for a metal exterior with plywood backing for sturdiness or cement board).

Prepare the ground with a non-combustible base extending 1.5 m around the structure. Ensure there are no gaps between the shed's base and the non-combustible surface. You can build up gravel, dirt, or sand up to the sides. No flooring is needed, but consider using sturdy pallets underneath the stacked wood to promote curing. Fill all gaps with caulking to prevent embers from entering. Close vents and eaves with 3 mm mesh.

Do not store items with fuel inside the shed (chainsaws, jerry cans, and oils can lead to explosions and significantly increase the risk to structures and safety). Place the shed at least 10 m from your home

Maintain well-spaced, low-growing plants to prevent fire from spreading. Prune tree branches to keep at least two metres of clearance from the ground. Ensure three metres of clearance on a slope. Keep lawns and native grasses mowed to 10 cm or less.

Use drought-resistant and fire-resistant plants.

3. Extended Zone (10-30m from the home). This zone focuses on reducing fuel loads and breaking up continuous vegetation to prevent fire from reaching structures.

Thin trees so canopies do not touch, preventing the fire from



Graphic from FireSmart

The FireSmart approach to fire safety divides the home's surroundings into three zones, each with specific strategies to reduce flammability.

spreading through the crown. Remove deadfall, underbrush, and accumulated dry vegetation. Maintain a clear space between sheds, woodpiles, and outbuildings. Incorporate rock gardens and fire-resistant hedging to create natural firebreaks.

Building a FireSmart and Water-Wise Garden

Given the Sunshine Coast's dry summers and changing climate, selecting drought-resistant plants that are also fire-resistant is essential for a resilient landscape. The District of Sechelt's drought-resistant plant guide highlights ideal species that thrive in our conditions while minimizing fire risk.

Species include: kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), stoncrop and other sedum varieties, creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), red-osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) bigleaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*), Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*), arbutus (*Arbutus menziesii*), and Pacific dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*). Fire-prone plants to avoid include highly resinous trees such as pine, cedar, and fir, shrubs such as juniper and rosemary, and tall, dry grasses such as pampas.

Ways to maximize fire resistance while conserving water include: Hydrozoning: group plants with similar water need to minimize irrigation waste. Mulching wisely: use gravel or composted bark mulch instead of flammable wood chips. Rainwater collection: install rain barrels to keep plants hydrated without excess water use. Drip irrigation: efficiently water plants while keeping surrounding areas dry.

FireSmart gardening is a practical and beautiful way to protect your home while embracing the Sunshine Coast's unique climate. By selecting drought-tolerant, fire-resistant plants and maintaining defensible spaces, you can contribute to a more resilient and fire-safe community.

For more details, consult the **SCRD FireSmart BC Program** for a complete resource guide, including the FireSmart BC Landscaping Hub. Please refer to the **District of Sechelt's drought-resistant plant guide**. And be sure to visit the Botanical Garden to explore FireSmart landscaping in action.

– David McIlwraith, FireSmart Coordinator



Sunshine Coast
**Botanical
Garden**

Spring events

*Gardening
Wildlife* FOR
WITH HARRY HILL

MARCH 6
7:00 PM
Register your spot

Photo: Emma England

*Soil
Health*
JORDAN MARA

MIND & SOIL

MARCH 18
7:00 PM

Register your spot

Seed Starting
JUMP START YOUR FOOD GARDEN

presented by
Mel Sylvestre of
Grounded Acres
Organic Farm

MARCH 23
1:00PM - 2:30PM

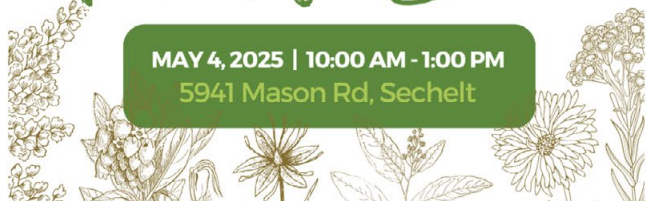
Register your spot

MEMBERS \$15; NON-MEMBERS \$20
Scan QR Codes to register online, or phone our office: 604-740-3969

Sunshine Coast
Botanical Garden

Plant Sale

MAY 4, 2025 | 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
5941 Mason Rd, Sechelt



ANNUAL FUNDRAISER
MAY 4, 2025 | 10AM - 1PM

**WE GRATEFULLY ACCEPT YOUR
PLANT DONATIONS!**

TREES, SHRUBS, WOODLAND & NATIVE PLANTS,
SHADE- AND SUN-LOVING PERENNIALS,
EDIBLES, GRASSES, FERNS

**Donations can be dropped off at the
Pavilion Friday - Monday, 11am - 4pm.**

Sunshine Coast Streamkeepers

A fun outcome of starting Sunshine Coast Streamkeepers Society (SCSS) is that it's also satisfying my gardener heart and green thumb. I am so grateful that I could move onto a two-acre property that already had a magical, perennial garden with fruit crops and a creek running through it. That creek was the inspiration to start a Streamkeepers group.

I thought Streamkeepers work would be only about monitoring creeks by performing water quality assessments and counting wild spawning salmon. I quickly discovered that the work also includes the removal of invasive plants and replacing them with native species.

We started hosting invasive plants removal events in 2018. Since then, about half of the SCSS volunteers have pulled truckloads of ivy, blackberry, laurel and holly out of Roberts Creek, Malcolm Creek and the Chapman Creek riparian areas. In their place, we have planted hundreds of native plants including sword ferns, cedars, oregon grape, salal and willow stakes.

This work is important. A creek cannot be a healthy habitat for salmon if it does not have a fully functioning riparian area along its banks that also serves as a wildlife corridor for other animals and includes a high tree canopy for shade cover, bushes along the bank to provide food, and plants such as ferns that maintain bank integrity.

The other half of our volunteers work directly in creeks. We perform the work found in the Streamkeepers Handbook: conducting water quality assessments and a weekly spawning count in the fall, invertebrate surveys, habitat assessments



Photo by Shirley Samples

Volunteers from the Streamkeepers Society at a clean-up event in Roberts Creek in March last year.

and numerous other projects. These projects include: Assessing how climate change affects salmonid, which involves recording creek water and air temperatures that are inputted into a nationwide data base. Working to protect the Roberts Creek watershed. A culvert replacement project at Malcolm Creek. Hosting information tables at community events such as World Rivers Day and at the Botanical Garden Harvest Festival in 2024.

Our work is important for wild salmon. Salmon are struggling and many populations are at all-time lows. Salmon are a keystone species with over 130 creatures depending on them for survival. The challenges facing salmon are many, including climate change, habitat loss, fish barriers (culverts), poor water quality, overfishing and aquaculture pathogens.

Sunshine Coast Streamkeepers invites anyone who is interested to join one

of our on-going projects, whether it's invasive plant removal and native planting, or walking the creeks with us counting spawning salmon. It is an incredible experience to be up close to these resilient, powerful and amazing creatures.

One of the main projects we took on is removing ivy from trees. Ivy growing on trees weakens them and also acts as a sail in the wind, making the trees more susceptible to being blown over.

To remove ivy, cut with clippers around the tree at chest level. Do the same at ground level around the tree. Pull off the ivy between the cuts and take to green waste. Pulling vines above chest level can damage the bark and weaken the tree. The ivy leaves will eventually die and fall off. Be mindful of nesting season; do this work after birds have left.

– Shirley Samples, President
SC Streamkeepers Society

NATIVE PLANT PLANTING & IVY REMOVAL

Saturday, March 15, 2025, 11 am – 1 pm ~ Roberts Creek Estuary

Meet at the Roberts Creek Pier/Mandala parking lot. We look forward to seeing you all there.

We have several native plants that need to get planted. Please bring gloves, eye protection, clippers, shovels, and watering cans if you have them. Please dress for the weather. Sturdy waterproof boots are a must.

sunshinecoaststreamkeepers.com | scstreamkeepers@gmail.com

Roberts Creek is the second major spawning creek on the lower Sunshine Coast. Let's do what we can to protect and restore the important salmon habitat and wildlife corridor it provides.

Notes from the Veggie Garden

Our new raised beds are set to arrive this month. We expect to set them up over a few months, with the garlic quadrant last, after it is harvested in July.

As the new raised beds are 17 inches in height, some of our gardening practices will be changed, so we would like to highlight some changes we'll be making with the new beds that might be useful to you. Do pop in over the next few months to follow our progress.

Carrot wall: Carrot rust flies can decimate your entire crop of carrots. It happened to us. The good thing is that the female carrot flies are very low flying, so the best method of prevention is to erect a barrier around the crop at least two feet (60 cm) high. The important thing to note is that the wall must cover all the gaps at ground level.

With the new beds being 17 inches in height, we would only need to add a lower barrier to reach up to two feet in height so nothing as spectacular as in the photos.

Squash watering pots: This is our free approximation of the Olla watering system. We embed a one-gallon pot right next to a squash or pumpkin plant for watering directly to the root zone. Water is not wasted on soil surface, nor is it causing powdery mildew on the leaves,



Photos by Vanessa Choo

Pictured above is our Great Wall for the carrots. We can water and harvest by reaching in. Right photo shows a row of cabbage surrounded by Brassica collars

and it's easy to tell when the soil has enough water.

We will probably still use this with the new beds as they are so easy to water and great for keeping water off the leaves.

Brassica collars: We use one-gallon pots with the bottoms cut off as collars around Brassica plants such as broccoli, cabbage, etc. We set them in when we

plant the seedlings and it helps deter slugs and also helps in watering as it focuses the water where it's needed.

We would probably not be needing them with the new beds as the raised bed itself present some barrier to slugs and also holds water better.

— Vanessa Choo

Veggie Garden Coordinator



**Sunday, May 4
10am to 1pm**

**PLANT DONATIONS
gratefully accepted**

*Trees, Shrubs, Woodland & Native Plants,
Shade- and Sun-Loving Perennials,
Edibles, Grasses, Ferns*

Donations can be dropped
off at the Pavilion
Friday to Monday, 11am to 4pm

**Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden
Plant Sale**

 Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden

Photo by Rick Tingman, Spirithouse Gardens

Water? Water!

Did you have enough water for your garden last summer and fall? Patterns of rain are changing and difficult to predict. What's a gardener to do?

The most basic thing is to select plants suitable to the situation in your yard. Lately, I select only plants that can tolerate some drought. If plants croak with a short drought, I don't bother with them. New plants may need to be babied with water until established, but with planning, it is not necessary to break the restrictions.

Ali Forbes, who leads the Plant Sale group, has implemented some innovative systems in her home garden. She purchased a 4,500-litre rain storage tank with the help of an SCR D grant. The property slopes, so gravity can feed a drip irrigation system to all the plants below. In a spot where the soil is too wet year round, she has made a naturalistic pond, popular with wildlife.

I too installed a storage tank for a thirsty project, a new hedge, but it lacks a distribution system, so is not so useful now. I do use it to fill watering cans; I have room for improvement! I'll need to have a pump installed.

Many gardeners have drip systems, using hoses with nodes to deliver water to particular beds or even to specific plants, such as newly planted ones. This really helps keep the water in the soil, and not on the plant leaves. On the bright side, hand-watering lets you know better which plants are thriving and which are not, and to take steps to deal with any problems.

A low-tech collection system I employ is a set of green or black plastic garbage cans,



Photo by Allison Forbes

Rainwater harvesting systems such as these large tanks installed at Spirithouse Gardens in Roberts Creek are ideal for saving water. There are several other innovative systems available to the home gardener.

placed where I can reach them with several connected hoses. These are located where they are not eyesores, some disguised, others not. I fill them early in the season, sometimes connecting several hoses to get to the furthest plants, well before severe restrictions come. For instance, I planted a couple of large rhododendrons that tower above me now; I'd hate to lose them! During the dry season, I dip a watering can into a nearby water garbage can, and hand-deliver the water to their roots. If needed, I use a fork to make holes in the soil first, letting the water percolate more easily into the dry soil. By frequent checking to note when the leaves begin to droop, I can give them water

in time.

Many gardeners get additional water sources by capturing gray water, or water that has been used already from laundry, shower, etc. Cut-away milk jugs are easy to fill while awaiting the warm shower water. Gray water may be kitchen water, laundry water, shower or bath water; all can be reused. But be careful about what water you use in the vegetable garden, or rinse your harvest (saving that water for your garden!).

Start collecting and storing water as early as possible in the spring, so you have lots to use if or when drought returns this year.

– Paddy Wales

The Buzz About Bees

There's lots of news in the North American honeybee industry these days, and most of it is bad. The U.S. bee industry suffered losses of bee colonies around 50% in the year 2023 to 2024, and this year's losses will be worse; estimates are in the 70-80% range. I never dreamed I would ever

see anything approaching this in my time in the industry.

As spring approaches in Canada, we'll soon see

how winter survival turns out here. We're certainly hoping for better results than our southern neighbours. The Varroa parasitic mite that found its way to North America in the mid 80s is certainly part of the reason for these losses, but not all. The issue of farming chemicals affecting our bees is receiving more and more scrutiny.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is assessing the border closure of bees coming into Canada from the U.S. The comment period ended January 31, and a decision

should be forthcoming. I believe most of our provinces are against it reopening.

On a personal note, I'm very honoured to have been elected president of the BC Honey Producers Association at our AGM in Vernon this past October. We have a hard working executive, and I'm very happy to do all I can for our honeybee industry here in British Columbia.

– Steve Clifford, president
Sunshine Coast Beekeepers Association
cliffordsteve5@gmail.com



Rethinking How We Fertilize

Technical fertilizer discussions are rarely simple – complex science prevents it. This is my attempt to explain fertilizers in general, be they organic, inorganic, quick acting or slow release. It's not about compost/humus, which is both a soil conditioner and fertilizer.

Let's begin with an analogy we can all relate to – grocery shopping. How would you react if the grocery store manager suggested that you purchase bread, broccoli and chicken this week? He's a food expert. He should know what you need. My first reaction? I need to see what I have in my fridge.

It's no different to fertilizer. Just because a fertilizer supplier suggests something, no matter how knowledgeable or altruistic their advice, it's unlikely to be what you need without knowing what you already have. The only way you will know what you need is by looking in the 'fridge'. And that can only be done by testing the soil.

The fundamental concept in fertilizing is you aren't feeding your family (plants). You are restocking the fridge (soil) of what has been eaten. You have no more control over the quantity your family eats than you have over what your plants ultimately consume. Adding more doesn't translate into more benefits.

But almost no average gardener gets their soil tested. So, if we don't know what we need, let's look at what plants need in general. There are two completely opposite theories on fertilizing. Both are backed by science. Both have many credible supporters.

The first, often called the 'traditional' theory, assumes that fertilizer requirements differ between plants. But experts can't agree on those requirements. Not all ornamentals have been studied so don't have standardized recommendations. Hence the plethora of rose, orchid, etc. food, each with vastly different nitrogen,

phosphorous, potassium (NPK) ratios.

The second, aptly named the 'contrarian' theory, says that since plant cell function is essentially the same, nutrient needs are about the same. There is a small range of optimum NPK ratios, about 3-1-2 to 3-1-3.

Both theories agree that at maximum growth rates, most plants use nutrients in about the same ratio. If any nutrient is provided in reasonable excess, the plant absorbs it but doesn't always translate it into improved growth. If nutrients are reasonably below a minimum level, that is not always translated into reduced growth. This is true in lab and field work.

So, in summary: We have no idea what we have in our soil and are unlikely to find out. Cheaper, at-home soil-testing kits give inconsistent and often erroneous information. Looking at plant leaves to identify soil deficiencies also gives inconsistent and erroneous information.

We have little idea of what we need – experts don't know or can't agree on the NPK required except at maximum growth rates.

Providing more nutrients doesn't translate into better results. Just because a nutrient is in the soil, doesn't mean our 'family' will 'consume' it. Even if they do, 'eating' more doesn't always translate into 'bigger-stronger-better'. AND even if nutrients are not there, plants may not suffer.

This begs the question, why are we fertilizing? What are we hoping to achieve? How good does the garden need to be to be good enough?

If the answer is to get the biggest and best blooms possible from all our plants, how practical is that? By following the traditional theory, are you willing to research, purchase, and store the required fertilizers in the various ratios for each plant you own? And whose advice do you

follow? Remember, you also don't know what is in your soil. If you follow the contrarian theory, adding fertilizer might not do a thing. Your plants may feel they are growing just fine and don't respond to it. But adding too much fertilizer has serious consequences. Chemical interactions from too much potassium can result in calcium and magnesium deficiencies in plants. Too much phosphorous can result in zinc and iron (chlorosis) deficiencies. It is also toxic to microorganisms, especially mycorrhizal fungi, which is essential for nitrogen uptake. Most soil in North America contains ample levels of phosphorus. And since phosphorus is not water-soluble and is the least needed of the NPK nutrients by plants, it is the most likely to accumulate in your soil. Consistently adding too much phosphorus can eventually toxify your soil and ironically, starve your plants. And then there is the issue of polluting waterways with run-off.

Our function as gardeners is to ensure the 'fridge' is restocked. But unlike a real fridge, soil is a dynamic biome that self-fills most nutrients. Don't assume your garden soil is deficient. It probably isn't. If everything is growing well enough, your soil likely has all the nutrients your non-veggie plants need. Nitrogen is likely the only thing that's low. Sandy soil, which doesn't hold nutrients well, might also need a top-up of potassium every other year or so. This advice pertains only to garden beds. Containers filled with soilless mix have almost no nutrients. They survive on what you feed them. In this case, the contrarian theory is valid and the easiest to follow. I recommend a fertilizer in a ratio multiple of 3-1-2.

The bottom line for the average ornamental garden: Don't fertilize unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

– Allison Forbes
Potting-Up Team Lead

SEEKING SUBMISSIONS!

Do you like to write? Do you have a keen eye for photography?

Your stories and photos suitable for publication in the Salal newsletter are always welcome. If you have something to share, please email editor Heather Till at: till@dccnet.com



Upcoming Events

Pruning II

NEW DATE: March 8 – Roberts Creek

This hands-on workshop has been postponed until March 8 and will take place in Roberts Creek. Attendance is limited to 12 participants – registration is required. You'll have the chance to watch Cheryl and try your own hand at some tree and shrub pruning. This workshop will take place outdoors, so please dress for the weather.

Members: \$10, Non-Members \$15

Gardening for Wildlife

Thursday, March 6, 7pm

We live in a region where we can easily access nature by walking the beaches and paths of local parks or kayaking in protected inlets. Encountering birds and other wildlife during these outdoor excursions can be an uplifting experience that improves our mood for days. To experience more of the happiness that viewing birds in their natural habitat can engender, why not invite them into our yards by providing the four elements that all living beings require: food, water, shelter, and space. In this slide talk, Harry Hill will explain how, by adding more and varied native plants to your garden, you can attract a wider variety of birds, bees, and butterflies. Using nature as a guide, you can choose plants that are useful and necessary to wildlife instead of plants that have no connection or usefulness in our local environment.

Members \$15, Non-Members \$20

Click here for tickets or phone our office 604-740-3969

Soil Health: Jordan Mara, Mind and Soil

Tuesday, March 18, 7pm

The Garden is excited to welcome Jordan Mara of Mind and Soil to the Garden! Jordan will lead a presentation on determining soil health and what you can do to create the optimal conditions for growing your garden. Jordan has amassed a large social media following comprised of those who seek to learn more about gardening, and the therapeutic benefits gardens can offer to support mental health.

Follow @MindandSoil on Instagram. And check out his YouTube channel for more gardening tips.

Members \$15, Non-Members \$20. Registration is required.

Click here for tickets or phone our office 604-740-3969

Seed Starting with Mel Sylvestre

Sunday, March 23, 1pm - 2:30pm

The Garden is thrilled to welcome back Mel Sylvestre of Grounded Acres Organic Farm for an informative session on seed starting vegetable crops. Mel will share info and tips that you can take away to implement in your garden. They will touch on what can be grown successfully in our Sunshine Coast climate, the correct timing for indoor starting and outdoor direct sowing, optimum soil conditions, the best tools to use, and recommended fertilizers.

Admission: Members \$15, Non-Members \$20

Click here for tickets or phone our office 604-740-3969

Children's Corner

Birds, Birds and Birds

When you see a bird, find out all you can about it. What is the bird's plumage (feathers) like? What does it like to eat? Where does it nest? When does it visit your garden? Look around you and see what species you can discover.

One of the smallest birds I observe is the chickadee. They sing a merry song "chickadee-dee-dee" as they peck at tiny bits of sunflower seeds that are in my hanging feeders. What coloured feathers do they have?

The largest bird that circles in the sky is the bald eagle. These birds have very good eyesight and I have seen them perched on the branches of an ancient tree named the Eagle Tree in West Sechelt. I whistle to them and they look down at me. If you have lost something, look for it using your eagle eyes!

There are many other large birds that sit in trees and call "caw caw caw". These birds are the crows and they will fly down to peck up seeds from my garden path. They are always on their own because all the other birds fly away when they swoop down. There is a saying that if you spot three crows there will be a letter for you. Where might it be?

Walking around the Sechelt Marsh, I can see many water birds such as mallards and Canada geese. If you feed these birds, the pigeons will also flutter down and call "coo coo" trying to get their share of seed, too. Pigeons are also called doves, and the slender light grey ones with a little black neck band are called



Photo by Heather Till

Bald eagles like to perch high up in tall trees and watch what's going on. They make many different sounds; it often seems as if they are talking to each other.

Eurasian collared doves.

There are many little brown coloured birds, some of whom have tiny red heads. They belong to the house and purple finch family. The most brightly coloured is the goldfinch, who is just in my garden for the summer months.

Perhaps you can make a list or draw some of the birds that you can discover.

– Grandma June Meyer

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The Garden is looking for an Historical Archivist

Do you love historical records? Do you have access to a computer and scanner? Are you organised and detail-oriented? Would you enjoy a rainy-day project that could be done from home in your spare time?

Several boxes of archival records from the Botanical Garden, dating back to its conception some 20 years ago, are awaiting your organizational skills. Further historical research into the Garden property and its previous owners/uses would also be welcome.

If this project interests you, please contact the Garden at
info@coastbotanicalgarden.org
or call 604-740-3969

Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden

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(October to April)

Friday to Monday ~ 11 am - 4 pm
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