

Tree of the Month, August 2010: **Goldenrain Tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*)**

If you look to the north as you enter the garden from the deck in August, you may be lucky enough to see a huge splash of yellow in the distance just past the lake fountain. The Goldenrain trees (*Koelreuteria paniculata*) are in bloom! Or visit them at the north end of the Laburnum Walk where they are underplanted with a magnificent display of Bowles' Golden Grass (*Milium effusum* 'Aureum') which mimics their flower display all summer long. Several other specimens of this tree can be found in the Sino-Himalayan Garden.

The name 'Goldenrain' is very apt – when the tree blooms in mid-summer, thousands of tiny yellow flowers form a golden halo around its leafy branches. After the tree blooms, the flowers transform themselves into parchment-like seed bladders that stay on the tree through the winter. The tree can reach a height of 10 meters, and its irregular branching structure gives it a lovely shape that provides winter interest along with the oriental-looking seedpods.

The Goldenrain tree is native to Eastern Asia and does well in zones 5-9. In Vancouver, there are few examples of this tree around the city except at the VanDusen Garden, but in the eastern United States and Florida it is considered invasive because it is very drought-tolerant and spreads rapidly. Vancouver's rainy climate keeps it from reseeding itself here.

In China, the trees are known as 'Luan'. The Chinese use the flowers to make a yellow dye and traditional medicines. Legend has it that the tree is often planted over the graves of scholars. More recently, Chinese researchers have found that Goldenrain trees planted in abandoned mining areas actually remove heavy metals from contaminated soils while beautifying the landscape.

The tree is named after an 18th century German botanist, Joseph Gottlieb Koelreuter, a professor of natural history and a pioneer in the study of plant hybridization. The botanic name is pronounced 'kurl roy TEA ree ah'. The epithet 'paniculata' refers to the inflorescences, called panicles in the botanic world, which contain the small yellow flowers. The tree has a number of other common names, such as 'China tree', 'Pride of India', and 'Varnish tree', the latter because the tree's milky sap can be used to make varnishes and lacquers. The tree is a member of the soapberry family (Sapindaceae), which also includes a group of trees more familiar to us Canadians, the maples.

There are several Goldenrain trees in the Garden. Two are located at the east edge of Livingstone Lake across from the Magnolias and Pines. Look for the 'Tree of the Month' sign. Two more can be found at the end of the Laburnum Walk at the edge of the Heritage Rose Garden. Others are growing in various spots in the Sino-Himalayan Garden.