

Marvelous May

May 2015 Self-Guided Tour

Contributed by several VanDusen Friday Guides

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

VanDusen Botanical Garden is turning forty this year! As you walk through the Garden enjoying the vistas, be reminded of Bill Livingstone, a self-taught landscape designer and former Deputy Superintendent of the Vancouver Park Board who played a vital role in the creation of the Garden. It was he who envisioned, and then saw to fruition, the rolling landscapes, soothing water features and unique use of locally sourced stone which we enjoy today.

Begin your tour by entering the plaza from VanDusen's Visitor Centre. Take a moment to admire the view, then turn left and cross the wooden bridge. On the other side, look out over Livingstone Lake and note the bronze resin sculpture *Fisher Hauling in the Net* by Romanian-born artist Gerhard Juchum, resting effortlessly on the lake shore. Doesn't it fit in perfectly? This sculpture was donated to the garden by the artist in 1976.

Following the directional arrow, proceed towards the Phyllis Bentall Garden, a formal perennial garden and gathering place that was a generous gift from the Bentall family in memory of their mother. Then wander through the Fragrance Garden, taking in the scents, and stop at the **1- Herb Garden** just ahead. Gently rub the leaves to enjoy the aroma of these plants. In Western culture, herbs are primarily used to season our food, but herbs are also used medicinally in many cultures, past and present. Continue along the paved path until you reach the **2- golden catalpa (*Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea')**. Also known as the Indian bean tree or cigar tree, suggested by the shape of its seed pods, this tree forms a dramatic landscape feature. Following the tradition begun by Queen Victoria, who always marked a special occasion by planting a tree, this beautiful golden catalpa was planted to celebrate the official opening of VanDusen Botanical Garden on August 30, 1975.

Walk a few steps to the directional arrow and proceed up the paved path to your left. Soon you'll see a number of **3- hardy Japanese fibre banana trees (*Musa basjoo*)**. These 'trees' are actually very tall herbaceous perennials with long fibrous leaf stalks forming the 'trunk'. Unlike the seedless bananas you buy from the grocery store, this species produces non-edible fruit with lots of seeds and very little pulp. In summer, their dramatic foliage provides a focal point, imparting the feel of a tropical jungle.

To continue the tour, enter the bark mulched **Loderi rhododendron trail** just to the left of the Minotaur sculpture. This trail features a collection of highly fragrant rhododendron hybrids developed by Sir Edmund Loder. He first crossed *Rhododendron griffithianum* with *R. fortunei* to produce a plant with the best features of both parents and today there are several Loderi rhododendron cultivars growing in gardens around the world. The **4- Rhododendron 'Loderi King George'**, with its large trusses of pale pink-white blooms, is considered by many as one of the finest of the Loderi Group. About ten metres ahead on your left is **5- Rhododendron 'Loderi Pink Diamond'**. These rhododendrons are all scented and on a warm day, the scent will be more pronounced. What do they smell like to you?

Continue to the end of the trail, then turn left onto the paved path. Walk along until you reach the **6- dove tree (*Davidia involucreta*)**. Look up to discover why this tree is also called the handkerchief tree or ghost tree. Large papery white bracts (special modified leaves) hang from the branches, directing pollinators to the small greenish-white clusters of flowers. It is a wonderful sight! Père Armand David, a French missionary and naturalist discovered this tree in 1869 while plant hunting in China.

Now turn right, following the directional arrow, onto the **Rhododendron Walk**. To your right you will soon see a collection of fragrant and colourful **7- deciduous azaleas**. Thriving in full sun, deciduous azaleas tend to have a more open, airy structure and fewer flowers when growing in partial shade. Like rhododendrons, azaleas are members of the genus *Rhododendron* but azalea flowers have only five or six pollen-bearing stamens, while rhododendron flowers have ten or more. As you walk along, count the stamens on the flowers and see if you can tell which are azaleas and which are rhododendrons. Some can fool you!

Continue up the path until you reach **8- Rhododendron fulvum** on your left. Although it is no longer in bloom, take a moment to admire the glossy, dark green leaves. Then look on the underside of a leaf for the soft, cinnamon-coloured *indumentum* (covering of fine hairs). Many rhododendron species have this adaptation to protect them from moisture loss during dry periods, and also against extremes in temperature.

More rhododendrons abound on this pathway, accented by a variety of groundcovers, ferns, and hostas. Hostas are the mainstay of the shade garden. These herbaceous perennials are noted for their many variations in leaf colour, size, texture and shape. Some even have fragrant flowers, such as the august lily or fragrant plantain lily (*Hosta plantaginea*) just ahead along the path. The genus *Hosta* is named for Nicholas Thomas Host (1761-1834), an Austrian botanist, who was the personal physician of the Holy Roman Emperor, Francis II.

Continue up the path towards the educational sign that tells the story of “The Aristocrats of Gardens”. Next to the sign is a stunning **9- orangebark stewartia (*Stewartia monadelphica*)**. A member of the tea family (Theaceae) and native to Japan and Korea, its bark just has to be touched! Walk further up the path until you reach another educational sign on your left. Stop here to admire the peeling, cinnamon-brown bark of **10- paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*)**. Unlike typical maple leaves, these leaves are trifoliate (divided into three distinct leaflets) and coarsely toothed with a glaucous (greyish) coating on their undersides.

Just ahead on the right side of the path is VanDusen’s recently developed **Japanese Collection**. The stately **11- Chinese scholar tree**, also known as the **Japanese pagoda tree (*Styphnolobium japonicum*)** is actually native to China and Korea but was first described from a cultivated specimen in Japan. With astringent and haemostatic properties, the flower buds are important in Chinese herbal medicine. In midsummer clusters of fragrant, creamy white, pea-like blossoms open when few other trees are in bloom. After the flowers have been pollinated, they give rise to fruit which resemble strings of pearls in green pods. Proceed to the end of the path where you will find a **12- Japanese larch (*Larix kaempferi*)**, a coniferous tree with needles growing in distinctive whorls (small bunches). Japanese larch is the only deciduous conifer native to Japan. This tree commonly retains its cones for many years. Look up, and note the abundance of cones along the branches.

Cross the path. At the entrance to the Canadian Heritage Garden is a towering **13- Himalayan spruce (*Picea smithiana*)**. This tree was planted when the bed was still part of the Sino-Himalayan Garden. Its long, hanging branches are an adaptation to allow it to shed snow easily, preventing damage to the tree. This tree is noted for having the longest needles of any spruce, up to 5 cm long.

Now enter the Canadian Heritage Garden which was opened in 1989. Just past the split rail fence is a grove of **14- sugar maple trees (*Acer saccharum*)**, whose iconic leaf is featured on the Canadian flag. Not well suited to our rainy climate, these trees remain quite small and are prone to disease here, but in their native Quebec they can reach 40 metres in height. Sugar maple trees are the source of delicious maple syrup and maple sugar. This grove is accented with an understory of spring ephemerals, such as white wakerobin (*Trillium grandiflorum*) and celandine poppy (*Stylophorum diphyllum*).

Follow the curve to your right to enter the area of the Canadian Heritage Garden that represents the Boreal Forest (Taiga), which covers about three quarters of Canada’s land mass. Stop at **15- black spruce (*Picea mariana*)**. This tree is a transcontinental species, and can be found from one end of Canada to the other. The principal commercial value of black spruce is as pulpwood with the long fibres in its wood adding strength to pulp and paper products. Note the jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*) across the way. It is the dominant tree in the southern Boreal Forest. Growing in rocky shallow soil, this tree is gnarled and lopsided, reminiscent of a scene made famous by Canadian painter Tom Thomson in his painting *The Jack Pine*.

Continue along the path past trees representing B. C.’s coastal coniferous rainforest, then the Prairie grasslands, and finally the Heritage Orchard. Just before turning right at the directional arrow, look across to **16- Eddie's white wonder dogwood (*Cornus 'Eddie's White Wonder'*)**. A hybrid of Pacific dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*) and eastern flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), this is the most famous tree ever developed in Canada. Read the educational sign to find out more about this tree and its local origins.

Now follow the directional arrow, and proceed towards the honeybee hives. If it’s a warm, sunny day, the bees will be very active! Next wander through the Heritage Orchard and along the path by the Vegetable Garden. Head towards the broad paved path, and turn right at the directional arrow. Enjoy the plantings on either side of the path along the way. At the foot of this path, you’ll find two **17- princess trees (*Paulownia tomentosa*)**. Look up to see the pale purple, foxglove-like flowers that appear before any foliage emerges. This tree is native to China. It is said that it was once the custom to plant a princess tree to celebrate the birth of a baby girl, and when she was of marriageable age, it was cut down to make items for her dowry. The seeds of Paulownia are numerous, soft, and papery and were used in 19th century China as packing material for exporting Chinese porcelain.

Now cross the path to the grassy area left of the Korean Pavilion, which is under repair. Go down the grassy slope towards the large expanse of lawn before you, a reminder that VanDusen was once a golf course. Continue down the lawn, veering right, past the hydrangea beds and the large Leyland cypress (× *Cupressocyparis leylandii*) on your right.

Keep going until you reach the Lathhouse. Then turn left and walk through an arbour of graceful weeping beeches, through the Perennial Garden, then turn right at the directional arrow. Continue on down the path. End your tour by strolling through the winding Laburnum Walk, a highlight of VanDusen this month. The pendulous, bright yellow blooms of the **18- hybrid goldenchain trees (*Laburnum × watereri* 'Vossii')** give off a wisteria-like scent and are beautifully set off by the purple alliums planted beneath.

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