

## July/August Self-Guided Tour 2014

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VanDusen Botanical Garden welcomes you. This self-guided tour will take you through a selection of our 22 hectare garden. It is home to over 7,800 different kinds of plants from around the world and the tour will highlight a few of these. A botanical garden is a living library with its collections scientifically organized and labeled. Botanical gardens allow the public to experience and learn about plants they otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity to see and, through *ex situ* conservation, they help to conserve plant species for future generations.

As you leave the Visitor Centre, walk across the plaza towards Livingston Lake. Look back to admire the sculptural roof lines of the Visitor Centre. These curves were inspired by the leaves of an orchid and offer a fitting botanical overture to the delights which lie ahead in the garden.

Follow the path to the left and cross the wooden bridge. Proceed up the slight incline until you see a green jade water fountain to your left. This is nephrite jade, mined in northern British Columbia, and is carved locally to create jewelry and sculpture. Continue towards the Bentall Pool and note the ceramic pots of various sizes in front of the flower bed to your right. These house our collection of insect-eating or carnivorous plants whose habitat in wetlands and bogs is threatened. Look for plants with tall yellow-green, tube-like pitchers with open lidded 'mouths'. These modified leaves are passive or pitfall traps, collecting water and enzymes in their narrow pitchers to drown and digest prey! If you look closely you may see some trapped bees and flies inside the pitcher shaped leaves. The striking **1 – yellow pitcher plant (*Sarracenia flava*)**, secretes a nectar-like substance on the lip of the pitcher that contains a paralytic chemical. Insects attracted to the nectar become paralyzed and fall into the trap, where they are digested by enzymes and absorbed by the leaf. Since bogs lack certain essential plant nutrients, carnivorous plants have evolved this amazing ability to collect missing nutrients by capturing and digesting small insects! Close by is **2 – red pitcher plant (*Sarracenia rubra*)**, which grows in bogs in southeastern USA .

To your left, note two trees with golden yellow foliage providing dappled shade. These are **3 - golden false acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia')**. The genus was named for Jean Robin, a botanist employed by King Henry IV of France. The luminous foliage of other golden-leaved trees can be seen if you scan the wooded horizon from this vantage point. These splashes of brilliant colour highlight the handsome and varied collection of trees in this botanical garden.

Retrace your steps to the jade water fountain and follow the bark mulched path on your left which winds along the top of a rise overlooking Livingstone Lake. This area illustrates the varied textures and hues that can be achieved with the imaginative use of drought-tolerant grasses. Such plantings survive well through the warm, dry days of summer and demand little of our precious water supply at this time of year. On either side

of the path, note the attractive blue-hued **4 – little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium* ‘The Blues’)**, a tufted perennial grass that thrives in dry, sunny locations.

Pause to take in the view across the lake. On a sunny day you will see many turtles basking on the warm rocks around the lake. These semi-aquatic turtles are **red-eared sliders (*Trachemys scripta subsp. elegans*)**, some of the many animals who find a home in this garden. Walk along the path through the grasses to the gnarled form of **5 – common quince (*Cydonia oblonga*)** to your right. This tree produces the down-covered yellow fruit used to make delicious quince paste, much loved in Europe and Australia. On the opposite side of the path are two fragrant young **6 – western redcedars (*Thuja plicata*)**. This tree, which can grow to over 65 metres in height, is the cornerstone of West Coast First Nations culture and is known as the Tree of Life. Used for healing and spiritual purposes, it is also used to make canoes, totem poles, masks, bentwood boxes, hats and house posts.

Continue along the path until you reach the stone steps that join the main paved pathway. You are now in the much admired Black Garden, a collection of plants that produce pigments that are nearly black. To your left, note the **7 - Kamchatka bugbane (*Actaea simplex* ‘Brunette’)** with tall, graceful white flowering stems set against imposing dark foliage. Ahead is an eye-catching, modern palette of more dark-leaved plants offset with brilliant acid greens. Look across the path at the striking **8 - golden creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia* ‘Aurea’)** planted with **9 – black lilyturf (*Ophiopogon planiscapus* ‘Nigrescens’)** From the steps, follow the paved path to the right where this colour scheme continues, featuring many familiar plants dressed in brightly contrasting hues.

Continue along the path until the lake comes into view again. You will notice at the water’s edge a spectacular plant, **10 – giant rhubarb (*Gunnera manicata*)**, with huge, sharply toothed, deep green leaves borne on prickly stalks, reaching up to 2.5 m in length. This is another interesting plant that has adapted to growing in wet, nutrient-poor conditions. *Gunnera* has a close symbiotic relationship with cyanobacteria, which live in glands located along the leaf stems and provide the plant with essential nitrogen. Everything about this plant is impressive, even the masses of small greenish-red flowers borne on enormous spikes, visible beneath the leaves. Giant rhubarb is also an ancient plant, one quite familiar to dinosaurs!

Follow the narrow path to the left which hugs the shoreline of Heron Lake and passes another ancient plant, **11 – Japanese umbrella pine (*Sciadopitys verticillata*)**. Its common name refers to the clusters of needles which resemble the spokes of an umbrella. This is a much revered tree in Japan but it has been over-logged and is now a threatened species. Proceed along the path by the water, then pause in the dappled shade of **12 – Borne weeping beech (*Fagus sylvatica* ‘Bornyensis’)**. Mature weeping trees of many kinds are a delightful feature of this garden. Peep through the branches to the grove of tall, dark **Douglas-firs (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)** across the inlet for a glimpse of a striking feature of the garden. For a closer look, follow the path up the slope and take the stone bridge on the right to enter the grove of Douglas-firs.

Leave the grove and proceed up the lawn between newly planted beds of conifers to join the main path. Across the lawn, against a stunning backdrop of **Himalayan white birch** (*Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*), you will see one of the exhibits from the VanDusen Garden sculpture exhibition Touch Wood. This powerful assembly of figures created from recycled Western redcedar is titled 'Council of Elders' and was carved by Michael Dennis.

On the right, on the far side of the main path, is a bank of architectural **13 – cutleaf staghorn sumac** (*Rhus typhina* 'Dissecta'). This species is native to Eastern North America and its common name refers to the soft velvety branches that resemble a stag's antlers. Continue up the hill and to the right, following the signs to the Waterfall, one of the most popular features in the garden. Here you can sit for a moment and enjoy the sound of falling water in a spectacular wooded setting.

Take the path to your right leading to the Fern Dell and look for two stunning, mature trees, one on each side of the path **14 – Chinese tulip tree** (*Liriodendron chinense*). Look up at the distinctive, roughly tulip-shaped, lobed leaves – once you have seen them you will always recognize their shape. In early summer green and yellow flowers bloom in the upper branches.

Take a moment to look into the sheltered microclimate of the Fern Dell, where stately **15 – Tasmanian tree ferns** (*Dicksonia antarctica*) with their large trunk-like stems set the scene for another fascinating collection of plants. Ferns have neither seeds nor flowers but reproduce by tiny spores. Look closely at a few specimens and see if you can find the spore-bearing structures, called sporangia!

Head down the slope to the Korean Pavilion, a gift to the garden from the people of Korea after Expo '86, which was held in Vancouver. It offers splendid views of the Great Lawn, a reminder that this garden was once a golf course. Walk down across the lawn, heading towards the magnificent beech collection where this self-guided tour ends. Follow the signs to the Garden Entrance or turn left at the Lathhouse and, for a grand finale, explore the delights of the Perennial Garden.

