

Tree of the Month, February 2016: Cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas*)

In late winter, *Cornus mas*, a small tree native to southern Europe and western Asia, brightens the landscape with a profusion of tiny, bright yellow flowers in clusters on bare branches. The distinctive ovate leaves emerge later in spring, with 3-5 deep parallel veins, like those of other dogwoods (*Cornus* species). In late summer, bright red, oblong, berry-like drupes begin to ripen. The tree can grow 5 to 12 meters tall.

The common name, cornelian cherry, comes from the Roman name for the tree, “cornel”, which is from the Latin word *cornu*, meaning hard or tough – a reference to the tree’s wood, which is so dense it sinks in water. The semi-precious stone carnelian, or cornelian, is reddish brown and named for its resemblance to the fruits of cornelian cherry. The fruits attract birds and for thousands of years humans have made preserves and liqueur from them. Red dye obtained from the roots was traditionally used to colour Turkish fez hats.

At VanDusen, *Cornus mas* can be found on the bark mulch path of the Winter Walk, behind the bloodtwig dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea* ‘Midwinter Fire’) and near the eastern entrance to the Floral Hall.