

William Shakespeare grew up in the English countryside, so it is natural that many of the images in his plays and sonnets reflected the landscape of his home. Gardening is at the root of English culture so it is probable that his home had gardens. While precise details of his life are disputed, the images and details of his plays are not.

According to *Flowers from Stratford-on-Avon*, a book written, illustrated and published by Paul Jerrard in 1852, at least 90 flowers, shrubs, trees and vegetables mentioned by William Shakespeare can be found at VanDusen Botanical Garden. While VanDusen does not have a “Shakespeare Garden” as such, we offer access to plants from the plays and sonnets that members and visitors can follow throughout the year. [A list appears at the end of this document.]

1- Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*) - turn left as you exit the doors of the Visitor Centre and proceed to the small hill at the edge of the plaza. The Garry oak is our native west coast oak. Shakespeare loved oaks and often seasoned his dialogue with oaks to suggest strength, age, wisdom, history, power, and endurance ... “*Under an oak, whose boughs were mossed with age, and high top bald with antiquity...*” says Oliver (*As You Like It*).

Shakespeare's London had a population of 200,000, small by today's standards. It was a city with no parks until the Crown Lands Act of 1851. Today London residents enjoy eight public parks comprising nearly 2,000 hectares (4,900 acres). In Shakespeare's day, oaken woods and farmland grew to the edge of the city limits. Candle-lit nights were dark and contained suggestions of mysterious portents, omens and forebodings, all fodder for the playwright's pen.

Here in the 55 acres of VanDusen Botanical Garden watch for “the little people” (faeries, which we call humming birds when we see them flitting around the garden). Any garden can make you think of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Watch for Oberon, king of the faeries who speaks of the power of “a little western flower, before milk-white, now purple with love's wound.” This phrase is sometimes interpreted by Canadians as a description of our native *Trillium ovatum* - it blooms in the spring but it is unknown whether a version of it was ever seen in London during Shakespeare's lifetime.

Now cross the plaza to your right and follow the signs. You will walk along the shore of Livingston Lake until you come to a narrow unpaved path pointing to the right. Follow this path to **2 – a fig tree (*Ficus carica*)** at the head of R. Roy Forster Cypress Pond. Titania says “*Feed him with apricots and dewberries, with purple grapes, green figs and mulberries*” (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Backtrack now to the paved path and turn right. Proceed to **3 – Lavender (*Lavandula sp.*)**. This is a plant that has never gone out of fashion. Everyone loves it. Shakespeare's Perdita says “*Here's flowers for you; hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram.*” The implication here is that the lavender isn't just a fragrance but is actually hot on the tongue.

Now you have a little walk without this self-guided tour to distract you. Follow the arrows through the Southern Hemisphere Garden, down the slope, and across the zig-zag bridge. Go up the hill into the Black Garden. Take a moment to appreciate the strong contrast between light and dark in the plantings here. Look for a low-growing **4 - European wild ginger (*Asarum europaeum*)**. Ginger, of course, has so much flavour and vitality, it is a natural fit for poetry and drama. Here is Shakespeare's description of a highly spirited horse: “*ORLEANS: He's of the colour of the nutmeg. BOURBON: And of the heat of the ginger. It is a beast for Perseus. He is pure air and fire, and the dull elements of earth and water never appear in him, but only in patient stillness while his rider mounts him. He is indeed a horse, and all other jades you may call beasts*” (*Henry V*).

Follow the signs now to our **5 – Formal Rose Garden**. Take your time exploring this collection of roses, selected for colour, size and abundance of blossoms. If you are a home gardener, note the size of the shrubs today then return in the winter to compare how the gardeners have pruned them. Through the stone archway is our Heritage Rose Garden, which features some older varieties of roses. Shakespeare provides us with many quotations about roses, including this one from Othello: “*When I have pluck'd the rose, I cannot give it vital growth again, it needs must wither. I'll smell it on the tree.*”

Now we proceed down to the Fragrance Garden. Follow the signs. Our Fragrance Garden contains herbaceous offerings that please the senses of smell and taste. Look for **6 – Herbs**. Our garden contains most of the herbs that were common to England in Shakespeare's day. You will find **marjoram (*Origanum sp.*)**, which was used as a password: “*LEAR: Give the word. EDGAR: Sweet marjoram. LEAR:*

Pass.” (*King Lear*) You will also find fennel. Falstaff said this about another character's physique: “Because their legs are both of a bigness, and a'plays at quoits well, and eats conger and fennel...” (*Henry IV*).

Follow the sign now to our **7-White Garden**, a garden “room” of fragrant plants. White gardens are considered “healing” gardens because they soothe the soul. Here you will find among the collection of white plants, a **white rose (*Rosa x alba 'Alba Semiplena'*)**. “YORK: Then I will raise aloft the milk-white rose, with whose sweet smell the air shall be perfumed.” (*Henry VI*)

The next stop is a short distance from here at the entrance to the Fragrance Garden. The small archway between the beds contains **8 - honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum 'Serotina'*)**. Honeysuckle is also known as woodbine. Again, we have a quote from Oberon, the king of the faeries. “I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, where oxlip and the nodding violet grows, quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine.” (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*)

On your right, just before the small bridge, you will find a beautiful example of **9 - New Zealand flax, (*Phormium sp.*)**. Although they share a common name, this plant belongs to a different family than the flax that was used to make linen in Shakespearean England (***Linum sp.***). Flax in 16th century London was an extremely valuable commodity, used in sailmaking, rope making, weaving and a large range of everyday products. “What a hodge-podge pudding? ... a bag of flax?” says Ford (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*).

Follow the arrow to the final stop on our Shakespearean journey. Proceed along the paved path beside Livingston Lake. About halfway along, you will come to our **10 - medlar (*Mespilus germanica*)**, heavily laden with fruit at this time of the year. Medlar is the subject of a blatant pun (“meddlers”) in *Timon of Athens*: “APEMANTUS: The middle of humanity thou never knewest; but the extremity of both ends. When thou wait in thy guilt and in thy perfume, they mocked thee for too much curiosity; in thou rags thou know'st none, but art despised for the contrary. There's a medlar for thee, eat it. TIMON: On what I hate I feed not. APEMANTUS: Dost hate a medlar? TIMON: Ay, though it look like thee. APEMANTUS: An thou'dst hated meddlers sooner, thou shouldst have loved thyself better now.” The Medlar also has a cameo appearance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as an insult during an argument between the king and queen of the faeries.

There is much more to see in the garden. The Bard's audiences, for the most part, believed in the existence of faeries and witches. You won't find many witches in the 55 acres of VanDusen Botanical Garden, but you will find numerous hummingbirds, credited as the inspiration of faeries. Shakespeare's trees (ash, balsam, bay, birch, fig, fir, hawthorn, and pine) can be fully appreciated as winter wanes and the geometry of bud-laden branches reveals itself. We have some of each in our plantings and you can explore the pathways looking for them all.

Today, more than 50 distinct living collections encompass far more than just today's Shakespearean plant references. These collections serve the ongoing horticultural display, education and plant conservation that underpin the nature of a botanical garden.

CHECKLIST of plants at VanDusen Botanical Garden with references in the works of William Shakespeare
Apple, (crab, pippin), ash, aspen, balm, balsam, bay, bean, birch, blackberries, box, broom, burdock, cabbage, chamomile, carnation, carrot, cherry, chestnut, clove, clover, columbine, corn, cowslip, currant, cypress, daffodil, daisy, dock, elder, elm, fennel, fern, fig, flag, iris, garlic, gillyvor or gilliflower (carnation), ginger, gooseberry, goss or gorse, grape, grass, harlock (burdock), hawthorn, hazel, heath, hebanon (yew), herb of grace (rue), holly, honeysuckle, hyssop, ivy, larkspurs, laurel, lavender, lettuce, lily, locust, love-in-idleness (pansy), mace, mallows, marigold (calendula or pot marigold), marjoram, medlar, mint, mistletoe, moss, mulberry, mushroom, mustard, myrtle, narcissus, nettle, nutmeg, oak, olive, onion, osier (willow), oxlip, palm tree, pansy, parsley, pea, pear, peony, pepper, pine, pink, plane tree, plantain, plum, poppy, potato, primrose, quince, radish, reed, rhubarb, rose, rosemary, rue, rush, rye, saffron, samphire, savory, sedge, speargrass, stover, strawberry, sycamore, thistle, thorn, thyme, toadstool, turnip, vetch, vine, violet, walnut, wheat, willow, woodbine (honeysuckle), wormwood, yew.

