

WEEKLY UPDATE – APRIL 9 – 16, 2016

**“Spring won’t let me stay in this house any longer.
I must get out and breath the air deeply again.”**

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911), Austrian composer

And where better to breath in the beauty of the season (allergies aside) than in the garden on such a splendid April day? The Thursday Gardener’s Walk with Tomas E. took place under blue skies and warm sunshine; the incredible weather prompted what might be a record turnout of guides and guide trainees. A few items to note from the first week of guiding:

- 1. The Volunteer Appreciation Pass 2016 is available at the Visitor Information Desk from 10:00am until 4:00pm. It is in effect from April 10 -23 inclusive.**
- 2. National Wildlife Week – April 10-16.**
- 3. The new A-Z reference books in the trolley are lovely and much appreciated.**
- 4. A plastic top will soon be on the trolley to protect its new surface. Thanks Brian.**
- 5. A map of easily accessible paths to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers would be a welcome addition to our resources to enhance the garden experience for mobility-impaired visitors.**

Guide Goings On

- 1. Thursday, April 14 – Guide Education: Gwen Odermatt will speak on “Gardening in Small Gardens”.**
- 2. Thursday, May 12 – Douglas Justice from UBC Botanical Garden will speak on “ How trees can help to make Vancouver the greenest city in the world”.**

Thank you to Malcolm H., Sunday guide, for passing along two items of interest, one about the garden’s Glastonbury Thorn, presently in bloom, and the other about the excellent documentary series *Life* hosted by David Attenborough and currently running on the Knowledge Network. The episode “Plants” can be viewed at <https://www.knowledge.ca/program/life>

Garden Goings On

1. Saturday and Sunday, April 9 and 10 – Sakura Days Fair presented by The Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival.

“Having scoured my skin
and bowed my skull
to Buddha...
Now for cherry-bloom!”
Kobayashi Issa (1763-1827)

2. BC Fuchsia and Begonia Society Plant, Bake and Craft Sale
Saturday, April 16 – 9:00am-3:00pm
Floral Hall
FREE
3. Point Grey Chrysanthemum Society Sale of Rooted Chrysanthemum Cuttings
Saturday, April 16 – 9:00am-1:00pm
Cedar Room
FREE
4. ADVANCE NOTICE – THE ANNUAL PLANT SALE
Sunday, April 24 – 10:00am-4:00pm
The Great Lawn
FREE

Bluebells

“... There is a silent eloquence
In every wild bluebell
That fills my softened heart with bliss
That words could never tell.”
Anne Bronte, (1820-1849), “The Bluebell”

Since their poems were written in the summer, both Emily and Anne Bronte were probably writing about the harebell or the Scottish bluebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*). In Britain, the delicate native bluebell, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, is a bulbous perennial plant in the Asparagaceae family. It is visible in April in the many famous deciduous bluebell woods around the country, although it also grows in open habitats. It is protected under UK law because it is in trouble from the larger, more adaptable Spanish bluebell, *Hyacinthoides hispanica*, which hybridizes with *H. non-scripta* to produce *H. x massartiana*, a weedier and more rapidly spreading (as it does in my garden) plant.

The native woodland bluebell can be readily distinguished from its bigger cousin; its sweetly scented, violet-blue bells fall to one side of its nodding stem, while the paler coloured bells of *H. hispanica* are found all around its upright the stem.

Bluebells synthesize a wide range of chemicals with potential medicinal properties. In folk medicine, the bulbs were used to treat leucorrhoea and as a diuretic as well as a styptic. One of the more interesting stories has to do with the distillation of the bulb juice being used by singing masters to stop a boy's voice from breaking. Another use for this sticky juice was as a starch with which Elizabethan courtiers starched their ornate ruffs.

In 2015, the botanical charity *Plantlife* had a poll to determine the most popular flower in the British Isles. The bluebell was voted in as England's favourite wildflower while the primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) won in Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

At our Garden, bed 48N contains both *H. non-scripta* and *H. hispanica*. (My thanks to Susan M., Thursday guide, for drawing my attention to the beautiful bluebells.)

The Buzz on Bees

"A bee is an exquisite chemist." Royal beekeeper to Charles II

Buzz, the bee mascot on the Honeynut Cheerios box, has taken a holiday for six months while General Mills Canada promotes its Bring Back the Bees Campaign. While bees are doing relatively well in Canada, there needs to be greater awareness of the fragility of bee populations and their potential disappearance in North America due to disease, pesticide use, flowerless landscapes and monolithic crop planting. To prevent this decline, General Mills Canada has partnered with Veseys Seeds in PEI to encourage the planting of 35 million bee-enticing wildflowers by giving away seeds. To date, an amazing 90,289,978 wildflower seeds from Veseys Seeds have been given away.

While the more cynical among us might see this as "greenwashing" in the interest of product promotion, it has certainly generated a positive response. If we understand that $\frac{3}{4}$'s of our flowering plants and more than a third of the world's food crops depend on pollinators such as bees, butterflies (plant milkweed!) and birds, human survival has a better chance. More information in an article by Dr. David Suzuki can be found at <http://ecowatch.com/2016/02/16/save-the-honeybee/>

May 28, 2016 is BC's Day of the Honeybee.

To promote bee awareness, VanDusen's Education Department is offering two workshops, both instructed by Brian Campbell, Master Beekeeper.

- 1. Helping Bees in Urban Gardens on Sunday, June 12, 10:00am – 12:30pm.**
- 2. Know Your Bees of BC on Sunday, July 17, 1:30pm – 4:00pm.**

Please note any comments, suggestions and questions in the Guide Information Binder or forward them to pkbuchanan@shaw.ca

The "Weekly Update" is also available at <http://www.ericanotebook.com>

"Spring is the time of plans and projects."

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), *Anna Karenina*