
Please follow the arrows and numbered black and white signs marked "SELF GUIDED TOUR" as you follow the information below. Your first sign can be found at the edge of the plaza after you exit our new Visitor Centre. Your walk should take 60 minutes through November's colourful red and brown garden.

1 - Livingston Lake is one of our seven water features. Note the reds and browns of our maple collection (*Acer*). On the small peninsula jutting into the lake, you see the tall graceful fronds of pampas grass (*Cortaderia selloana*), native to Argentinian "pampas" ranchlands. This grass grows in dense tussocks to a height of 3 m. Leave the garden plaza to your right, following the gravel path to its first fork. Turn left, then turn right almost immediately at the next fork.

2 - *Oxydendrum arboreum* is a small tree common to the southern United States. Noted for its rich fall colours, this tree is known by a variety of common names: sourwood, sorrel tree, lily-of-the-valley tree. In mid-July, the *Oxydendrum arboreum* blooms with small white flowers. A remnant of this year's bloom can be seen at the crown of the tree in front of you.

Proceed along the path to the small clearing on your right. Across the grass, at the edge of the garden bed you will find **3 - the Kentucky Coffeetree**. The coffeetree (*Gymnocladus dioica*) produces dark brown pods, each with a half-a-dozen dark, hard-coated seeds. The plant gets its name from reports that early settlers roasted the seeds as a coffee substitute. Making coffee from the plant is not advised: the beans contain a poisonous substance called saponin. This member of the Pea Family (*Fabaceae*) has a pre-historic history. Scientists believe the large pod-like fruits evolved to be eaten and dispersed by a giant mammal that later became extinct. In Québec the Kentucky coffeetree is called *chicot Février* or "February snag" because it looks quite dead until late in the spring. Another French description is "*arbre aux ossements*," meaning tree with bones.

Return to the path and turn right. Ahead lies **4 - Cypress Pond**. Here, the colour is provided by a bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), a unique member of the redwood family. This tree differs from its cousin the coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) and the giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*) in two ways. Native to the swamps of Louisiana and Florida, the bald cypress drops its needles each fall, hence the name "bald" cypress. At the base of each tree, note the wooden bumps. These are called knees. Their primary function may be to provide buoyant stability in an environment of soft mud and a constantly changing water level, although no one has been able to determine what cypress knees actually do.

As you cross the zigzag bridge, pause to enjoy the reflected colours peeking through the trees from both sides of the pond. Follow the small gravel path through the bamboo to **5 - dawn redwood** (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*), which was believed to be extinct until the second world war. According to a 2003 paper in *Taxon*, the tree was found growing near a shrine in a village in Sichuan by a Chinese botanist working for the National Central Bureau of Forest Research in 1943 who identified a single tree in 1944. Today the tree is found in gardens all around the world. Petrified samples were found on Ellesmere Island northern Canada and in the Dakotas. Dawn redwoods also grow in our Sino-Himalayan garden.

As you emerge from the bamboo at the paved sidewalk, you will find **6 - *Sequoiadendron giganteum***. This is our nursery of giants. These giant are sequoias native to arid regions of California but once grew from Alaska to California. They died off during the last Ice Age. Giant sequoias have a life expectancy of up to 3500 years and can achieve a height of 350 feet. These specimens were planted during the early 1970s as VanDusen Garden was being converted from a golf course. They are barely 40 years old and yet are already among the largest trees in the garden. As they grow, the lower branches will fall away, leaving a bare trunk with tufts of branches at the top. Examples of these trees can be found all over Vancouver, and a very large specimen can be found on the grounds of the garden at Versailles just outside Paris, France. The giant sequoia propagates from cones that have been known to remain on the tree upwards of 20 years. Fire is required before the seeds will germinate.

Proceed along the paved path to your left into the Mediterranean garden. **7 - Strawberry tree** (*Arbutus unedo*) is native to the Mediterranean region and western Europe, but its range

extends into the UK. In Southwestern Ireland, for example, it is known as either the “Irish” or “Killarney strawberry tree.” The edible fruit is a red berry with a rough texture and a bland taste. There is another good specimen, which usually bears fruit, to your left by the stone bridge left of the crossroad ahead.

Follow the paved path as it winds through the Southern Hemisphere garden, turns to your right, crosses another small zigzag bridge, and climbs the steep rise on the far side of the bridge. At the top of this rise, to your right you will find a grotto. As you emerge from the grotto, you enter **8 - The Heather Garden**. Heath (*Erica*) and heather (*Calluna*) are familiar decorative plants are members of the large Ericaceae or heath family (4000 species, 126 genera). Included are such distant cousins as cranberry, blueberry, rhododendrons, *Pieris* and others. This corner of the garden has colour virtually year round as the various heaths and heathers go through their seasons. The gazebo in the heather garden is a great spot to enjoy a picnic in the summer, or to take in the magic of the garden during a rainy winter day.

Follow the path out of the Heather Garden across the small stone bridge to the paved walkway. Turn left to the **9 - Perennial Garden**. At this time of the year it is cleared of most plant material, a perfect time to look at how it is organized. Note the formal yew hedge (*Taxus baccata*) providing a backdrop the beds to your left. This is a common component to formal perennial gardens that reflect early English thinking about gardening. In 1890, George Nicholson, curator for the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, conceived a perennial-only garden with an evergreen backdrop. Traditional perennial gardens require a lot of garden space and they can only be viewed from one side. To eliminate shading and restricted viewing, island beds such as the ones you see here were introduced to Kew’s perennial gardens in the 1950s.

Proceed along the paved path through the weeping beech archway, along the edge of the great lawn to the intersection and you will see **10 - the dove tree (*Davidia involucrata*)**, also known as the “handkerchief” tree because of its tissue-like large white blossoms. Native to China, its botanical name reflects the classification of the tree by a missionary named Father Armand David.

At this intersection, turn right onto our Rhododendron Walk. Proceed to the **11 - orangebark stewartia (*Stewartia monadelpha*)**, which resembles the coastal “arbutus” or “madrona”. It is growing close to the left side of the path. This species, native to Japan, tolerates acidic soil and loves rain. Its orange bark is a welcome splash of colour on a rainy day in any garden.

Proceed up the path. Pass by the entrance to the Canadian Heritage Garden and keep right. At the intersection with another paved path, turn left. Almost immediately to your right is **12 - the Meditation Garden**. The Chinese writing carved into the entrance to this small garden means “ease the heart”. A fragrant Himalayan *Rosa longicuspis* decorates the arch over the entrance. Massive Douglas-firs (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) provide shaded solitude and quiet tranquility. The plants here are left deliberately unlabeled to enhance the feeling of seclusion from the hustle and bustle of the city. The nephrite jade seats provide a resting place for a few quiet moments.

This brings you to the end of our walk on the self-guided tour. From here, you can proceed in two directions - both will return you through circuitous routes to the Visitor Centre and both deliver good reasons to return to VanDusen Botanical Garden in another season.

If you proceed from here up the path to the maze, you will find our dormant vegetable gardens and the Alma VanDusen Garden, two features that come into their own during August and September.

Your second choice is to turn back to the paved path to the fork in front of the Korean Pavilion. If you turn left along this path, you will see our large collection of species rhododendrons. These rhodos begin to bloom much earlier than the hybrids growing in your home garden. You can find colours here as early as February in some years.