

VanDusen Botanical Garden
5251 Oak Street
Vancouver, BC V6M 4H1

Seasonal Self-Guided Tour
May 2010

Contributed by Arlene Clark & Kumi Sutcliffe, VanDusen Garden Volunteer Guides

Please follow the black number and arrow signs for this tour.

May is a time of sunshine and flowers, birds in their nests and sometimes a shower!

This self-guided tour takes you to a part of the garden that is spectacular at this time of year. As always exact blooming times are in the hands of Mother Nature. As you walk along, be sure to look way up and way down, so as not to miss any of the miracles unfolding. Begin your tour by taking the stairs to the left of the pavilion deck. Turn right at the directional arrow and proceed towards the herb garden. Gently rub some of the leaves of the plants in these beds and notice their aroma. These days, herbs are used primarily to season our food, but in the past they were used to cure sickness and ward off evil spirits. Continue along the path until you reach some stone troughs filled with tiny alpine plants. These plants require full sun and good drainage.

Across from the troughs is 1- the **golden catalpa** (*Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea'), a tree planted to mark the official opening of the garden on August 30, 1975. Turn left here and walk towards the espaliered fruit trees. Cross to the opposite side of the path, walk across the grass, and enter the bark mulched Loderi rhododendron trail. This trail features a collection of rhododendron hybrids developed by Sir Edmund Loder at the famous Leonardslee Garden in England. The 2- **Rhododendron** 'Loderi King George', described by many as the best of the Loderi Group of rhododendrons, has large pink-white blooms and is slightly scented. Ahead on the right is 3- **Rhododendron** 'Loderi White Diamond'. If it's a warm day, the scent from the rhododendrons will be more pronounced. What do they smell like to you?

At the end of this trail, turn left towards the broader paved path. Just ahead on your right, go up the two stone steps and enter another bark mulched path. Here you will find the colourful and fragrant 4- **deciduous azaleas** (including *Rhododendron molle* and numerous cultivars). Deciduous azaleas are more tolerant of the sun than many of the evergreen rhododendrons. Incidentally, all azaleas are in the same botanical group as rhododendrons but azaleas have 5 stamens and rhododendrons have 10 or more. As you enjoy this colourful trail, check the stamens, and see if you can tell which are azaleas and which are rhododendrons—some can fool you!

At the end of this bark mulched trail, turn left and continue up the paved path. On your left you will see 5- a **Chinese dogwood** (*Cornus kousa* var. *chinensis*), a beautiful disease-resistant tree. More rhododendrons abound on this pathway, along with an abundance of groundcovers, hostas, and ferns. 6- **Ostrich fern** (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*) is the most common fern available for planting in gardens. It gets its common name from its resemblance to ostrich plumes. The young, tightly-coiled fronds of the ostrich fern are the fiddlehead greens that are served in fine restaurants.

As you continue up the path you will see a sign board entitled "The Aristocrats of Gardens". Next to this signboard, notice the beautiful 7- **orangebark stewartia** (*Stewartia monadelpha*). A member of the tea family and native to Japan and Korea, its bark just has to be touched! A few steps ahead on your right is 8- a **golden full moon maple** (*Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum'). This graceful tree with its beautiful, yellow-green, palm-shaped foliage is much loved in Japan. Enjoy more beautiful rhododendrons as you proceed along this pathway. On your left next to another signboard admire the thin, papery, cinnamon brown bark of 9- the **paperbark maple** (*Acer griseum*). This wonderful tree is native to China. It is difficult to propagate and is considered endangered.

The 10- **Rhododendron yakushimanum** is native to Japan. Look on the underside of the large leaves to see the indumentum, the fuzzy covering which provides protection

against moisture loss during dry periods, and also against extremes in temperature. Check the underside of other rhododendron leaves to see if they have this adaptation. Now enter the Canadian Heritage Garden, a pastoral area of VanDusen. This area contains many plants that are native to Canada and many cultivars of fruit trees and plants that have been developed to tolerate the various climates found across this vast country. Just a few metres ahead on your right is 11- the common camas (*Camassia quamash*). The bulb of this plant was an important staple food for First Nations people. Further along is a grove of 12- sugar maple trees (*Acer saccharum*). They are quite small here due in part to our mild and rainy west coast winters, but in Quebec, they can grow to be 40 metres tall. These are the trees that produce delicious maple syrup and maple sugar. Continue along until you see the stone stairs ahead of you.

Go up the stone stairs and onto the bark mulch trail. Soon you will see some Canadian rhododendron hybrids and cultivars such as *Rhododendron* 'Scandinavia' x 'La Bars White'. Continue on and soon you will come to 13- Eddie's white wonder dogwood (*Cornus* 'Eddie's White Wonder') a hybrid of *Cornus nuttallii* and *Cornus florida*. In 1986 this tree was selected as Vancouver's centennial tree. This particular tree is the parent plant from which all 'Eddie's White Wonder' have been propagated. Keep following the stone wall. Soon on your right you'll see a configuration of stones on the ground. This is a representation of an ancient medicine wheel used by First Nations people for calendar, spiritual and astronomical purposes.

At this point, wander through the small orchard inside the split rail fence. Also take a minute to check out the beehives. The bees who call these hives home busy themselves collecting pollen from around the garden. Leave the orchard by the fence opening marked by the rural mailbox. The 14- circular garden which you see in front of you was planted during the winter with fall rye grass, a green manure which provides nutrients to the soil when it is dug under in spring. As much as possible organic means are used at VanDusen to enrich the soil. If you visit in the summer you will see a variety of heritage vegetables growing in these beds. The vegetables are donated to the local food bank.

Now, turn right and head for the paved path. Enjoy the plantings on either side as you walk along. At the foot of this path, you will find two 15- princess trees (*Paulownia tomentosa*). Notice the distinctive eyelike formations on the trunk and look up to see the large, showy, tubular, purple flowers that appear in May before any foliage emerges. This tree is native to China. It is said that it was once the custom to plant a princess tree when a baby girl was born, and when she was eligible for marriage, the tree was cut down to make a wedding chest.

Now walk straight ahead to 16- the Korean Pavilion, and be sure to go right inside. This structure was a gift to the garden from the Korean people at the close of Expo '86 which was held in Vancouver. Growing around it are some Korean native plants. Go down the stone steps and veer to the right down the grassy slope. This area also boasts many rhododendrons and azaleas. Glancing to your left, you will see a large expanse of lawn, one of the last reminders that VanDusen was once a golf course. Continue down the lawn, walking past the hydrangea beds and the Leyland Cypress. Let your eyes savour the magical panorama. When you reach the path near the Lath House, turn right and walk along it until you are at 17- the dove tree (*Davidia involucrata*). Look up and you will see why this tree is called such names as the handkerchief tree and the ghost tree. In May, large white bracts hang from the branches hiding small greenish-white clusters of flowers.

Follow the directional arrow, and continue on down the main path. You are now back on the Rhododendron Walk. End your tour in spectacular fashion by strolling the length of the Laburnum Walk, a highlight of VanDusen during this month. A rule of thumb is that this tree is at its peak around the 24th of May. This tree's common name is 18- hybrid golden chain tree (*Laburnum x watereri* 'Vossii'). Its pendulous, yellow blooms which give off a wisteria like scent are beautifully set off by the alliums planted beneath.

This marks the end of the self-guided tour. Continue on your own to see more of the garden, or return to the entrance which you can see from this spot.