

WEEKLY UPDATE – OCTOBER 23 – OCTOBER 29, 2015

“At no other time (than autumn) does the earth let itself be inhaled in one smell, the ripe earth; in a smell that is in no way inferior to the smell of the sea, bitter where it borders on tastes, and more honeysweet when you feel it touching the first sounds. Containing depth within itself, darkness, something of the grave almost.”

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters on Cezanne*, 1952

There is so much to describe in autumn: plenitude, colour, scent, texture. Rilke's sentence, exemplifying the synaesthetic effect, blends the senses of smell, taste, touch and hearing and adds darkness too. As I write this, we have perfect fall weather: blue skies and sunshine, and cooler temperatures. The burnt sugar fragrance of the katsuras, the ripeness of the berries on the hawthorn and ash trees and the crackling of the leaves underfoot, all of these and more, encourage us to slow down a little, consider the natural world and ponder our place in it.

This will be the last “Weekly Update” of the regular 2015 guiding season although the Sunday guides will continue to offer tours throughout the winter when the garden reveals a different kind of beauty. From all accounts, it has been a very successful guiding season in spite of very hot weather and the accompanying drought.

A few items to report.

1. A new plastic sheet for the top of the trolley will be needed for next year's guiding season as the current one is cracked and broken.
2. Also for next year, there is a request for pamphlet holders for maps etc. that can be attached to the trolley.
3. Thanks to Marilyn G. for sending along this interesting little factoid back in October. An abundance of fruit on the quince tree led the guides to searching for more detail. They discovered the word “marmalade” comes from the Portuguese word for quince, i.e. “marmelo”. The Portuguese made a sweet pink paste from quince cooked with honey which they exported to Britain. It was stiff enough to be cut with a knife and served as a kind of dessert. Later, the British adopted the word to describe jam made from citrus fruits. Check out the website <http://www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-mar3.htm> for more information.
4. Thanks to all who sent along items of interest for the “Weekly Update”. Your contributions, comments, questions and input were very much appreciated this past guiding season.
5. Thanks to all the guides who put so much energy, enthusiasm and

expertise into the many guiding responsibilities: radio and cart maintenance, the 40th Anniversary celebrations, the Guide Education presentations, *the Gazette*, to name a few that kept us busy this past season beyond the regular welcoming of visitors and touring and being fantastic ambassadors for the garden.

- 6 . Thanks to the gardeners for sharing their knowledge and expertise with us on the monthly garden walks and for being so willing to answer our many questions.

Home Again

After having spent the last three weeks in Europe (the Veneto, Tuscany, Puglia and Amsterdam), I am happy to be home again. And Mocha is especially pleased to see his primary food provider. He is on the mend after minor surgery on his knee, but he popped his first set of stitches, the fifteen replacement staples and is now on his tenth bandage, this one bright blue, under which he has a new set of stitches!

We visited many gardens: huge, stately formal gardens like the Boboli in Florence; smaller, private formal gardens such as Gamberaia in Settignano and Palazzo Pfanner in Lucca; botanical gardens in Padua, Lucca and Pisa; working farms where the focus was on olive oil, wine or artisanal cheese production as well as agriturismo; and magical places like La Cutura in Salento in the heart of Puglia.

One of my favourites was the Hortus Botanicus Amsterdam; founded in 1638, it is one of the oldest botanic gardens in the world. A mere three acres, it is a small gem, located on a lovely canal in the leafy Plantage residential neighbourhood in the heart of the city. More than 4,000 plant species can be viewed in the garden and its greenhouses and seven different climate zones are represented. The garden specializes in particular groups of plants including cycads, South African plants, palms, *Fuschia* and carnivorous plants; it also has a butterfly greenhouse containing tropical plants for the production of coffee, tea and chocolate.

Originally the Hortus was a medicinal herb garden, the Hortus Medicus, where doctors and apothecaries came to study pharmacology. Today, this part of the garden is the Snippendaal Garden, named after Johannes Snippendaal, the director appointed in 1646 to catalogue the entire collection. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the collection expanded as a result of the successful trade by the Dutch East India Company which brought back to the Netherlands more herbs and spices as well as exotic plants.

The Hortus provides detailed and illustrated information pamphlets in six different languages as well as a separate pamphlet entitled "The Crown Jewels Route" which introduces the visitor to fourteen garden highlights, including the cycads, the quiver tree, the Seed House, the Palm Greenhouse and the *Welwitschia mirabilis*, to name a few.

One of the most interesting places in the Hortus was the Three-Climate Greenhouse where one can explore plants from the tropics, the subtropics and the desert. A catwalk through the greenhouses enables the visitor to enjoy a canopy walk and experience the treetops while looking down over the displays.

The Hortus was also featuring a special exhibit, *Josephine: An Empire in a Garden*, which focused on Josephine de Beauharnais, the first wife of Napoleon and the development of her interest in gardens and her extensive botanical collection in her Malmaison gardens. A complementary exhibition at the Hermitage Amsterdam (a short walk from the Hortus) featured highlights from her impressive art collection, most of which ended up in the St. Petersburg Hermitage after her death.

The Hortus Botanicus Amsterdam also does a great deal of research into biodiversity and has published a very detailed and informative book (in both Dutch and English) entitled *Plants in the Spotlight: Biodiversity from all over the World in the Heart of Amsterdam*. It identifies fifty rare and threatened plant species from all over the world which can be seen in the Hortus. Meticulously researched, lavishly illustrated and beautifully presented, it is a valuable resource and it cost a mere one Euro!

So much packed into such a small space (along with a giftshop and a delightful restaurant) in such a charming part of a bustling city; it was a pleasure to experience its peace and tranquility and, at the same time, learn so much.

At the risk of being repetitive, I would like to reprint the first stanza of the most beautiful poem written to celebrate the fall season, "Ode to Autumn", by John Keats. It was composed in September, 1819, when he was only 24 and eighteen months before his death.

"Season of mist and mellow fruitfulness!
Close bosom friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease;
For summer has o'erbrimmed their clammy cells.

Have a happy final week of guiding!

And enjoy a "spooktacular" Hallowe'en at home and in the garden too. Don't forget that Daylight Saving Time ends on Sunday, November 1.

“Gathering starlings
cry as they
sprinkle berries
from the autumn tree”
Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902)