

WEEKLY UPDATE – MAY 28 – JUNE 4, 2016

“Spring being a tough act to follow, God created June.”

**Al Bernstein (1950-present), American sportscaster
and writer**

After the splendid and oh so merry month of May we have experienced, it's hard to imagine how June can outperform it. A few items to report.

- 1. Thanks to John S for testing the radios. He reported clear reception in all areas of the garden. If individual radios are problematic, please report that.**
- 2. English visitors asked if VDG provided a brochure that outlined the history of the garden. Sadly, we don't, but it would be an idea worth pursuing.**
- 3. A rib blew off the trolley umbrella. Thanks to Brian C for undertaking repairs.**
- 4. The mock orange is in fragrant bloom in the Phyllis Bentall garden. Like just about everything else this year, it is early. Notes on *Philadelphus* are available in last year's "Weekly Update", June 19-25.**
- 5. The majestic *Rosa filipes* 'Kiftsgate' across from the Korean Pavilion is in bloom. Stop for a moment to inhale the aroma from this tea-scented giant.**

Guide Goings On

- 1. Thursday, June 2 – Garden Walk with James t through the Southern Hemisphere, the Eastern North America and the Mediterranean Gardens.**
- 2. Thursday, June 9 – Guide Education – Rosemary P, Friday guide, will speak on “Learning from Stories: Plant Stories to Guide Your Guiding”. A tea for retired guides will take place afterward.**

Garden Goings On

- 1. Uncommon Annuals Plant Sale
Sunday, May 29 – 9:00am-4:00pm
See the VDG/Bloedel website for details**

2. **Pacific Northwest Palm and Exotic Plant Society – Speaker Change**
Gary Lewis, owner of Phoenix Perennials, will speak on “Hot New Plants: Cutting Edge Garden Plants for Cutting Edge Gardens”.
Monday, May 30 – 7:30 pm
Cedar Room
No admission charge and all are welcome

3. **Desert Plant Society of Vancouver Show and Sale**
Saturday, June 11 – 10:00am-7:00pm
Sunday, June 12 – 10:00am-3:30pm
Floral Hall
Admission by Donation

Tree Highlight – Himalayan White Birch – *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii*

**“When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy’s been swinging them.
But swinging doesn’t bend them down to stay
As ice-storms do...”**

Robert Frost (1874-1963), “Birches”

While Frost’s birches may be bent by ice-storms in his native New England, it is more likely that heavy snow packs bend the white-barked Himalayan birches in the high altitudes of the Himalayas.

The garden’s Tree of the Month is the Monarch Birch. But another beautiful garden birch is the Himalayan white birch, a deciduous tree in the Betulaceae family; in its native landscape, it frequently grows intermixed with conifers and with an undergrowth of species rhododendrons. These birches are noted for their white bark and the pink or reddish brown heartwood which is exposed when the bark peels.

The Sanskrit word for “birch” is “bhuja”, an indication of its linguistic Indo-European origins and its closeness to the modern common word “birch.” The “*utilis*” in its botanical name refers to the many uses of different parts of the tree.

In ancient times, the white, paper-like bark was used for writing sacred Sanskrit scriptures and texts.

In modern times in its native habitat, the bark is still used for writing sacred mantras which are worn as protective amulets. However, the bark is also used as packaging material for a variety of products including butter. The foliage is

used as fodder for animals, while the wood is used for bridge construction and firewood. This latter use has contributed to significant loss of birch forests. Outside of its native habitat, the Himalayan white birch is used primarily as a landscape tree. Several cultivars with exceptional white bark have earned the RHS Award of Garden Merit.

In VanDusen Garden, a stately row of *B. utilis* var. *jacquemontii* stands in beds 74 and 74A above a corner of the Great Lawn where the mountain ashes are located. Surprisingly, they have survived the attacks of the bronze birch borer and are looking very healthy. A few years ago there was talk of removal because pruning was so expensive. They are especially striking in the spring when the underplantings of mauve and purple azaleas are in bloom, but they are always attractive with their glowing pink underbark.

If you read Frost's poem in its entirety you might never look at birches in the same way again.

Another "shining" tree - Golden Full moon Maple - *Acer shirasawanum* 'Aureum'

The laburnums are finished but there are other "golden" trees in the garden right now. For example, the tall, golden *Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia' looks fabulous against a bright blue sky. On a much smaller scale, however, the Golden Full Moon maple glows in the sunlight. Native to Japan and a member of the Sapindaceae family, this ornamental tree is noted for its lovely foliage and autumn colour for which it has earned the RHS Award of Garden Merit.

In spring, the rounded leaves with their pointed tips are an acid green; in their centers, the heads of erect, tiny rose-red and white flowers will mature into the familiar winged samaras which will dangle beneath the leaves.

In the fall, the leaf lobes turn orangey-red while the interior/center remains yellow - thus the full moon effect.

Acer shirasawanum 'Aureum' can be found in beds 73 along the Rhododendron Walk, in bed 86 in the Japanese Collection near the end of the Rhododendron Walk, in bed 93 with the evergreen azaleas near the Korean Pavilion and in bed 121A near the Waterfall. Another cultivar, *A. shirasawanum* 'Jordan' is in bed 61 in the Japanese Maple section.

As always, please record comments, corrections, suggestions, questions etc. in the assigned pages in the Information Binder or send them to pkbuchanan@shaw.ca.

I would love to hear from you and contributions are welcome. Archived "Weekly Updates" along with Tree of the Month, Self-Guided Tours and Gardeners' Walks can be accessed at www.ericanotebook.com.

And in closing...

**"There once was a dormouse who lived in a bed
Of delphiniums (blue) and geraniums (red)
And all the day long he'd a wonderful view
Of geraniums (red) and delphiniums (blue)..."
A.A. Milne (1882-1956), "The Dormouse and the Doctor"**

Check out the delphiniums in the Alma VanDusen Garden and have a wonderful and, maybe, cooler week of guiding!