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Parrotiopsis jacquemontiana

Loose and woody!

Walt Bubelis

‘Loose and woody’ – I used this phrase to describe my gardening style in the short piece about seed collecting in the Spring 2017 issue, and I’ve been asked to elaborate on what that means in terms of my garden and the plants within.

While there are formal gardens in the Pacific Northwest (PNW), most plantspeople are following what might be termed a PNW ethos. The region still has a decent amount of second-growth coniferous tree cover, so most gardeners have to contend with varying amounts of sun and competitive roots. The upside is having magnificent native trees as a constant reminder of why we want to live here. Natural wilderness including Mt. Rainier, Olympic and North Cascades National Parks and Mt. St. Helens National Monument are within a few hours’ drive from Seattle, so it’s not unreasonable to want

to have and/or retain some of that at hand. Oregon and British Columbia have equally exciting natural areas. Despite urbanization and sprawl – Seattle is the fastest growing city in the US, due in no small part to local companies such as Microsoft, Boeing, Amazon, Costco, Starbucks – the native movement is very much a feature of many gardens.

We have a city lot, 90ft wide and 110ft deep, but with the trees of the school next door allowed to march up to our boundaries the view is very woody, and only in winter can we see the valley beyond. The cedars on one side give varying amounts of shade but are terrible drains of surface water. In summer, supplemental water is needed to keep the understorey plants alive.

We have a northern extension of the Mediterranean climate prevalent in California.

The bulk of our rainfall comes in the fall and winter. Summer droughts are not uncommon here: two years ago, no rain fell for over 100 days. It can be quite cool late into the summer, which often limits our growing plants on the verge of hardiness.

At first my focus in gardening was to raise plants for class use that weren’t common in the trade. With large trees scattered about, the site has full sun only on one quarter of the property. Teaching and head of department duties meant less time to even contemplate a formal garden. All roads led to fashioning the space into a botanical display. The space for our sons’ sandbox and swings eventually became a patio; the front lawn once used for volleyball became the place for berms (large raised beds).

Inspiration came too from long involvement with reading about and visits to gardens in England.



Rhododendron chlorops, Hydrangea macrophylla 'Lemon Daddy', Polystichum munitum & Thuja plicata.

In 1980, my wife, two sons and I came to England and Scotland for 6 weeks with another week in France. Seeing such gardens as Trengwainton, Lanhydrock, Syon and Osterley reinforced my love of sweeping beds and exuberant growth.

Our horticulture department was fortunate to have visiting speakers such as Christopher Lloyd, Alan Bloom and Adrian Bloom. I had a wonderful day driving Adrian to two of our local plantspeople's gardens, Roy Davison (author of *Lewisias*), and the *Arboretum Bulletin* editor, Sallie Allen. British ideas and plant choices were part and parcel of what was entering the PNW gardening world, later supplemented by others such as Fergus Garret

and Piet Oudolf. Early on, I joined the Hardy Plant Society and subscribed to *The Garden* and *Gardens Illustrated*. Two of our faculty were instrumental in getting permission from the HPS to form a Northwest Branch, known here as the Northwest Hardy Plant Society. A break-away became known as Northwest Perennial Alliance; they co-exist.

Additional inspiration and/or reinforcement came from many local artists. The Northwest School began in the 1930s and saw Mark Tobey, Kenneth Callahan, Morris Graves and Guy Anderson inspired by the wild, rugged landscape and also by the coastal native North American art of such tribes as the Haida, Tlingit, Kwakwaka'wakw, and Makah.

In nearby Victoria, B.C., Emily Carr's work is renowned. The salt-water life here inspired the early organic works of the master glass blower Dale Chihuly among others of the Pilchuck School.

All in all, it's an outdoor-oriented lifestyle, although the pressures of intense population growth are masking that in many areas. The green world thus plays an ever more important role in my life, which I continue to share with graduates of our horticulture program through the monthly garden walks I arrange.

Visiting a mixture of public and private gardens reinforces their plant knowledge and introduces new plants and design concepts. A wealth of new introductions comes our way owing to the excellent plant-collecting activities of Dan Hinkley of Heronswood and now Windcliff, Kelly Dodson and Sue Milliken of Far Reaches, Sean Hogan of Cistus Nursery, Paul Bonine of Xera Nursery, and others such as the fern experts Sue Olsen and Judith Jones. I donate seeds and cuttings to the Calvert Greenhouse at the University of Washington, the Kruckeberg Garden and to my previous horticulture department at Edmonds Community College. I always find other tempting treasures. I use just a few mail-order nurseries such as Plants Delights Nursery, Annie's Annuals and McClure and Zimmerman. The seeds offered by both the HPS and the Mediterranean Garden Society broaden the options.

I apologize for mere lists which can be boring to look over. They're included to indicate the diversity of plants I attempt to grow with varying success.

Trees give variety and shade. I myself have four 100' tall Western Red Cedars (*Thuja plicata*), numerous Big-leaf Maples (*Acer macrophyllum*), Western/Pacific Dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*), a Cascara (*Frangula purshiana*), a large Coast Rhododendron (*R. macrophyllum*), Western Hazelnuts (*Corylus cornuta* var. *californica*) and many Indian Plums

(*Oemleria cerasiformis*). Native shrubs include both Oregon grapes (*Mahonia aquifolium* and *nervosa*) and Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) with Starflower (*Trientalis borealis*) running underneath. Our south and west sides flow seamlessly into the school property as both are steep slopes some 70ft above the level parking lots, with sizeable Black Cottonwoods (*Populus balsamifera* var. *trichocarpa*), Oregon Ash (*Fraxinus latifolia*) and Pin Cherries (*Prunus emarginata*) on the school's perimeter.

A few other tall conifers

(*Chamaecyparis pisifera* 'Plumosa Aurea', *Abies koreana* – the tallest in Seattle at 20', *Picea omorika*, *Sciadopitys verticillata*) and various broadleaf trees and shrubby trees cast their shadows too. Of note here are a 20' *Eurya japonica* (which I grew from HPS seed), *Illicium anisatum* (also some 20' and seed grown), *Ilex crenata* 'Mariesii' (another Seattle record at 18'), *Trochodendron aralioides*, *Osmanthus armatus*, *Viburnum cinnamomifolium* & *rhytidophyllum*, *Garrya elliptica*, *Maytenus boaria*, *Aristolelia chilensis*, and



Thuja plicata towers over *Stewartia pseudocamellia*, *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Preziosa Pink Beauty' & *Chamaecyparis pisifera filifera* 'Golden Mop'.



Fothergilla monticola, *Crataegus monogyna*, *Populus balsamifera* var. *trichocarpa*, *Geranium sanguineum*, *Iris pallida* 'Variegata' & *Mahonia nervosa*.

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various camellias and rhododendrons of size.

Some deciduous trees of note are *Hovenia dulcis* (at 25', seed grown), *Sorbus forrestii*, *Amelanchier laevis* and *A. x grandiflora* (both 30'), *Acer circinatum* 'Pacific Fire', *Acer grosseri* var. *hersii*, *Alangium platanifolium*, *Photinia villosa*, *Stewartia pseudocamellia*, *Stewartia monadelphica* and *Ptelea trifoliata*.

Midsized plants up to 10' (and over) include *Mahonia x media* 'Charity', *Fothergilla monticola*, *Buddleja x weyeriana* 'Honeycomb', *Parrotiopsis jacquemontiana*, *Deutzia x hybrida* 'Mont Rose', *Kalmia latifolia*, *Vaccinium ovatum*, *Hoheria* 'Glory of Amlwch', *Philadelphus pekinensis*, *Pinus*

cembra subsp. *sibirica*, *Vitex agnus-castus*, *Osmanthus decorus*, *Argyrocitrus battandierii*, *Aristotelia chilensis*, *Hypericum beanii*, and *Viburnum x globosum* 'Jermyns Globe'. Most of these are paired with smaller woody plants that are able to fend for themselves by tolerating the shade and/or spreading wide enough to capture some sunlight.

Smaller evergreen shrubs, ferns, groundcovers and herbaceous plants are plentiful. Some of the more noteworthy include: *Heliohebe hulkeana*, *Reineckea carnea*, *Rohdea japonica*, *Bergenia ciliata*, *Myrsine africana*, *Epimedium wushanense*, *Ypsilandra thibetica*,

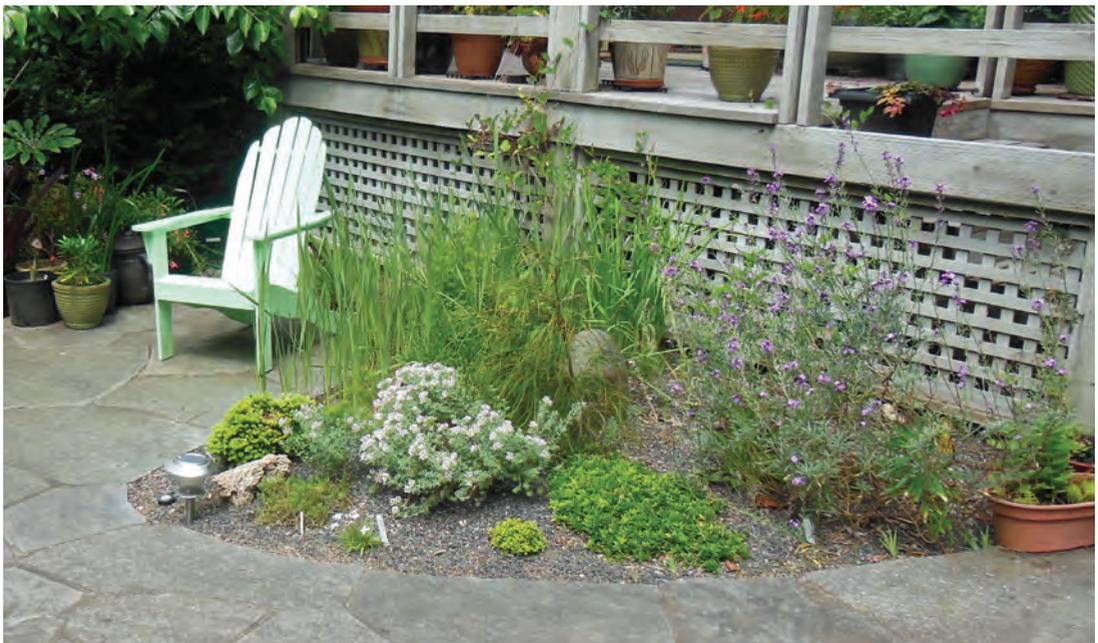
Strobilanthes attenuata, *Vaccinium moupinense*, *Crinodendron patagua*, *Ruscus x microglossus*, *Prostanthera cuneata*, *Weinmannia trichosperma*, *Hypericum monogynum*, *Ramonda myconi*, *Desfontainia spinosa*, *Trachelospermum asiaticum* 'Theta' and *Microcachys tetragona*.

Numerous ephemerals appear in the spring and fall. Trilliums, sanguinarias, podophyllums, disporums, pinellias, erythroniums, colchicums, snowdrops, and an array of bulbs. Tulip and narcissus cultivars are grown in pots that get shifted from a space near the greenhouse to the patio and deck as they come into bloom.

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As in most gardens, choosing companion plants takes some thought and sometimes trial and error. The north-facing bed alongside the house is anchored at the west end by the tall Plume Chamaecyparis, followed eastward by a large *Camellia japonica* 'Guillio Nuccio', 'Bow Bells' rhododendron, the Korean fir, *Fatsia japonica* 'Spider's Web', *Corydalis lutea* (in a pot), *Adiantum venustum*, *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Hamburg', *Disporum* 'Green Giant', *Hosta* 'June', *Vancouveria planipetala*, *Gymnocarpium dryopteris*, and finally *Reineckea carnea* underneath a *Sarcococca confusa*. I tried to establish *Xanthorhiza simplicissima*, *Blechnum chilense* and *Syneilesis aconitifolia* in this bed but they just faded away. I've carved out an opening at the eastern end for some *Trillium pusillum* 'Early Alabama Spring' and *Paris tetraphylla*.



On the sunny south side of the deck the space is limited (about 35 sq. ft) but a triangular bed, edged by a stone sidewalk, house and patio gets full sun from 10 to 4 so I can plant both sun- and drought-tolerant plants in this bed. A Whipcord Cedar (*Thuja plicata* 'Whipcord') and an upright basalt rock anchor the centre. Arrayed nearby are a Hachiya persimmon with *Smilax walteri*, *Abies koreana* 'Silberkugel', *Penstemon pinifolius*, *Lotus hirsutum*, *Buxus microphylla* 'Compacta', *Polygaloides chamaebuxus* 'Grandiflora' and *Erysimum* 'Bowles's Mauve' – common, but so long-flowering. A mulch of chipped rock helps restrict weeds and aids in keeping low foliage dry. Winter cold killed off a *Lotus hirsutum* a couple of years ago, but some seeds regenerated and the plants look happy once more.

After a few years, the survivors are planted along the roadside verge. Species are planted in the ground from the beginning.

Some fruit and nut trees give at least shade and support for clematis. I've never had a mature nut yet from the English walnut owing to the squirrels, but it does a nice job of shading my potting bench. Squirrels also sample unripe persimmons and apples mercilessly. Apples require cloth baggies dipped in a clay solution to thwart apple maggots, but these provide only partial protection from the codling

moth. I've given up on getting any sour cherries and currants, because of fruit-fly infestations. The only chemical I use is an infrequent application of the herbicide glyphosate on some crushed rock paths. Otherwise, staying organic has clear rewards with numerous bees and birds making appearances. Recycled material is evident throughout. Broken sidewalk concrete pieces are used in one set of steps and three retaining walls. Four rustic boundary fences are of either hawthorn or ash posts, with long rails of hazel.

As I'm weeding and thinking about this article, I'm reminded of my early upbringing and how that has influenced my gardening. When I was 6, the family moved from Chicago to the wilds of northern Wisconsin. We lived in a 3-room log cabin on the edge of a vast forest some 10 miles from the nearest town. An orchard of apples and cherries were in front of the property, a cranberry bog off to one side. My dad tried logging but had to go back to Chicago to earn better wages, leaving my mother, my younger sister and me alone for two years.



A small area which gets direct sun for 4–6 hours a day is being planted with very drought-tolerant plants. To help ensure their survival in our often wet winters, I've incorporated gravel throughout, even though the soil is a sandy loam to begin with. So far, the plants include *Ilex* 'Cluster Berry', *Chamaerops humilis* var. 'Argentea', *Helianthemum* 'Henfield Brilliant', *Valeriana phu*, *Lysimachia paridiformis* var. *stenophylla*, *Nolina microcarpa*, *Ozothamnus rosmarinifolius*, *Solidago rugosa* and *Halimium lasianthum* subsp. *formosum*. Newly planted this season are *Sideritis hyssopifolia*, *Phlomis cretica*, and *Salvia nubicola*.

Winters were harsh, falling to –52°F with over 8ft of snow the first year. Porcupines, deer and an occasional wolf would cross the property. I went to two different one-room school houses because they couldn't decide on which side of the county line we lived.

When we moved back to Illinois, it was to a suburban area outside Chicago that would become tract developments after I left for college and my mother and sister moved to California, my father having passed away. Remnants of the prairie were just a block away with its resplendent flowers and abundant wildlife. It was just the natural thing for me to continue into botany and

ecology in my studies.

I don't expect the garden ever to be 'finished'. Rather, I see it as a continual experiment. One can learn only so much from reading about plants, but to grow them is so much more revealing. Unfamiliar genera and species fascinate me, so when I see they're available, in seed lists or in the trade, I want to try my hand at growing them and eventually sharing them. Recently I gave a *Leucosidea sericea* to a friend who then gave me divisions of a *Haberlea rhodopensis* and *Trigonotis cavaleri*.

The garden doesn't feel crowded to my eye but it does take constant pruning. I share many of the cuttings

with my former horticulture department and the UW Arboretum greenhouses; in turn, I get some of their new treasures. Although not large by some standards, raised beds, a few hedges, some large trees, and hardscape features help compartmentalise the garden. A rough tally reveals that there are about 1200 different species.

I don't begrudge the time it takes to maintain it but look forward to enjoying it on many levels for many years to come. My wife and I do it all except for the occasional arborist. With few hard lines, it's a forgiving garden that doesn't demand constant attention – it's 'loose and woody'! 🌿

Walt Bubelis taught horticulture for over 40 years, and he's now enjoying more time in his garden and sharing it with family, friends and graduates.