



Chair's Annual Report

2025-2026

Gérald Lajeunesse, Chair

Presented at the Canadensis Botanical Garden Society Annual General Meeting
June 18, 2026

Canadensis exists because people continue to believe in the importance of nature, biodiversity, horticulture, public green space and environmental stewardship.

Our vision has endured because people care deeply about what a botanical garden can represent—not simply as a beautiful place, but as a place of learning, connection, research, community and hope.

This past year was one of growth and clarification for Canadensis. It was not defined by one dramatic breakthrough or single milestone. Instead, the organization continued to mature strategically, operationally and publicly.

Perhaps most importantly, Canadensis increasingly functioned not simply as a future vision, but as an active and evolving community organization already contributing to Ottawa's environmental and cultural life.

Strategic Planning and Direction

Over the past year, the Board devoted considerable time to Canadensis's future direction and to the broader realities surrounding our vision to create a botanical garden in Canada's capital.

Long-term discussions regarding land, planning and partnerships continue to evolve. This required thoughtful consideration of our priorities, organizational focus, long-term sustainability and how Canadensis can continue moving forward in meaningful and realistic ways.

In the spring, the Board participated in a strategic planning workshop led by Adrian Horwood. The session strengthened alignment around the organization's future direction and reaffirmed the importance of the Canadensis vision.

The need for places that connect people with plants, biodiversity, education, horticulture and environmental stewardship has never been greater. In a world shaped by climate anxiety, biodiversity loss, rapid urbanization and growing disconnection from nature, botanical gardens

matter. They are places of learning, beauty and healing—and places that connect people more deeply with the natural world.

Strengthening Canadensis

A great deal of important work took place behind the scenes as the Board worked to strengthen the organization and prepare Canadensis for its next phase of growth.

This included strategic planning, governance discussions, financial planning, communications improvements, membership development and a major website redevelopment initiative.

The website work became much more than a technical project. It evolved into a broader conversation about how Canadensis tells its story and communicates the importance of plants, biodiversity, environmental stewardship and botanical gardens in Canadian life.

An important part of this work has been the development of a new membership portal. We heard the frustrations expressed by members about the existing system—and experienced many of those frustrations ourselves. The new portal is intended to create a smoother, more welcoming and user-friendly experience for current and future members.

Canadensis is not simply proposing another local garden. Our vision has a broader scope and an opportunity to create a place in Canada's capital that reflects Canadian biodiversity and landscapes, environmental education, climate resilience, horticultural knowledge and public connection with nature.

Financial Stewardship

Canadensis remained financially stable during the year and continued to manage its reserves responsibly and thoughtfully.

The Board also considered longer-term investment strategies and how best to position the organization for future opportunities.

I would especially like to thank our Treasurer, Courtney Flood, for the tremendous amount of work she has undertaken on behalf of Canadensis.

Environmental Stewardship and Site Work

One of the clearest examples of visible momentum has been the continued growth of the Canadensis Native Tree Nursery initiative.

Tree planting, seedling distribution and volunteer participation helped strengthen Canadensis's role in community greening and environmental stewardship.

Canadensis also continued its annual participation in National Tree Day, highlighting the importance of urban forests, biodiversity and environmental education. We are looking forward to another tree-focused event at Canadensis Garden on September 26th, 2026.

Volunteers continued restoration and maintenance work throughout the Garden. The sea-can—or shipping container—also became a practical resource for maintenance, equipment storage and operational work while restoration of the Red Barn continued.

Public Programming and Community Engagement

Canadensis continued to welcome new visitors through arts, culture and shared experiences in nature.

A Company of Fools continues to perform at Canadensis Garden, and plans were made to welcome the company again in July 2026 for an outdoor performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The new **DOMEOCRACY** interactive arts and music series was also launched as part of Ottawa's bicentennial year. Developed by artists Jesse Stewart and Matthew Edwards, the series explores music, sound, participation and creativity in an outdoor setting through monthly events at Canadensis Garden.

These projects reflect something increasingly important about Canadensis: the Garden is already becoming a place where people gather, learn, explore, create and connect with nature together.

Throughout the year, Canadensis also used social media and public storytelling to engage people in gardening, biodiversity, horticulture, environmental stewardship and the importance of public green spaces.

Growing the Canadensis Community

The proposed Growing Canadensis membership campaign was developed as an opportunity to invite more residents to become part of the Canadensis vision during Ottawa's bicentennial year.

Rather than focusing solely on immediate membership revenue, the proposed campaign is intended to increase awareness, expand participation, strengthen community connections and introduce new audiences to Canadensis.

This initiative has the potential to grow public awareness significantly and strengthen Canadensis for the future.

Supporting Horticultural Education

The past year also highlighted the importance of horticultural education in our region.

Canadensis publicly expressed concern about the proposed suspension of horticultural programs at Algonquin College. As an organization working toward a botanical garden, we understand how important horticultural professionals, educators, arborists, greenhouse specialists and environmental stewards are to the future of our communities and green spaces.

I would also like to thank Tommy Wingreen, Algonquin College professor and Canadensis Board Director as well as Algonquin College for welcoming Canadensis members for a horticultural tour and for their continued support of the organization.

Tommy brings more than 35 years of experience in horticulture, greenhouse production, urban forestry and landscape management. His career includes international work in Japan and the United States, as well as extensive experience with the National Capital Commission and Algonquin College's Department of Horticulture.

We are fortunate to have his expertise and leadership as part of Canadensis.

Volunteers and Partnerships

The past year reinforced the importance of our volunteers and partnerships.

Canadensis continued strengthening relationships with community organizations, horticultural groups, educational institutions, environmental organizations, artists and cultural partners.

Our volunteers supported garden restoration, public programming, event logistics, tree nursery activities, parking, setup and takedown, and ongoing maintenance work.

I would especially like to recognize Steve Wilson for his outstanding volunteer commitment and thank all our volunteers whose contributions continue to sustain Canadensis.

Looking Ahead

There is a growing sense that Canadensis is entering an important new chapter.

Ottawa's bicentennial year provides opportunities to expand awareness of our vision. Website redevelopment and communications improvements will continue, while programming and partnerships will keep evolving.

We will also continue working toward a future in which Canada's capital is home to a botanical garden that reflects biodiversity, environmental stewardship, education, beauty and public connection with nature.

The vision to create a botanical garden in Canada's capital has spanned generations of volunteers, advocates, educators, planners and supporters.

Sometimes progress appears through major milestones. At other times, it is quieter: a tree planted, a partnership formed, a volunteer returning, a student inspired, a family attending an event or a conversation that changes how someone thinks about plants, biodiversity or public space.

All these things matter. Together, they continue moving Canadensis forward.

Thank you for your continued support, belief and commitment.

Let's keep building a garden.
