

### **Beauty and knowledge – Roy Forster's masterpiece**

“The feeling is akin to that which a painter feels when first putting brush to a blank canvas,” noted Roy Forster, VanDusen Botanical Garden’s first Curator and Garden Director when tasked with planting the Garden in the early 1970s.

As you step out onto **1 - the Plaza** from the Visitor Centre, look beyond to the Garden where the story of plants and their relationship with human history is spelled out across VanDusen’s 55 acres. The water features, stone work and rolling terrain were all created by Bill Livingston before the first plant, a lily-of-the-valley shrub (*Pieris japonica*), went into the ground. Today, more than 50 distinct living collections at VanDusen are grown for the purposes of horticultural display, education and conservation. Gardening questions find answers in the rich array of plants.

Exit the plaza, taking the main path to your right toward the **2- Eastern North American Collection**. Turn left at the main intersection and bear right along the eastern shore of Cypress Pond. To your right is Roy Forster's rendering of a Carolinian forest. Note the diffuse light through the canopy of hardwood trees, with American larch (*Larix laricina*), witch alder (*Fothergilla* species), butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) and black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia* ‘Tortuosa’). Sunlight penetrates this canopy differently than through the dense dark canopy of our predominantly coniferous West Coast rainforests. The rich, layered understory here, with plants like Solomon's seal and oakleaf hydrangea, live in harmony, adapted to life beneath a deciduous canopy.

From here, proceed straight ahead to the small floating bridge and pause at **3-Cypress Pond**. The bald cypress trees (*Taxodium distichum*) along the shore get their “baldness” each fall when their needle-shaped leaves turn a brilliant coppery colour before falling to the ground. “We had a lot of fun with Cypress Pond,” says Roy Forster. Before you leave, remember to feed our pet alligator (she lives on the small island).

After you cross the floating bridge, proceed up the narrow gravel path through the bamboo collection and pause as you encounter **4 - the redwoods**. It's okay to feel small and insignificant here. First is the **dawn redwood (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*)**. This species is common in fossil records across the Americas and Asia. Once believed extinct, a small grove was discovered in central China in 1944. Since then, an international network of universities, botanical gardens and arboreta has distributed the tree globally for the purposes of horticulture, research and conservation.

Continue through the bamboos to the **coast redwood (*Sequoiadendron sempervirens*)**, a giant that needs lots of water, grows over 300 feet in height and lives for up to 1800 years. Proceed up the path, cross the paved walkway and surround yourself in our grove of **giant sequoias or giant redwoods (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*)**. In nature, they tower nearly 300 feet and live upwards of 3500 years. When naturalist John Muir told then President Theodore Roosevelt that 3500-year-old sequoias were being felled to make fences in California, Roosevelt established new national parks to protect wild treasures such as these. The youngsters in this grove were planted just over 40 years ago.

Exit the sequoias to the paved path and turn right. Proceed with caution through **5 - The Mediterranean Garden**. Oregano, sage, thyme and other herbs common to the Mediterranean diet are found here.

Proceed along the path through the **6 – Southern Hemisphere collection**, with assemblages of plants from Chile, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and South America. To your left is flowering tobacco (*Nicotiana*). In the Australia and New Zealand Garden you will find cider gum trees (*Eucalyptus gunnii*) and *Veronica albicans*.

Proceed across the zigzag bridge past the prehistoric giant rhubarb (*Gunnera manicata*), with deciduous leaves that grow to an 8-foot span each spring. Across the bridge, at the top of the rise is **7 - the stone Grotto**, which leads into the **Heather Garden**. Heather (*Erica* species) and close relatives like heath (*Calluna vulgaris*) and mountain heather (*Cassiope* species), are found throughout northern latitudes from Europe to Haida Gwaii. Worldwide, there are over 300 species of these tough, low-growing shrubs. One or another of our varieties is in bloom every month of the year.

Walk past the Scottish Shelter across the small stone bridge, turn right onto the paved path and follow it to the crossroads. At this intersection is a Douglas-fir planted by Mr. Whitford VanDusen, for whom the Garden is named (look for the commemorative plaque). Compare this tree to those giant sequoias, planted at roughly the same time.

Turn left and proceed along the paved path past the cutleaf staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina* 'Dissecta') and Ponderosa pines. The striking white Himalayan birches on your left mark the gateway to the Sino-Himalayan Garden. Many of Vandusen's nearly 800 species and hybrid rhododendrons came from personal plant collections donated to the garden over the years, increasing the total from the initial 450 varieties catalogued in the 1970s. These rhododendrons bring some of the earliest blossoms to the garden each March and April.

Proceed along the paved path. Behind and to the right of that large Himalayan birch is one of the rarest trees in the garden, **8 - *Emmenopterys henryi***, a deciduous tree native to southern China and Vietnam that can live for upwards of 1000 years. This youngster, planted in 1990 and only 30 feet tall, probably won't bloom for another 30 or 40 years. Be patient.

Proceed along the paved path to **9 – The Canadian Heritage Garden**. The country lane to your right leads to a collection of plants as varied as the Canadian landscape. The paved path to your left leads into the Rhododendron Walk. Our hybrid rhododendrons lure visitors back to the garden each year with a riot of colour in May.

Midway along are **10 – Hydrangeas**, a collection of mopheads, lacecaps and oakleaf that provide colour after the rhodos finish blooming.

Proceed to the dove tree at the foot of the path and proceed to **11 - the Perennial Garden**. This collection achieves Roy Forster's objective of uniting knowledge and beauty. Walk around the beds to enjoy the late blooming perennials. This concludes the tour and we welcome you to explore the Garden further on your own or return to the Visitor Centre.