

Contributor: Lyn Anderson, VanDusen Volunteer Guide

And May flowers bring a rainbow of colour to VanDusen's 70 plant collections. This tour will take you to a few of these Collections and some of our themed gardens. Welcome to VanDusen Botanical Garden. (Please note some bloom times may differ due to colder than usual weather this spring.) Follow the arrows and numbered signs.

Of the seven colours of the rainbow, perhaps green is the most prominent. In today's world green has more than one meaning. Cities and buildings going "green" to name a few instances. Turn around and look at VanDusen Visitor Centre you just walked through. Architects Perkins + Will partook in the Living Building Challenge when they designed this building. This challenge is the highest level of certification for a green building. The challenge's six criteria, or Petals, at that time, were Site, Water, Energy, Beauty, Health and Materials. VanDusen Visitor Centre is Living Building Challenge Petal Certified achieving certification in the categories of Site, Materials, Health, and Beauty. It was one of the first buildings in Canada to pursue this challenge. The building has also achieved LEED Platinum status. Now, the Garden.

Facing Livingstone Lake, turn to your right and follow the path to the **Eastern North America** sign. Turn left, a few feet away, on your right is **1 -cucumber tree or bigleaf magnolia (*Magnolia macrophylla*)**. This magnolia has the largest leaves and flowers of any deciduous tree in North America. Our tree is quite young and may take a few more years to flower. Just behind is an **Ashe's magnolia**, a smaller tree and quite rare in its natural habitat. White magnolias are used in hybridization resulting in magnolia trees with yellow flowers. Continue down the path and turn left. On your right is R. Roy Forster Pond named for VanDusen's first curator. On your left is **2 – hybrid magnolia (*Magnolia x brooklynensis* 'Yellow Bird')**, considered one of the best yellow-flowered magnolias. It was developed by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden in 1981. It is a hybrid resulting from a cross between (***Magnolia acuminata* var. *subcordata*** and ***Magnolia x brooklynensis* 'Evamaria'**). Continue along the path until you reach its end and the **Mediterranean Garden**.

Turn to towards your right. In the distance is the beautiful **3 – hybrid dogwood (*Cornus* 'Eddie's White Wonder')** created by Henry M. Eddie (1881-1953). Mr. Eddie was a Scottish nurseryman who immigrated to Canada in 1910. In his early years in B.C. he ran a nursery, then established his own business and added a retail outlet. Around 1945 he crossed our native **western or Pacific dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*)** with the pink and white **eastern flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*)**. Most of the seedlings were lost from his nursery in the Fraser Valley during the 1948 flood. Luckily, he had moved his best seedling to his nursery in Richmond before the disaster. All 'Eddie's White Wonder' trees have been propagated from that one seedling. This cultivar is known for its masses of flowers surrounded by large, snowy white bracts, and has some resistance to anthracnose, a fungal disease that plagues our native dogwood.

Turn to your left, carry on down the path to the **4 - western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*)**. It is the provincial tree of British Columbia. Historically, the tree has played a key role in the lives of West Coast First Nations and continues to be a valuable resource today. Because of its high resistance to decay it is used widely in building materials. In the spring of 2020 Harmac pulp mill near Nanaimo, B.C. urgently produced a supply of pulp that is unique in the world. Because it's a blend of primarily western redcedar, a soft fiber, it allows it to be mixed with synthetics to make the end products like medical masks and gowns in demand due to the Corona virus pandemic.

Not too far down the path is **5 – giant rhubarb or gunnera (*Gunnera manicata*)** with huge leaves and enormous flower spikes. Gunnera was food for dinosaurs – the family dates back 95 million years. It also nourishes itself by a symbiotic relationship with cyanobacteria, which live in glands located along the stems providing the plant with essential nitrogen. Cross over the zig-zag bridge and take the middle path through the **Black and Gold** themed garden. Chartreuse plants contrast dramatically with dark purple and burgundy plants and shrubs. **6 – Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii* 'Crimson Velvet')** is a wonderful example with its yellow flowers and maroon leaves.

Continue along the path as it curves and borders on the **Formal Rose Garden**. Walk along until you see the collection of pale pink **rhododendron hybrids** developed by Sir Edmund Loder. **7 - *Rhododendron* ‘Loderi King George’** is forefront of this group and considered finest of the group. It has a heavenly perfume.

Turn back to the entrance of the **8 – Laburnum Walk**. Wander under the archway of **hybrid golden chaintrees (*Laburnum X watereri* ‘Vossii’)** underplanted with brilliant purple **9 - ornamental onions (*Allium hollandicum* ‘Purple Sensation’)**. The walk was inspired by the famous Laburnum Arch at **Bodnant Garden** in North Wales. For many visitors it is the “crown jewel” of May blooms in VanDusen Garden.

Turn left at the end of the Laburnum Walk, when you get to the fork in the path go left again. You are now in the **Perennial Garden** which illustrates two styles of English gardens. One, a formal English garden with its **10 - Irish yew hedge (*Taxus bacata* ‘Fastigiata’)** border, was found in manor houses in an era when a huge staff of gardeners were employed. The second one is an ‘island style’ of garden. In 1953 British horticulturist and steam engine enthusiast, Alan Bloom MBE, popularized the garden feature of freestanding island beds, set in open lawns. During his life he developed over 170 new varieties of hardy perennial plants at the family nursery in Norfolk, England.

At the base of the **Great Lawn** is a very interesting tree **11 – Adam’s labrunum (+ *Laburnocytisus* ‘Adamii’)**. It is a graft chimera of two species, a **laburnum (*Laburnum anagyroides*)** and a **broom (*Chamaecytisus purpureus*)**. Flowers in racemes bear three colours, yellow and purple, true to each parent, and purple-pink with a yellowish flush, a result of the union. The plant originated in the nursery of Louis Adam near Paris in 1825, probably by accident. An Adam’s laburnum near the stone wall was lost in the winter storms this year. Hopefully you can see this intriguing tree from this distance.

As you look across the Great Lawn you can imagine it was once the first hole fairway in the 18-hole Shaughnessy Golf Course. Each May long weekend the lawn is host to the All British Field Meet, a car show started in the early years of the garden by Roy Foster CM, the proud owner of a beautiful BRG (British racing green) MG sports car. 400 antique cars and motorcycles come each year for the event.

Return to the fork in the path, turn left and follow the signs to the **Waterfall**. Once you reach the Waterfall, continue along the path to your right, turn left at the first stone bridge. Follow the path, down a few steps, turn left to find **12 – Himalayan blue poppy (*Meconopsis betonicifolia*)**. Himalayan poppy needs to be sheltered in a partially shaded area to avoid cold, dry winds, which is why we created this **Meconopsis Dell**. Follow the curved path, on your left is a curiosity in the plant world **13 – *Helwingia chinensis* (broadleaf selection)**. *Helwingia japonica* was introduced into Europe in 1830 (named after Georg Andreas Helwing, a 17th century Prussian botanist) and *H. chinensis* only appeared on the Western scene in the 20th century. Washington State’s Daniel J. Hinkley, world renown horticulturalist, brought it back from one of his plant exploration trips to China. Look closely at the leaves for a tiny bump midrib. This rare phenomenon is called ‘epiphyllly’, meaning ‘on the surface of the leaf’. The species is dioecious, with separate male and female plants. If plants are in close proximity, small fruits will appear in the fall. The other *Helwingia* is near the Meditation Garden so probably not close enough. Continue on the path and turn right, return to the Waterfall, walk until the path ends at Gate 4. Turn left, you are at the top of the **Rhododendron Walk**.

Take your time to enjoy the Rhododendron Walk. There are nearly 1,000 different rhododendron species, varieties, hybrids and cultivars throughout the Garden. The walk and adjacent paths are well worth taking your time to explore and experience the many beautiful jewel-like colours on each side of the path. Rhododendron hybrids are on your right side and azaleas on your left. Some azaleas are deciduous, but all are rhododendrons. The difference is in the number of stamens. It is also a good idea to look at the various leaves. Stop at the Magnolia & Hydrangea sign. Directly across the path is **14 – *Rhododendron Yakushimanum* ‘Mist Maiden’**. Note the underside of the leaves. The tawny-coloured hairy material is called indumentum which means ‘garment’ in Latin. Indumentum protects against moisture loss. At the end of the walk is one of the wonderful sights in May, **15 – handkerchief or dove tree (*Davidia involucrata*)** with its spectacular display of white bracts. What this tree lacks in colour, it makes up in ingenuity. The bracts surround a flower head to protect its pollen in rainy weather, and flutter in the breeze to attract pollinators.

A perfect end of today’s tour takes you through the small path to your left through the rhododendron bed which takes you to the midst of the Loderi collection. We hope you have enjoyed the results of VanDusen’s gardener’s green thumbs.