

## TREE OF THE MONTH – August 2011

### Black mulberry (*Morus nigra*)

A beautiful tree with shiny green leaves and a gnarly trunk, black mulberry (*Morus nigra*) provides welcome shade on hot days (admittedly rare this summer!). This species grows quickly, reaching 13 m in height at maturity.

*Morus nigra* is native to western Asia, and has been cultivated around Europe for thousands of years. It was eventually brought to Britain by the Romans, and in the 16<sup>th</sup> century King James I planted many of them in the hopes of establishing a silk industry to rival that of France (established by Catherine de Medici). Unfortunately, he planted the wrong kind of tree – silkworms prefer the tender leaves of white mulberry (*Morus alba*), which is native to China, and the venture failed.

Black mulberry produces a huge quantity of sweet, black berries that birds are fond of. The best way to harvest them is to shake the tree and collect the fruit that fall to the ground. Consequently, the ground beneath the tree can get quite messy, so watch out for juice stains! British journalist Andy Bull, in his 1998 article in *The Independent*, called the mulberry “The Quentin Tarantino of fruit”, referring to the incredible amounts of dark red juice that stain you as you pick the berries, leaving you looking like “a gangster victim”. Mulberries are used in wines, pies, teas, and eaten dried like raisins. The tree can produce fruit for 200 years.

At VanDusen, you can find black mulberry at the western end of the Rhododendron Walk, near The Throne of Nezahualcoyotl by Mexican sculptor Sebastián.