

## VanDusen Botanical Garden Seasonal Self-Guided Tour May 2011

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*It's May! It's May! The lusty month of May! -Lerner and Loewe*

This self-guided tour takes you to parts of the garden that are 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. Stop here to 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 some were believed to ward off evil spirits. Continue along the path until you reach the **1- golden catalpa (*Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea')**, a tree planted to mark the official opening of the garden on August 30, 1975.

Turn left now and walk past the Alpine Troughs. Just past the troughs you will see hardy banana trees (*Musa basjoo*) on your left. These "trees" are actually very tall herbaceous perennials with long leaf stalks forming the stem. Unlike the seedless bananas you buy from the grocery store, this species produces non-edible fruit with lots of seeds and very little pulp. The plants require winter protection and are wrapped from the end of October until mid-April.

Cross to the opposite side of the path, and notice the large, galvanized wire sculpture entitled 'The Minotaur and the Hare'. This installation is one of many art pieces displayed throughout the city for the Vancouver Biennale. Now 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 these rhododendrons will be more pronounced. What do they smell like to you?

Walk along to the end of this trail and 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, azaleas are in the same botanical group, the genus *Rhododendron*, as rhododendrons, but azaleas have five pollen-bearing stamens, while rhododendrons have ten 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 towards the paved path. Walk along, and you will soon see on your left a **5- 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 an educational sign entitled 'The Aristocrats of Gardens'. Next to this sign, 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 a **8- golden full moon maple (*Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum')**. This graceful tree with its beautiful, yellow-green, palm-shaped foliage is much loved in Japan. Proceed along this pathway, and enjoy more beautiful rhododendrons. On your left, next to another educational sign, admire the peeling, papery, cinnamon brown bark of **9- paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*)**. This tree has leaves unlike typical maple trees. The leaves are trifoliate (divided into three distinct leaflets), and coarsely

toothed. This wonderful tree is native to China. It is difficult to propagate and is considered endangered.

The **10- *Rhododendron yakushimanum*** is native to Yakushima Island in 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- common camas (*Camassia quamash*)**. The bulb of this plant was an important staple food for First Nations people in British Columbia. Walk along a bit further and you'll come to a grove of **12- sugar maple trees (*Acer saccharum*)**. They remain quite small here due in part to our mild and rainy West Coast winters, but in Quebec, where they are native, 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'). Walk along a bit more, and you will come to **13- Eddie's White Wonder dogwood (*Cornus 'Eddie's White Wonder'*)** a hybrid of *Cornus nuttallii* and *Cornus florida*, and the most famous tree ever developed in Canada. In 1986 this tree was chosen as Vancouver's Centennial Tree and it has won numerous awards, including a First Class Certificate from the Royal Horticultural Society. This particular 'Eddie's White Wonder' is the oldest living specimen and was moved to VanDusen from Eddie's retail nursery in 1994. It is a propagation of the sole survivor of the 1948 Fraser River flood that destroyed all but one of Henry M. Eddie's original seedlings. Keep following the stone wall. On your right you'll soon see a large circular 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 moment 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- Vegetable Garden** beds which you see in front of you were 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 harvested vegetables are donated to the local food bank.

Now, turn right and head toward 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. These trees are 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 the **16- 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 azaleas and rhododendrons. Looking 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 large Leyland cypress. Let your eyes savour the magical panorama. When you reach the path near the Lathhouse, turn right and walk along it until you are at the **17- dove tree (*Davidia involucreta*)**. Look up and you will see why this tree is also sometimes called the handkerchief tree or 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 these trees

are at their 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 give off a wisteria like scent and 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.