

ST. GABRIEL'S GARDEN



GROWING NEWS



About Our Garden Ministry

Another growing season is upon us, and the Garden Ministry has been very busy responding to an awakening garden. There are regular invitations to “Join Us in the Garden” on Saturday mornings, and we encourage anyone with a little time, interest, or even curiosity to come out to see how you can help. After the spring clean-up, and assessment of post-winter damage, we have once again been reminded that life will always find a way. Unfortunately, it’s often the “weed life”, and that will be a consistent challenge. As well, many of the fruit trees are in trouble due to disease. They have been pruned and sprayed, but it appears we may have lost some. Particularly hard-hit have been the cherry, peach and possibly the pear trees. Time will tell whether they can be saved, or will need to be removed.



A sample of the ever-encroaching “Garden of Weeden”

We’re experiencing some other setbacks, too. The system of light-and-moisture barriers we attempted in order to quell the weeds where we wish to create a Sunflower Garden (to the west of the Elkhorn Driveway) was not as successful as we’d hoped. Know that weeds are very tenacious and persistent, and these managed to grow parallel to the light-and-moisture barriers. Then they popped up along the edges, if not breaking through any gaps they found. So, we will have to persist in reclaiming that area of the garden before it can become what we intend it to be—full of “plant sunshine” in the form of various varieties of sunflowers that grow to different heights and bloom at different times, continuously presenting the happiness of their yellow flowerheads.

As well, the perennial garden we want to establish in the “desert space” talked about in the last issue (the area under the south window overhang) is not moving ahead as quickly as we planned. However, patience and perseverance are necessary qualities that gardening requires, and we will continue to work toward that goal—just more slowly. It’s frustrating, but ultimately, it will be worth the wait.

On a happy note, the Children’s Liturgy group once again helped with planting broccoli in the community garden boxes, and we hope to be able to enlist their help again later in the season to do some harvesting.



Dark blue Haskap berry bunches on horizontal branch.

Another piece of good(ness) is news of the first harvest. The Haskap bushes in the North Garden produce an elongated berry-like fruit that is rather oddly shaped—more like an oval or bean shape than the round berries we're more accustomed to. They have similar colouration to blueberries, and their flavour is also blueberry-like. What's quite wonderful about them is how early in the season they are ready to pick...this year we were able to harvest before mid-June!

Spotlight on the Garden (and Spotlight on an *Invader!*)



This issue we turn the spotlight on an invasive species that is quietly trying to take over, particularly in the North Garden. A parishioner with gardening experience alerted the Parish Office to its presence (as well as a couple of other invasive species), but this one in particular, we've known about for years. Its official name is *Vincetoxium nigrum*, or Black Swallow Wort. And we seem to be waging a losing battle against it.

It's a very sneaky enemy, sneakiness being a hallmark of successful enemies! This plant is not "unsightly" as some invasive plants are... until you look more closely at it. Once you do, you immediately understand its "generic" name: "Dog-Strangling Vine". Anyone trying to rip it out will discover that it has wound its way around tree trunks and branches, or slunk along the ground to climb up any plant it finds along the way, or even wound around itself, and is therefore extremely difficult to remove.



Black Swallow Wort (hereinafter called "DSV") has long slender leaves that grow on opposite sides of the stem, and produces pink-purple blooms that are rather pretty (until you know what they will produce). Once the long pointy seed pods mature, fluffy seeds are released and full-scale invasion becomes airborne!

"DSV" is also toxic to wildlife: deer, for example, won't touch it, so an unsuspecting person might think it *wanted* in their garden, should deer munching be their problem. It's not ours, though people who live near forested areas will understand.

What is much more worrying is that "DSV" mimics the milkweed plant, a favourite "nursery plant" for Monarch Butterflies. The larvae from hatched Monarch eggs thrive on the leaves of the Common Milkweed (which we are encouraged to allow to grow, since Monarch Butterflies are a threatened species). Should a Monarch be fooled by the flowers of the "DSV", the larvae will hatch, but feeding on the leaves will result in the larvae's starvation, as this plant holds no nutritional value for them. Consequently, DSV not only overtakes and chokes out the plants we wish to have growing, it also further destroys a species we are struggling to save.





"DSV" in bloom against currants in the background

Although we have been waging war on this invasive plant for well over six years, we have been unable to eradicate it. Consequently, we are entreating people to respond to our urgent plea to come out to our Saturday morning "Join Us in the Garden" sessions...or to give us whatever time they have, if Saturday is not a good day. Don some gloves and direct whatever vengeance you might be feeling upon ripping out this invader. Pictures are provided, so that you will know what you are attacking...it does become clear very quickly, because its "nickname" is so appropriate. It feels like this plant COULD strangle a dog!!

We can win against it (though it will take us more than one season), but we definitely need a lot of extra help this season to begin to rip it out before it goes to seed. Plant parts must be placed in garbage bags so that seeds do not escape. All of these supplies are available from the Garden Ministry. **Please** contact the Garden Ministry with your pledge to help!

Photo Credits: Bridget Barron

Meditation on Pulling Weeds

I believe that everything is here for our good. God has given me this weed for *my* good, for it has brought me close to this section of green. I know this weed is just an "uninvited plant". Its purpose is to draw my attention to the needs of the "invited" plants around it. In removing the weed, I am freeing more nutrients for the use of the invited plants. I imagine the weeds are sins, which I am removing from the soul of this garden. I am giving the invited plants the grace to grow as their Maker intended. I am the Good Gardener.

"To You from Failing Hands..."

by Marlene Bourdon-King, Editor



The shock and sadness of learning of the death of Pope Francis the day after Easter has waned now, since the conclave of cardinals so quickly chose as his successor, our new pope, Leo XIV. Liturgically speaking, the timing of his death seems fitting—a season of "resurrections": of Jesus, of Pope Francis to eternal life, and of the Church under our new leader. But a real fear might be that the legacy of Pope Francis—his championing of the marginalized, his giving voice to the needs of the voiceless—including the environment in his first and very important encyclical *Laudato Si'*—will be set aside, and lose the attention it still so desperately needs.

Hence, the title of this editorial quotes a line from Canadian John McRae's famous WWI poem, "In Flanders Fields". True, it was a very different war he was alluding to, but Pope Francis's hands did, necessarily in the end, fail. And so, it is to us that the torch of hope must pass. We must continue to bring light to the ever-worsening plight of the planet God gave us to be our home. We must continue to bring pressure to bear on local, provincial and federal governments to address environmental issues in meaningful and sustainable ways. We must steadfastly fight against the continuing assaults on land, water, air, and the species that inhabit all—including humans—by the relentless pursuit of personal, political, and corporate profit to the detriment of life itself.

What we do in the St. Gabriel's Garden is but a small contribution to the overall health of the planet. But we all know what cumulative action can accomplish, as "ripples" move outward. Single votes elect legislators; legislators form governments; governments establish policy and pass laws. Whether we are an electorate that will keep the environment on Government "radar" is a perennial question.





Photo Credit: KFYR

As fires rage, this year across the prairie provinces in addition to forested areas we are more “accustomed” to hearing about, we wonder what we can do. It is so easy to feel overwhelmed and helpless. We certainly do not have to look very far afield to find evidence of a planet in peril, and increasingly, human lives are being severely impacted as evacuations are ordered, and homes destroyed by the fires and floods that respond only to the conditions that spawned them.

Of course, we must never forget the power of prayer. Jesus told us that we have only to ask God to grant our prayers, as long as what we ask for conforms to God’s will. It is difficult to imagine God wanting the destruction of his creation to continue unabated. The rainbow is the sign of God’s covenant with us, after the Great Flood, never to destroy the world again. This time, it is not GOD who is destroying the world...it is human beings of the “first world”. And so, we must pray that hearts may turn toward compassion, choosing action that gives and affirms life.

We must hear the cries of people in island nations who watch as the sea level relentlessly rises and threatens, with no hope of recovery, to permanently drown the very land upon which they live. We must listen to the voices of indigenous peoples—not only in Canada but also throughout the world—who know how to take care of the land upon which they have successfully and sustainably lived for thousands of years. Prayer can open our hearts to hear what the gifts of the Holy Spirit can enable in us: to understand and consider the issues prudently, and to act wisely with strength and courage.

In the meantime, speaking of “failing hands”, we of the Garden Ministry are waging war within a Sacred Outdoor Space that is always in danger of being overwhelmed by the ingenious versatility of those plants which are ever-ready-to-take-over in a “Garden of Weeden”. We know that many people are unwilling or unable to officially become ministry members. But that does not mean that individuals, even children, cannot make even small contributions.

If parishioners are helping with the harvesting, for example, that leaves the GM members free to do the more “specialized” gardening tasks. It does not take much training to learn how the watering system works, and that is a crucial and regular, though not difficult task that is best undertaken in the early morning or evening.

You may be thinking these pleas are tiresome. Indeed, they are! But the garden does not shrink, the weeds do not take a vacation, and the effective care of this garden property does not happen without many more helpers. The garden is the responsibility of St. Gabriel’s Parishioners! The GM will provide leadership, training and direction, but as we are, we cannot possibly provide all the help required! Neither can the parish afford to hire the full-time help we need. Help must be part of our Christian service. We’re not going to stop asking, but we will be SO GRATEFUL to see you!



Photo Credit: Caroline Martin

“Growing News” is the newsletter of the St. Gabriel’s Garden Ministry, published quarterly, at the turn of each season.

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