

## WEEKLY UPDATE - JUNE 25 - JULY 2, 2016

“Soon will the high Midsummer pomps come on,  
Soon will the musk carnations break and swell,  
Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,  
Sweet-William with his cottage-smell,  
And stocks in fragrant blow.”

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), “Thyrsis”

The poor roses took quite a beating in Thursday’s morning rain, but the moisture released so much fragrance. There is very little to report.

1. The #4 radio is “in the shop” for repairs.
2. The umbrella is surviving. Thanks to everyone for being so careful with it.

### Guide Goings On

1. Thursday, July 7 – Gardener’s Walk with Casey W. through the Sino-Himalayan Garden

There will be no Guide Education/Business meetings during July and August.

### Garden Goings On

1. Vancouver Rose Show  
Sunday, June 26 – 12:30-4:30pm  
Floral Hall and Cedar Room  
FREE

Check the Garden website for more July events!

### In the “Weekly Update” Archives

You can find information and stories about the following plants in last year’s “Weekly Updates”. Go to [www.ericanotebook.com](http://www.ericanotebook.com)

1. July 3 – 9, 2015 - *Cotinus coggyria* – Smoke Bush or Smoketree
2. July 10 -16, 2015 - the July flower, red campion, *Silene dioica*  
*Sequoia sempervirens* ‘Glauca’ – the Blue Coast Redwood  
*Fallopia japonica* – Japanese knotweed (invasive species)
3. July 17 – 23, 2015 – *Nymphaea* – water lily; *Crocasmia*
4. July 24 – 30, 2015 – *Tilia* – lindens  
Trumpet plants – *Campsis radicans* and *Brugmansia*
5. July 31 – August 6, 2015 – the August flower, *Gladiolus*  
*Arbutus unedo*, the Strawberry Tree, and *Cynara cardunculus*, the Cardoon

## Special Days in July

July 1 – **Canada Day** “If the first of July be rainy weather  
T’will rain, more or less, for four weeks together.”  
Old English Rhyme

Let’s keep our fingers crossed for good weather for the Canada Day weekend!

July 3 – the Dog Days of summer in the Northern Hemisphere begin now and last until August 11. These are hot, sultry days marked by lethargy and inactivity (but not if it rains on July 1).

## Garden Clippings

1. Bulb catalogues are starting to arrive!!
2. Did you know that **birch trees** are tapped for their sap just as sugar maples are? Popular in Europe and Russia, birch tree tapping is now done in the birch forests of BC. The water, flavoured or natural, is said to have powerful antioxidants and is marketed as a detoxifying and re-energizing drink. It’s pricey, though - \$48.00 for a dozen 473ml paks.

## Plant Highlight – Cutleaf Staghorn Sumac – *Rhus typhina* ‘Dissecta’

A frond of vivid scarlet leaves waving like a red flag in a Safeway parking lot bed caught my eye the other day. Prematurely fall-like, it belonged to a Staghorn sumac (also spelled sumach), a member of the Anacardiaceae family (which also contains cashews, pistachios and mangoes) and native to eastern North America. However, in well-drained soil, no matter how poor, and a sunny exposure, it thrives here too.

It is also known as the velvet sumac due to the reddish-brown hairs on its new branches which then resemble the soft velvet antlers of a young stag. Another name for it is the vinegar tree because of the tart taste of the berries.

The plant is dioecious; both males and females produce flowers, which appear from May to July. Birds and insect pollinators, including bees, are attracted to the showy flowers as they provide a good source of nectar for honey production. The female flowers produce the pyramid-shaped ornamental fruiting clusters, which generally open from July to September. Each one contains numerous hairy, berry-like drupes, which ripen to a bright red in autumn. When the foliage turns brilliant orange, red and rust, the combination makes for a striking display.

Staghorn sumac spreads through self-seeding and the production of root suckers or rhizomes. It grows in thickets with the oldest plants in the center and the new plants on the outside. Because it is hardy, drought resistant and grows best in open spaces,

weedy places and disturbed sites, it is an important agent of environmental recovery and reclamation.

All parts of the plant, except the roots, have a high tannin content and can be used for natural dyes and mordants, chemicals that fix a dye in or on a substance by combining with the dye to form an insoluble compound.

The fruits, after soaking and straining, can be used to make a gargle for sore throats or a kind of pink lemonade whose tartness can be sweetened with honey or maple syrup. In the Wrigley Memorial and Botanical Garden on Catalina Island (one of the California Channel Islands), I took a picture of *Rhus integrifolia*, the native Lemonade Berry Tree! Unlike its northern and eastern cousins, it is evergreen although it does experience leaf drop in the fall.

As a hardy ornamental with four-season appeal, *R. typhina* 'Dissecta' has earned the RHS Award of Garden Merit. Look for it in bed 122 across from the Great Lawn and the row of Himalayan white birch. A large clump sits under some somewhat scraggly Ponderosa pines. The new growth is clearly visible, and the fruiting clusters are starting to form.

Although it is in the same family, Anacardiaceae, and shares the same name, sumac, Staghorn sumac is not closely related to the poison sumac which belongs, along with poison ivy and poison oak, to the Toxicodendron genus. These three plants all contain urushiol, an oil that causes an allergic skin rash.

### **The Mighty Oak, the third tree in the fairy triad**

"A song to the oak, the brave old oak,  
Who hath ruled in the greenwood long:  
Here's health and renown to his broad green crown  
And his fifty arms so strong."

H.F. Chorley (1808-1872), "The Brave Old Oak"

In the Fagaceae family (beeches), the *Quercus* genus, to which the oak tree belongs, is complex; it is divided into two subgenera and a number of sections with over 600 extant species. Oaks can be found throughout the Northern Hemisphere in Asia, Europe, North Africa and North America, which has the most species, 90 in the US and 160 in Mexico of which 109 are endemic.

China boasts 100 species.

The wood of oak is typically noted for its strength and hardness. Planks of oak formed the decks of Viking longships and oak was utilized in the building of the early British naval fleet. It has been used for building and furniture. Wine, brandy and hard liquors are aged in oak barrels.

The oak tree has profound cultural significance. It is a symbol of stability, nobility, strength and endurance. In the USA and at least a dozen other countries it is the national tree. The northern red oak, *Q. rubra*, is the provincial tree of Prince Edward Island. In Vancouver, a red oak in Alexander Park across from the inukshuk at English Bay has been designated as the original VancouverPoetTree. Fred Wah, Canada's Poet Laureate (and my first year English professor), commemorated the occasion by reading and dedicating his poem "Tree".

Look for examples of the red oak in the various garden beds along the Rhododendron Walk.

(The most recently planted PoetTree is a *Catalpa bignonioides* 'Aurea' at Trout Lake).

In Greek mythology, the oak tree was sacred to Zeus while in Norse mythology it was sacred to Thor. And the common English oak, *Quercus robur*, was a sacred tree for the Druids. Look for examples in beds 90B and D near the Loderi rhododendrons (Oak Knoll).

In the Ogham alphabet, the ancient Irish rune-like writing system, trees are associated with letters and also corresponding tree months. The ash represents the letter N and the third tree month extending from February 18 to March 17. The hawthorn represents the letter H and the sixth tree month extending from May 13 to June 9. The oak tree represents the letter D and the seventh tree month, June 10 to July 7, of which we now in the middle. Together these three trees form the fairy triad of Celtic lore. It is believed that if they grow together, fairies live there.

There are many famous oak trees throughout North America and Europe. The Major Oak in Sherwood Forest is thought to be 800 to 1000 years old; Robin Hood may have used it for a shelter. Another is the Bowthorpe Oak in Bourne, Lincolnshire which is estimated to be 1000 years old. The Minchenden (Chandos) Oak in Southgate, London has the largest known girth – 8.2 meters around! It is around 800 years old.

In the June, 2015 *Gazette* Dean M. commented that the garden's English oaks are not doing so well; epicormic shoots, i.e. twiggy growths along the branches, had developed; they had been limbed high to get rid of dead wood; and they didn't like the wet west coast climate.

"Generations pass while some tree stands, and old families last not three oaks."  
Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682), *Urne Burial*

Your comments, questions, suggestions, corrections etc. are most welcome and appreciated. Please send them along to [pkbuchanan@shaw.ca](mailto:pkbuchanan@shaw.ca)

HAPPY CANADA DAY! AND HAVE A GREAT WEEK OF GUIDING!