

The tour starts and ends at the Plaza and lasts about an hour. Please follow black and white number and arrow signs. Parts of this tour are not wheelchair accessible.

In October, fall is at its best. While evergreen plants are attractive year-round, most of the summer flowers have now been replaced with colourful displays of leaves, berries and seeds.

As you walk around the 22 hectare (55 acre) garden, the views look natural, but this was a golf course until 1960. Livingstone Lake, in front of the Plaza, was man-made as were all the water features and since this is a botanical garden, the plants have been selected, documented and arranged in collections. The garden's natural look has been carefully planned and created.

Turn right from the Plaza and down the ramp onto the gravel path to the Eastern North America collection. Straight ahead, where the path divides, is an **1 - evergreen magnolia (*Magnolia 'Monland' 'Timeless Beauty'*)**. Magnolias occur in two widely separated regions, with one group in Eastern and Southeast Asia and another occurring from Eastern North America to Brazil. Many magnolias are deciduous but the evergreen magnolia keeps its shiny, green leaves all year. Large, fragrant white flowers in summer are followed by fruit shaped like little pineapples which will split to reveal red seeds.

Take the path on the left, then the path immediately right which leads you through a typical fall scene in eastern North America, the ground carpeted with red leaves. On the left are several **2 - red maples (*Acer rubrum*)** and for nearly 300 years, the red maple leaf has been a symbol of Canada. The Canadian flag was officially introduced in 1965 but the flag's red maple leaf is an artist's version and not a copy of the leaf of any specific maple variety.

Curving left, the path follows the shore of Cypress pond, named after the **3 - bald or swamp cypress trees (*Taxodium distichum var. distichum*)**. They are easy to recognize by their feathery green needles which are now turning orange. Though conifers are typically evergreen, some are deciduous, dropping their needles in the fall; the bald cypress is one of them. Cross the floating bridge and at the end of the bridge on the left is a bald cypress with some of its roots in the water. Growing from its roots are what are called 'knees' (**pneumatophores**) which can reach a height of eleven feet (over 3 metres) but the purpose of the 'knees' is unknown.

Turn right onto a small, bark-mulched path and follow it around Cypress Pond until on the right you come to a large tree with a moss-covered trunk. The **4 - dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*)** is also a deciduous conifer with needles turning orange. It was known from fossils and thought to have been extinct for millions of years but in the 1940's the tree was identified in a forest in China.

Turn left on the narrow path to join a wide, paved path and turn left again. Soon on the right you will see an **5 - American larch (*Larix laricina*)**, yet another species of deciduous conifer with needles turning gold. The American larch is also known as Tamarack, a word given by the Algonquins which means wood used for snowshoes. Continue up the path, with the **bamboo** collection on your left. There are over 1450 species of bamboo, all belonging to the Grass Family (***Poaceae***). One of the fastest growing and strongest plants on earth, bamboo has a wide variety of uses, from food to fabrics and skateboards to scaffolding.

At the end of the path, stop and look across to the grove of **6 - Giant sequoias (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*)**, not the tallest but the largest tree by mass in the world. The current record holder is a tree in California called General Sherman, 82.6 metres (271 feet) tall and possibly 2,700 years old. The trees here are about 40 years old and are 21.5 metres (70 feet) tall, so just imagine the General Sherman tree, four times their height. Step inside the cool, dark interior of the grove and look up to see the sky through gaps in the lacework of branches.

To the right of the giant sequoias, walk across the lawn to the bank of Heron Lake, next to a flower bed. With a clear view down the lake you might see a great blue heron standing perfectly still, one of the 86 species of birds recorded in the garden. The summer birds flew south in September and the northern birds are arriving, so October is a good month for bird watching.

A small path on the right winds through the collection of Japanese maples with vibrant leaves of red, orange, pink and purple. When the leaves have gone, the bare twisted branches are still attractive. Pass two benches then look on the left at the **7 – Japanese umbrella pine (*Sciadopitys verticillata*)** with needles that resemble the spokes of an umbrella. Dating from over 200 million years ago, the tree is considered a living fossil.

Join the wide, paved path and turn left past the maple collection and follow the path as it curves left up the slope. Among the many varieties of maples growing here are several **8 - sugar maples (*Acer saccharum*)** from which nearly all maple syrup is made. Canada supplies over 80% of the world's maple syrup, most of it produced in Quebec. At the top of the slope, on the right, are low-growing shrubs of **9 – salal (*Gaultheria shallon*)**, an evergreen popular with florists because the shiny leaves remain green for months after being cut. Harvesting salal is a multimillion dollar B.C. industry, located mainly in the southern part of Vancouver Island.

Straight ahead is one of the trees that remain from the time the golf course was first laid out in 1911. It is a **10 - Western redcedar** which is not a cedar at all; it is ***Thuja plicata***, a conifer belonging to the Cypress family. The Western redcedar is the official tree of B.C. and has played a central role in the culture of the coastal First Nations for thousands of years. Canoes, totem poles, masks and baskets are made from the wood and bark, among the many uses of different parts of the tree.

Walk left and enjoy the views on both sides of the path. On the right is the **Mountain Ash or Rowan Collection (*Sorbus species*)**, the trees laden with bunches of red, orange and yellow berries, and the **Ash Collection (*Fraxinus species*)**. Beyond the trees is the Great Lawn, once the sweeping fairways of the

original golf course. On the left, in a gap between the **deodar cedars** and the **Chihuahuan spruces**, you may catch a glimpse of the Coast Mountain Range in the distance.

The group of **11 - Chihuahuan spruce (*Picea chihuahuana*)** have blue-green needles. Discovered in Mexico in 1942 and now endangered, it is estimated that fewer than 2500 trees still grow in the wild. Continue on the path, and on the left notice an unusual conifer, a **snake branch spruce (*Picea abies* 'Virgata')** with an interpretive sign. Next, pass Heather Pond and then the Heather Garden, which represents a typical Scottish moorland with heather, heath, Scots pine and silver birch.

Follow the path through the Perennial Garden with its two distinct styles. The modern style on the right has free-form flower beds with the tallest plants growing in the middle while the Victorian style on the left has a high hedge with the tallest plants growing at the back. The hedge is **12 - Irish yew (*Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata')**. Yew trees are historically associated with doom and death and Harry Potter readers may know that Lord Voldemort's magic wand was made of yew.

Leaving the Perennial Garden, the path is framed by three graceful **weeping beeches (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Pendula')**. Turn left along the Lavender Walk and although the flowers of the **English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*)** may be over, rub the leaves to release the strong scent of lavender. Look across the grass to the right and see what, at first glance, appears to be a tall shrub that has lost all its leaves. This is an art work by B.C. artist Alastair Heseltine called *Salix Iterum* (Repeating Willow). Created with woven willow shoots, it will stand there until it eventually collapses.

Turn right at the **13 - laburnum trees (*Laburnum x watereri* 'Vossii')**, also known as golden chain trees. For three weeks in May and June, long chains of flowers create a bright yellow canopy over the path to make the Laburnum Walk one of the outstanding attractions of the garden. Though the tree is deciduous, the leaves do not change colour in the fall. A warning – every part of the tree is poisonous, especially the seeds! The right side of the Laburnum Walk is soon bordered by **14 - beautyberry (*Callicarpa bodinieri* var. *giraldii* 'Profusion')**, a shrub with twigs covered in clusters of small purple berries that stay through much of the winter and provide food for birds.

The path curves to the left to reveal an overview of the Formal Rose Garden. In formal gardens low, closely-clipped evergreen hedges of **boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*)** enclose beds laid out in geometric patterns called *parterres de broderie* (embroidery patterns). This pattern was inspired by the 16th century gardens of Versailles in France.

Joining the wide path, turn right between the tropical and seasonal flowerbeds. October is a busy time for the gardeners as they prepare the garden for winter. Tender perennials such as **century plant (*Agave americana*)** are moved to the greenhouse while plants at the northern edge of their range, such as **15 - Japanese fibre banana trees (*Musa basjoo*)**, are wrapped in straw, sacking and plastic to protect them from cold weather. October is also the month to start planning for spring by planting thousands of bulbs and bedding plants.

Walk back down the path and cross to the low, spreading tree on the corner. This **16 - golden catalpa (*Catalpa bignonioides 'Aurea'*)** was planted on August 30, 1975, the official opening day of the VanDusen Botanical Garden. Long, black seed pods hang from the branches, the reason the catalpa is also called the Indian bean tree.

Continue along the path to the left of the catalpa and at the T-junction, turn right to pass a mass of red berries on a **Chinese hawthorn (*Crataegus pinnatifida*)** and orange berries on a **Washington hawthorn (*Crataegus phaenopyrum*)**. Haw is the name of the hawthorn berry but it is also an ancient word for hedge so hawthorn literally means hedge thorn. Because of their sharp thorns, hawthorn hedges are often grown to protect property.

A few steps further is one of the most beautiful trees in the fall, a **17 - mountain ash (*Sorbus hupehensis 'Pink Pagoda'*)** covered with pink berries. Take the small path beside this tree to the top of the embankment for a good view of Livingstone Lake and the Visitor Centre, an award-winning, green building opened in 2011. Follow the path to the right through the **Ornamental Grasses**, turn left over the wooden bridge and return to the Plaza.

October is often the busiest month of the year for the volunteer members of the VanDusen Seed Collectors' group who gather over 500 species of annuals, perennials, shrubs, coastal BC native plants, trees, ferns, vines, rhododendrons and more. Packets of seeds are available in the gift shop or on line at www.vandusen.plantexplorers.com.

All proceeds support VanDusen Botanical Garden.