

## **Tree of the Month, June 2012: Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*)**

Every month we highlight one of the trees in our collection. This month we have selected Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*), named for Nicholas Garry, Deputy-Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1822-1835. Garry provided assistance to David Douglas, the botanist who first described this tree.

*Quercus garryana* is a medium-sized tree with gnarly, spreading branches and dark green, leathery leaves. It grows naturally in Mediterranean climates (with mild temperatures and dry summers) and ranges from the Gulf Islands and the southern tip of Vancouver Island in BC, down through Washington and Oregon to California. In the United States it is commonly referred to as Oregon white oak.

Garry oak is the dominant species of one of the rarest ecosystems in Canada, the Garry oak ecosystem. Consisting of open woodland or meadows, Garry oak ecosystems occur in areas that experience frequent fires, which do little harm to heat-resistant Garry oaks but suppress the growth of more sensitive tree species like arbutus and Douglas-fir. In these warm, dry meadows dotted with Garry oaks, a wide variety of flowering perennials, grasses, insects, birds, mammals and reptiles form a rich community of species. Aboriginals harvested some of these plants, including edible camas bulbs, and would deliberately set fires to maintain the meadows and encourage the growth of useful plants.

With European settlement came fire suppression, and other tree species were able to move in, turning meadows into woodlands. Subsequent agriculture and development have led to the loss of much of the Garry oak ecosystem, and a number of associated species are now endangered. Most of the remaining Garry oak ecosystems are found in protected areas, such as preserves and parks.

The future of this type of ecosystem is uncertain. Efforts are being made to restore habitat in some Garry oak ecosystems, and several botanical gardens, including UBC and VanDusen, have planted their own Garry oak meadows.

At VanDusen, we have two Garry oak meadows planted near the Visitor Centre. Our youngest Garry oak tree was planted by Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, when she visited the garden in 2009. As you enter the Garden, you will find the tree to your left, at the edge of the Tong & Geraldine Louie Plaza.