

Flora



CALGARY HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

ANDREA LAU

Flora

Essays compiled by the
CALGARY HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Illustrations by
ANDREA LAU



Foreword

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Essays compiled by the Calgary Horticultural Society

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The language of plants is ubiquitous. Through scent or blooms, fruits or roots, home-grown gardens or sprawling vistas of green, plants speak to all of us in different ways. How we relate to, feel and express our thoughts regarding our relationship to plants and gardens is seldom spoken to, yet for most, provides an important and meaningful link to the natural world.

For over 117 years, the Calgary Horticultural Society has been cultivating Calgary's gardening community, encouraging gardening for the enhancement of our environment and quality of life. In the spirit of recognizing the connection between people and plants, the Society embarked upon a special book project, beginning with a call to society members who wished to share a personal, meaningful story about gardens, special memories, or personal connections to plants.

From the resulting contributions, a collection of 22 stories were selected and then passed to local artist, Andrea Lau, to craft the book. For each narrative, Andrea first read and then created original artwork to complement the piece. She also held workshops, guiding 40 participants in the art of creating traditional, hand-made paper with donated plant materials. You will find your own sheet on the next page of this book.

Flora is the 'fruit' of this project. Please enjoy this limited-edition art book, exploring the themes of community, plants and story. We strive to bring new and experienced gardeners together to have fun. The Flora book project helped us achieve this endeavor and grow our gardening community.



Artistic Inspiration

Flora is the creation of Calgary based multidisciplinary artist Andrea Lau, whose work is strongly rooted in her lifelong relationship with the natural environment. Lau's visualization for the book was inspired by her own connections to the natural world, the enthusiasm of the Calgary Horticultural Society members, and the beauty of community stories.

Lau created all the *Flora* artworks with purpose and meaning. Just as gardening is 'hands on' and 'trial & error,' similarly, Lau crafted each artwork by hand. Instead of garden shovel or spade, Lau held paintbrush or pen. As gardeners layer seeds and soil, Lau layered with different paint colours and techniques—adding here, moving there, and at times, beginning again. With anticipation and excitement, both gardener and Lau, as artist, bore witness to their creations as they grew.

Ultimately, the book reflects the embodiment of the tremendous connection between humans and plants, gardens and ultimately – the earth. Although the story collection is diverse, Lau noted the peony and apple tree were mentioned by several writers as intergenerational plants—valued both as legacy and a tribute to ancestors. The stories describe how the plants have thrived and inspired ongoing connections to the natural world. Each spring, they unfurl their leaves and grow blooms, continuing to flower joy upon all. Look for the hand carved relief prints that accompany the stories of peonies and apple trees. For Lau, the replication and printing symbolize the continuity of generational joy and legacy.

PAPER INSERT

This paper was created by the Calgary Horticultural Society community using traditional hand papermaking techniques. It is made from donated plant matter (*iris leaves, foxtail grass & more*) combined with cotton, abaca, and hemp fibers.

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Royal Star

spring blossoms
snowy flowers
balance
mountain crown
whiteness
high between clouds
playfully spread
cotton balls
across the sky
young magnolia
with kitten-paw softness
holds star flowers
against silver bark
I inhale sweetness
filling my lungs
wonder
how your stellantis
came
from the land
of the rising sun

Lucia Semenoff



Life Lessons

LEARNED FROM WALKING THE BOTANICAL
GARDENS OF SILVER SPRINGS LABYRINTH

Lesson 1: There are different paths to choose and each of us needs to walk the path that speaks to us.

Lesson #2: Various distractions will occur, over which we have no control.

Lesson #3: It is important not to push ourselves too quickly along the path we are meant to travel, but instead slow down and trust that we are exactly where we need to be.

Lesson #4: In times of stress, we need to just slow down, breathe deeply, and know that we are supported.

Lesson #5: When we think we are furthest away from our destination sometimes that is when we are closest!

Lesson #6: In slowing down and taking time to utilize our senses, it is clear that it is truly the journey and not the destination that matters.

Lesson #7: It is important to look up and not always have your head down so that you can see the beauty that surrounds you!

Susanne Heaton



Social Zones

My garden contains a range of growing zones and “social” zones.

Without an alley, the backyard is private and shaded, and I am left to my own thoughts, free to enjoy bird songs and squirrels scampering. It is a delight when a neighbour is available for a chat over the fence.

My front garden is very different. Although it is on a secluded street, it is a haven for walkers. If I have tasks to do at the front, I allow for multiple interruptions as my time is often interspersed with a variety of conversations, whether a passing “Hello” or longer chat with those accompanied by their now familiar dogs.

Some are long-time friends who, like me, grew up in this community and were drawn back to its familiarity later in life. Some are neighbours who comment on the progression of blooms or, perhaps, the need for rain. Others offer a polite nod and words of encouragement. There are even some who ask about a specific plant or gardening advice.

My favourite conversations end with me offering to share a plant or seeds so this garden and the joy it provides can be shared in the community and, hopefully, inspire others to create spaces that spur conversations and encourage friendships to blossom. There is nothing like a garden to draw people together.

Maureen Leew



Apple Tree Rescue

AUTUMN 1989

I was asked to help dig out a dying apple tree (8–10 years old) from my friend's yard in Dalhousie, NW Calgary. He said it yielded good fruit. The tree was heavily infested with fireblight, a type of woody stem cancer. I took it home and replanted it, cutting the fireblighted deadwood off, and thinning and training the new growth, season after season.

Now 35 years later, it has matured into a solidly “scaffolded” apple tree (great for little climbers) yielding sizeable (*up to 7 cm in diameter, when thinned in early summer*) abundant fruit annually, which I share with neighbours and friends.

From the internet, Patterson apple:

“Flesh pure white resists browning. Good dessert and keeper, juice, and drying. Very good cooking ... greenish yellow ground with blushed cheek, very mildly sub-acid, flavor excellent quality the best. A good keeper.”

It is a cross between a Columbia x Melba apple that was developed at the University of Saskatchewan by Dr. C. F. Patterson (tested in 1946).

Albert Stasiulis



Novice Gardener

Years ago, a friend commented on his neighbour's beautifully landscaped yard, "But then, he does belong to the Horticultural Society." I didn't have the nerve to tell him that I did too.

The Society's prize-winning, spectacular gardens inspired me to join. Waterfalls and water gardens, vine covered trellises, secret pathways, and endless varieties of flowers, trees, and shrubs. I wanted them all.

After joining, I read the Society's newsletter, gardening books, magazines and attended presentations and garden viewings, intending to start all my own bedding plants and create a prize-winning garden.

By May, reality struck. I hadn't even started my bedding plants and lacked the skills, time, and money for my lofty plans. My attempts seemed pathetic, each plant failing to thrive a personal insult.

Things looked up the next year. My plans were modest and attainable—a tiny herb garden, a few strategically placed pots, some new-to-me plants, a trellis. And I bought my bedding plants.

I love being outside planting, digging, and moving things around. My occasional successes bring me great pleasure, and I often think of my mother and grandmother who had amazing gardens.

Once, gardening with my little granddaughter, up to our elbows in dirt, she asked "Don't you just love the smell of wet dirt?" I do—it's one of my favorite smells.

Carol Pantella – Originally published in the *Calgary Herald*, 1998



The Bouquet

It was the year of the millennium, and I was about to get married and move to Canada. I went to the venue to make the final arrangements for the day of the wedding.

I was early, and another bride-to-be was discussing her event. They were talking about flowers and colour themes. I started to panic as I had not considered these details: we had only just decided to get married. I had to think fast. What flowers would I want in my bouquet? What would be significant and meaningful to us?

Inspiration came in the form of cornflowers. We had met through conservation work. I wanted something that could be found in the wild in my bouquet.

I got my wish and pink and blue cornflowers provided the colour theme of the day, and we even had iced versions on top of the cake. I discovered I could grow these flowers here in Calgary, and 25 years later I have a special spot in my garden where those pink and blue cornflowers thrive. It is a dry sunny spot with poor stony soil, but each year the cornflowers come up to remind me of the big day.

Sarah Greenwood



Magic Apples and Other Memories

I'm a native Calgarian and grew up in northwest Calgary in a house my dad built. My parents were gardeners and passed on their love of gardening to me. My mom oversaw the growing of vegetables, herbs, berries, and flowers. Half of our backyard was the source of produce to fill our freezer. Summers included games of pretending to sell lettuce wraps filled with sliced radishes and giving them to neighbourhood friends through the milk chute.

And mom always had sweet peas or other flowers to make posies for her weekly visits to senior residences.

But the most magical to me as a young child was our apple tree. It was planted by my dad, who grafted onto it many varieties of BC apples available in the 1960s.

We had limbs of McIntosh, 'Red delicious', and 'Spartan' on our apple tree and could eat what we wished. There were always apples leftover for mom's pies.

My parents' garden is one of the amazing memories I have of growing up in Calgary, and this magical apple tree is still growing in Calgary more than 60 years later. I have continued my dad's apple legacy and most years make apple sauce from their apples.

Linda MacKay



Reader Rock

Have you ever entered the Reader Rock Garden and felt like you've been transported into a space that edges ever so closely towards the magical?

You breathe in the pinene and the limonene from the craggy old conifers, and wander over the damp, uneven stones looking for all the blooming treasures. Of course, you've been there so many times, in so many seasons, that you joyfully anticipate the drifts of hepatica bursting from the melting snow, the pockets with lady's slippers spilling from them, and the outrageously gorgeous peonies with flowers the shape of ballroom skirts over crinolines.

You rediscover the hiding places of sky-blue poppies-that-are-not-actually poppies, and you stroll along living fences formed from swaying martagon lilies. You forget that you are scant yards away from a major street and one of the biggest entertainment complexes in the country. Sometimes you bring a book, and you always bring a camera.

Sheryl Normandeau



Homage to Mary Perlmutter, gardener extraordinaire.

My Aunt Mary was the most accomplished gardener during my childhood, which was populated with good gardeners. She was vermicomposting in the early 1970s, helped establish Heritage Seeds of Ontario, was the first president of the Canadian Organic Growers Association, and took her Master Gardener qualifications in the early 1980s. She was also the person answering gardening questions for CBC Toronto.

I well remember a trip with her to the Experimental Farm Gardens in Ottawa at Thanksgiving. She spent the whole time harvesting seeds and putting them in old envelopes with the Latin names written across the front—with particular emphasis on native and heritage varieties. These were all carefully propagated in her greenhouse and huge garden at the schoolhouse in Fenelon Falls, Ontario— their seeds collected and contributed to the seed bank.

Marion Jones



The Botanical Gardens of Silver Springs

ROSE COLLECTION

I am a lover of gardens, particularly those with roses. I volunteer in the Silver Springs Botanical Gardens (BGSS). BGSS has grown a more botanical focus with a specialized collection of gardens, including several signature collections. My role began by caring for the growing rose collection with a team of volunteers, working in partnership with two Canadian Heritage rose experts. Through this partnership we were able bring many older-bred Canadian Zone 3 (Z3) roses into the gardens.

To our surprise, in spring 2024, two Canadian Z3 Heritage rose experts let us know we were one of three Canadian gardens with a significant collection of these roses. The other two were the Montreal Botanical Garden and the University of Alberta Botanical Garden. Our small group of volunteers had created something special and worthy of protection.

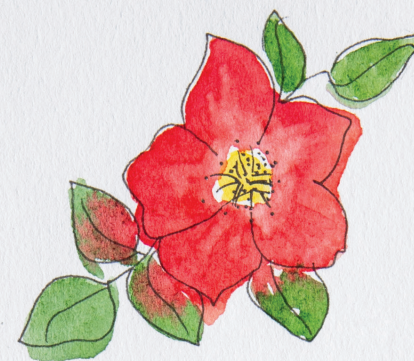
We continue to care for our roses, much more intentional in our purpose of creating, protecting, and preserving a significant collection. These roses thrive in Zone 3 environments, with the help of hardy and wild rose species parentage, Alberta's wild rose being one of these.

The path we followed was serendipitous. It was both luck and the support of volunteers and Canadian Heritage rose experts that resulted in creating something special to recognize the roses, their breeders, and the wonderful stories these roses tell.

Gail Fitzmartyn



Morden Blush



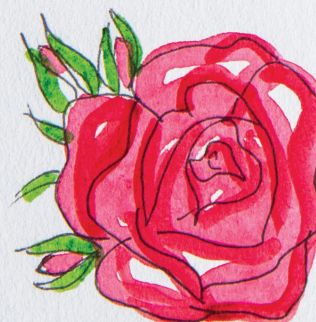
Cherry Pie



Oscar Peterson



Olds College



Navy Lady



Kimberley

Hi, I'm Gary

Hi, I'm Gary. I can still remember the day I started my first vegetable garden, with my mom, in our yard. Seasonally, it was around spring, I remember it was right after my birthday (I just turned 60.) Because of that event I have become a lifetime gardener and will remain so until the day I die!

Gary Schoepfer



Fairy Flowers

It was a cold spring following on the heels of a long, hard winter. Heavy clouds hung over the city and ice clung to the banks of the Bow River. Even the song of returning birds seemed muted.

Living near the river pathway, I see folks out on walks enjoying nature. One morning a group of children from the local nursery came down the path, their mittened hands clutching a rope. As they toddled past my yard, a small cry came from one of the girls. "Flowers! Fairy flowers!" she exclaimed, dropping to her knees. Then all the children abandoned the rope and clustered around a swath of snowdrops that had magically appeared overnight. Their bright white flowers and fresh green leaves waved defiantly above the patches of snow.

Snowdrops (*Galanthus spp.*) are one of the first flowers to bloom in the spring and are a symbol of returning life. In Greek mythology they are linked to Persephone, the goddess of spring, who brought this flower with her from the underworld.

For our community, this patch of snowdrops has become a signal, as welcome as robins or pussy willows, that sunny green days lay ahead.

Rosemary Griebel



Secret Gardener

Although my mom, who nurtured and experimented with hundreds of plants, is the gardener of our family, my dad was always the “secret gardener” of our yard. He engineered the drip irrigation system that watered snapdragons and nourished tomatoes, and the custom rain barrel to funnel excess rainwater along fences and eavestroughs to feed the lilacs and hollyhocks. However, I believe that, secretly, his favourite part of the garden to pamper and tend were the saskatoon berry bushes.

Every year, they were pruned to their 1.8 m height, and my dad covered the branches with netting to protect the berries from snacking animals. He also took great care to keep the netting tight around the base of the bushes, nimbly darting in and out behind them, to prevent little birds from wandering in and being unable to find their way out again.

I have fond memories of my dad filling a small plastic bag with his daily harvest of saskatoon berries. These were added to a collection in our freezer until one day my mom would open the oven and bring out his favourite: saskatoon berry pie—the best way to enjoy my parents’ shared love of the garden!

Elyse Tremblay



Homage to Mary Dover

As my 57th birthday approaches, I want to share a story about Mary Dover and her garden. Details may be a bit blurry, being I was only seven years old, but this memory comes every spring as the weather warms and the days get longer.

When I was in grade 2, Mary Dover, an inspiring and distinguished Calgarian, spoke to our class. I remember her stories about family, work, and her passion for gardening. She instilled in me the wonderful rejuvenation of the lands in spring, when the vibrant green grasses start growing, the birds return, and chirping fills the air. The animals become frisky, and the flowering of buffalo beans and crocuses often coincide with the birth of new calves and colts.

Many of the plants in her family's garden came from overseas, representing small pieces of her homeland. Her peonies were 100 years old. Imagine, 100-year-old peonies, started five generations ago and still thriving! What a legacy for future generations. I am still so inspired by generational plants.

I recently read that there are now over 500 peonies at the Mary Dover Garden. I think about this inspiring Alberta woman and her garden, now that the days are longer and the birds are chirping.

Karen Begg



Sleep. Creep. Leap.

When I grew up in small-town Saskatchewan, gardening was essential for feeding our family of eight through long, cold winters. My siblings and I would change from school clothes to work clothes and weed the garden before doing homework. Dad, who operated heavy equipment clearing land and building highways, often brought home small trees that I helped plant and care for. This responsibility instilled a lifelong love of gardening in me.

We never called it gardening; we planted, watered, and weeded, enduring sore backs, sunburns, and dirt under our nails. I was especially drawn to the magic of trees, captivated by their growth and grandeur. This fascination led me to plant trees every year—spring, summer, and fall. When I sold my previous home, I even made it a condition to take my beloved trees with me.

A few years ago, I began an exciting project—planting trees in a heart-shaped formation. After researching and consulting with gardeners, nurseries, and the Horticultural Society, I chose 28 spring snow crabapple trees from a local nursery. As I've learned, trees follow the cycle: Sleep. Creep. Leap. This is our leap year, and I eagerly await the growth—an ongoing journey fuelled by my love of gardening.

Shirley Sherbut



The Great Harvest

During the pandemic my world shrank to the size of my property. Every centimetre of space seemed worth questioning in the efficiency and purpose of my life. I wanted to grow my own food.

Outside in the backyard, I assembled a plexiglass greenhouse and built raised beds. I trellised small gardens and rigged a span of chicken wire into an organic compost bin. I put fabric pots and containers everywhere and drilled hooks into eaves for hanging planters. With the backyard ready, I turned to the front.

The wasted space was offensive. Why do we have front lawns? Just a simple sheet of tiring turf, cordoned off, threatening weeds, and always thirsty.

I decided on a total transformation. I peeled off the grass and, when winter was certain, planted 250 cloves of garlic. In early spring the green stalks peaked upwards and grew. The shoots came in early summer—delicious when fried in butter. Then the great harvest. Enough to replant, to make the wonderful condiment *toum*, and dehydrate the rest into powder for family and friends.

For four years now I haven't needed to buy garlic. From wasted space I found a better and healthier self-sufficiency.

Philip Neville



Heirlooms

I have wonderful memories of my grandmother's garden. When she moved from small town New Sarepta to live with my favourite Aunt Elsie in Edmonton, she brought along many plants and continued to garden until she passed away at the age of 98. My aunt was also an avid gardener, and she kept my grandmother's plants thriving. When Elsie passed away in 2009, I carefully transplanted many of these plants to my garden in Calgary—a small pink peony, purple and white Iris, lily of the valley, blue iris, yellow day lilies, tiger lilies, and hostas.

It took a couple of years for the peony to acclimate, but the others thrived, and all continue to bloom and bring me joy. I think of my grandmother and aunt every time I water the gardens bordering the front, side, and back of the house, and the driveway.

Over time, the iris and day lilies were split many times and bagged for neighbours to pick up and plant in their own gardens. Throughout Evanston today, if you see purple and white iris, they likely came from my garden, via my grandmother.

The peony is now a large, healthy shrub, with pride of place in the flowerbed near the bottom of the driveway, with large showy blooms for all to enjoy what was my grandmother's favourite flower.

Anne Martinot



An Ode to Peas

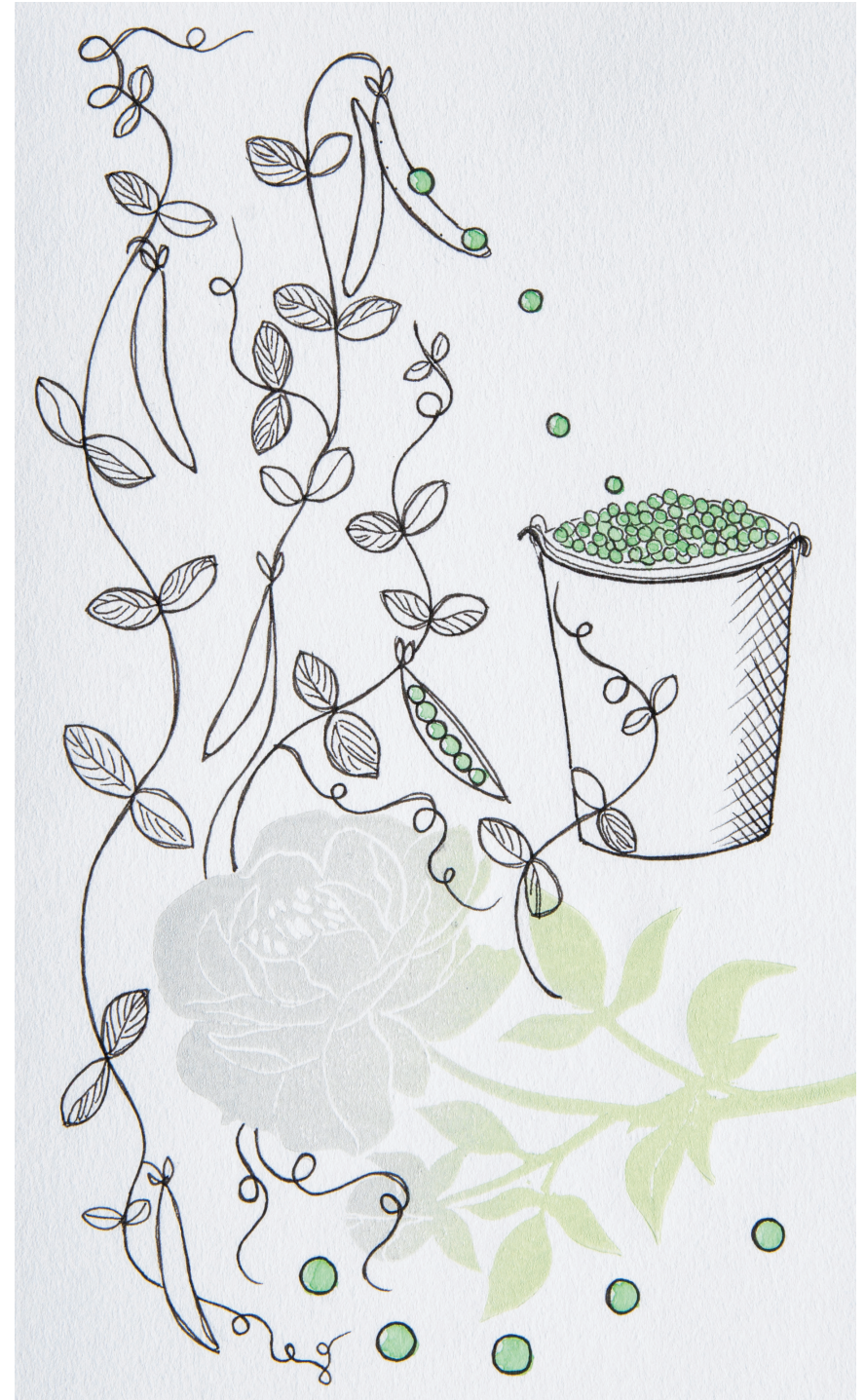
Growing up on a middle prairie farm, we had three garden plots: east for potatoes and corn; central for vegetables; and west for fruit, including raspberry patch, apple trees, pear tree, and gooseberries. This was also where the peonies resided, a piece of which now grows in my own garden (*Festiva Maxima*). Strawberries and rhubarb grew nearby, and the shelterbelt had a row of saskatoons. If we were lucky, spring not being too cold, windy, or wet, we harvested saskatoons, which became jam and pies (Dad's favourite). Summers were never idle. Once the soil warmed, we kids pulled weeds and hilled potatoes. From mid-July to September's end became a picking marathon, including strawberries, beans, and peas.

The shelling spot was in front of the house, by a picture window, on a grass blanket between the front steps and lilac, a curtain of hollyhocks behind. There, we shelled buckets of peas. I don't remember what we did with the shells, maybe food for the pigs, and not all the peas made it into the bowls. We ate our fair share of the bounty!

Looking back, I find it amazing that we preserved enough vegetables, fruit, and potatoes to feed a family of six all winter. Organic before organic became trendy, local before local became a calling card. All of it mere steps away.

But what I remember most are the peas.

Lynne Nieman



Morning Blossom Watch

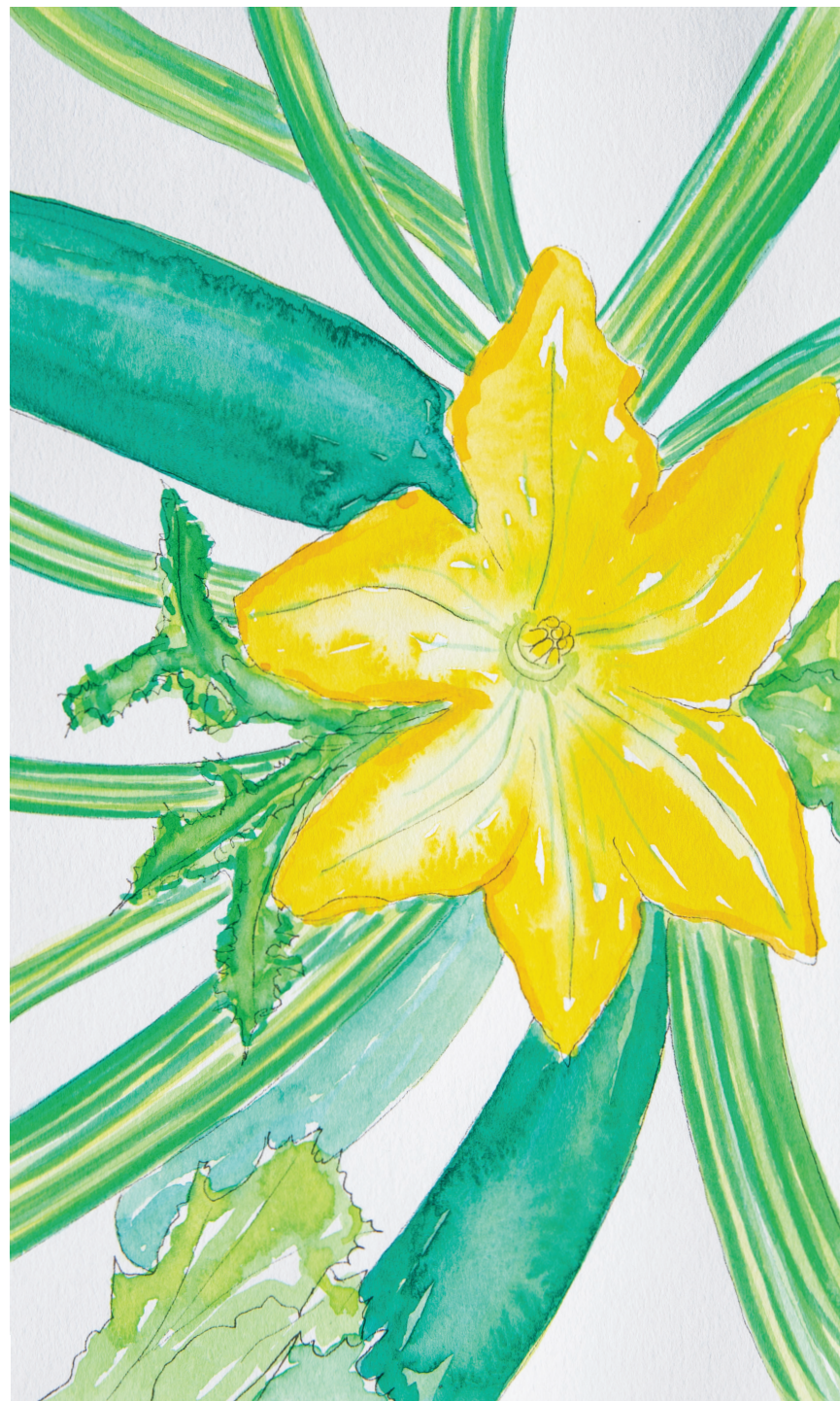
If you hold your fingertips together and slowly open them up, you will mimic the blooming of the glorious yellow flower of the zucchini plant. The blossoms are open for only one day before dying off.

When we first grew zucchini, we got excited about every flower, believing a zucchini would grow from each one. When we looked closer, one had a stem and the other had a zucchini below the flower. That is the difference between the male and female. Your plant needs both, but in the beginning, it might only have one or the other.

We were frustrated when the zucchini would die off. Then we learned we could help our plants. Now, each time a male flower blooms and there are no female flowers also blooming, at the end of the day we pinch off the flower and save it in the refrigerator for the next blooming female. When a female flower opens, we peel back the petals of the shrunken male pod and rub the stamen against the pistil of the female to pollinate it.

Morning blossom watch has spread to our neighbours, who have also started growing. We've even shared our males.

Sandy Krausnick



In the Garden, Something Changes

The garden is where I breathe best.

I cannot pray away wars or climate change.

I cannot find the bodies of murdered women and children.

I cannot stem the tides of food insecurity or the ignorance that fuels the spread of preventable disease.

I begin my garden work with a head full of worry.

I lift the first watering can of the day with fear.

My heart is heavy.

My head is hurting.

Minutes later, the world spins as usual, but I am transformed.

I smile at the clover's slow and steady colonization of the lawn.

I marvel at the buzzing cloud of native bees at work in the flowers of my apple trees.

I lightly flick the blossoms on my tomato plants, physically encouraging pollination and fruit production.

In the garden, something changes.

It's not the world.

It's me.

Joy Gregory



A drift of pink; an advance of amethyst

Fireweed (*Chamaenerion angustifolium*) often shows as a stunning swath of fuchsia-pink spears. Blossoms march up from spent flowers to tight buds; lanceolate leaves form slender spires.

When I was a little girl in Northern Ontario, open areas were filled with fireweed that was considered not quite desirable. Emerging after a fire had blackened a landscape made them a herald of regrowth.

Over a long summer, fireweed glows in open fields, abandoned yards, back alleys, and naturalized areas. In a garden like mine.

Bees, moths, and butterflies land and pollinate the blossoms. The seeds ripen in magenta pods that then emerge with tufts of white fluff to carry the seeds away. Sometimes, I pick some fluff then carry it away and tuck it under a bit of gravel or wood. Sometimes fireweed grows in the spring. The tough brown stalks offer shelter to insects in the fall and winter and are beautiful with their curving pods and bits of fluff.

Fireweed carries decades of wonderful childhood memories.

Now, I look for my stalwart magenta friend on my travels; it helps to make a strange land welcoming.

Monika Smith



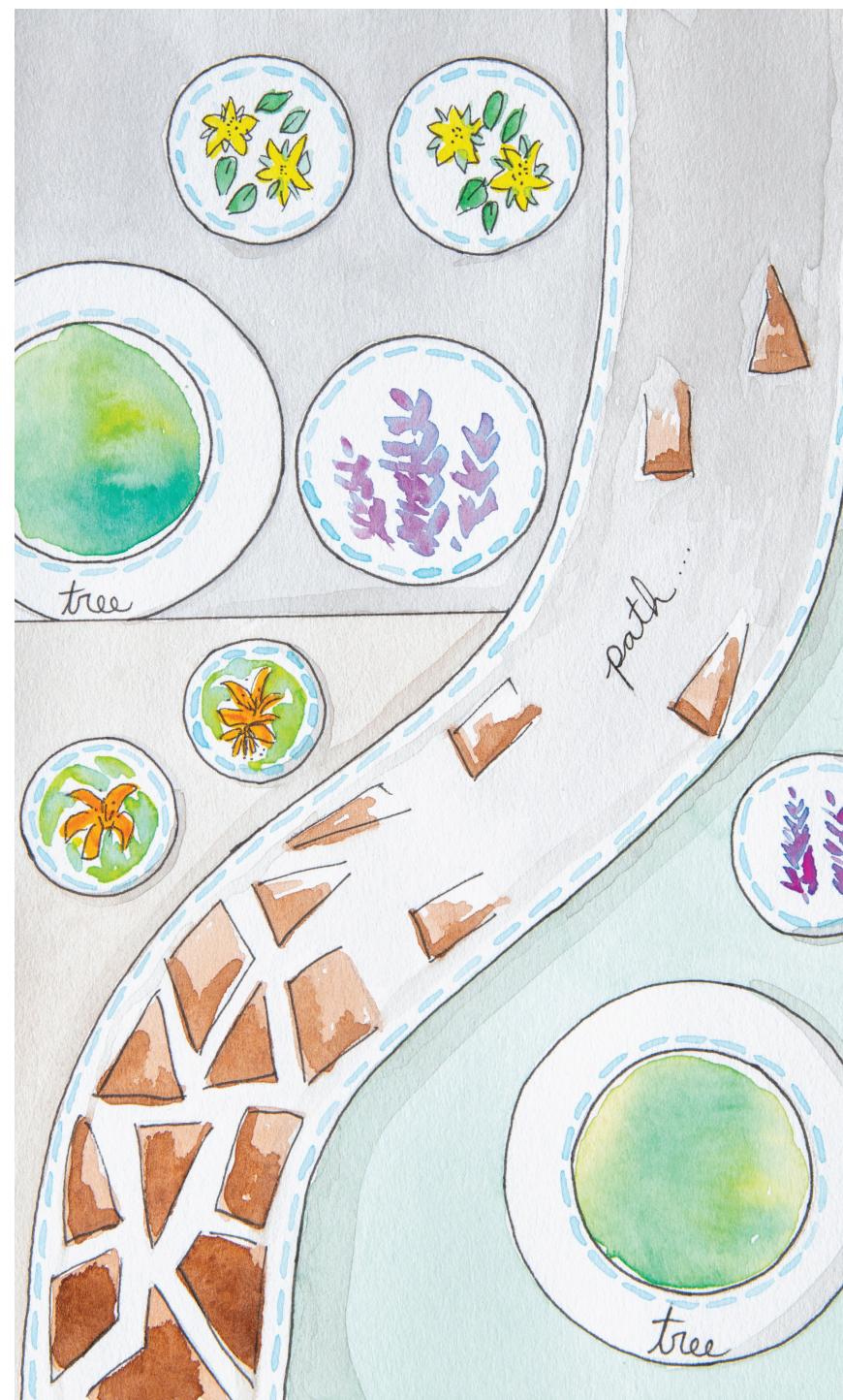
Calgary Horticultural Community

My neighbourhood is Charleswood Heights. It was developed in the 1960s, but now in the 2020s, it's considered part of Calgary's inner city. We moved here in 1992, and a previous owner was a good friend of Grandma's. It's a small world indeed.

Initially we focused on restoring the yard, including building a new fence, pruning overgrown trees, and moving a few shrubs. I didn't grow up with a green thumb, so I had to learn by trial and error. A friend gave me a Calgary Horticultural Society membership, and I spent many hours browsing the Society's magazine. I've kept that membership and see it as my gardening community.

A few years of walking by a xeriscape neighbourhood yard gave us the courage to move forward with developing our yard. My husband wanted a plan before we started digging, so I attended the Society's "Design your Yard" workshop. Together we modified our plan and then started the transformation. A sloped grass yard was tiered with stone pathways and river rock, plants for Calgary's climate and mulch were installed, and rain barrels installed and used for hand watering. In the 2000s, our yard and the one we used for inspiration showed up in The City of Calgary's Waterwise brochure. Our yard continues to evolve but you can still see the bones of our original plan.

Judy Bennett



Contributors

Many people have participated in this project and we are grateful for their contributions. If we happened to have missed including your name in this list, please accept our apology.

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James Wang	Paul Lau
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Karina Pantella	Solomiia Semenkosvat
Kath Smyth	Susan Fogg
Katie Downie	Tara Schiefler
Leslie O'Loughlin	Trudy Holder
Lisa Caldwell	Victoria Fretz
Lora Fong	Yu Sum Wong



*“Don’t you just love the
smell of wet dirt?”*