

## WEEKLY UPDATE - JUNE 18 - JUNE 25, 2016

“A dry May and a leaking June  
Make the farmer whistle a merry tune.”  
Old English Rhyme

Who knew that June weather could be so fickle? So far, we've had a heat wave and brilliant sunshine, chilly mornings and cold rain, thunder and lightning, wind and hail, snow on the North Shore mountains ... it's more like April! A few items to report!

FIRE ANT ALERT - in the Heron Lake and Great Lawn areas. Please read the communication from Bill M. that was forwarded to the Captains and then to the guides. You can find more information about the European fire ant in the Guide Info. Binder on the trolley.

1. Please remember to send your volunteer hours to Judy Aird.
2. Please remember to record your statistics.
3. Re the *Liriodendron tulipa* - no cooperation from my computer but here's a hint. When you are searching for a plant name or for plant information, include "images" and you will find sites with lots of beautiful pictures.

### 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. Night Shift Jazz  
Thursday, June 23 - 7:00pm-9:00pm  
Visitor Center Plaza  
FREE with Garden Admission
2. Bird Walk with Jeremy Gordon  
Saturday, June 25 - 10:00am  
Meet in the Atrium
3. Vancouver Rose Show  
Sunday, June 26 - 12:30pm-4:30pm  
Floral Hall and Cedar Room  
FREE

## Summer Solstice

Monday, June 20, marks the Summer Solstice, the longest day of the year. At 3:34pm, PDT, the planet's northern polar tilt will be closest to the sun.

A pagan celebration, it will bring out the Druids at Stonehenge and Avebury in the UK; however, it is also known and celebrated as Midsummer in Scandinavian countries where it has huge significance.

Plants associated with the summer solstice and its rituals include the oak tree, the ash tree, daisies, honeysuckle and sunflowers. Some people believe that golden-flowered midsummer plants such as calendula and St. John's wort have healing properties.

### In the "Weekly Update" Archives

1. Hydrangeas – June 12 – June 18, 2015
2. *Philadelphus*, Mock Orange or *Syringa*, June 19 - June 25, 2015
3. *Mahonia*, Oregon Grape, and *Buddleja*, – June 26 – July 2, 2015

### Tree Highlight -The Catalpa

"I wade in a snow of fallen  
blossoms  
under this miracle of trees...  
each frothy white bloom  
delicately spiced  
with violet  
in its snowy maw."

Roryrose, "Catalpa" *Teen Ink*

My Sunday walks to the Kitsilano Farmer's Market take me along streets lined with towering northern catalpas (*Catalpa speciosa*) with their huge, heart-shaped leaves and showy flower clusters that, from a distance, look like the candles of the horse chestnuts. The flowers, easily accessible now that the rain and wind have blown them down and up close, are whitish with purple and yellow interior spotting, resembling delicate orchid blooms. The flowers are hummingbird and bee friendly.

In the Bignonioides family which also includes the trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*), the catalpa, a mostly deciduous tree, derives its name from the Muscogee "kutuhlpa" which means "winged seed." It is also known as the cigar tree, no doubt because of its long fruits resembling bean pods which appear in the fall, and the fish bait tree because it is a host of the catalpa sphinx moth whose larvae make excellent fish bait.

Indeed, some avid fishers grow catalpa orchards in order to have ready access to the larvae as a personal bait supply!

Its smaller southern cousin, *Catalpa bignonioides*, flowers later and produces smaller bean pods.

Catalpas were common in Europe during the Tertiary period and fossil remains have been found in Miocene rocks of the Yellowstone River.

VDG's beautiful golden catalpa (*C. bignonioides* 'Aurea'), also known as the Indian bean-tree, was planted on August 30, 1975, to commemorate the opening of the garden. Look for other *C. bignonioides* in the Eastern North America Garden and on the Great Lawn in bed 102. A *C. bignonioides* 'Nana' can be found in bed 96B in the former Children's Garden.

*C. bignonioides* is one of the two parents of the hybrid x *Chitalpa tashkentensis*. See the July 17 – 23, 2015 "Weekly Update" for the sad story behind this pretty tree. For more information on catalpas, in general, and on the garden's commemorative Indian bean tree, please refer to "Tree of the Month" for July, 2010, which you can find on [www.ericanotebook.com](http://www.ericanotebook.com)

### **The European Ash Tree – *Fraxinus excelsior* - A story for your guiding repertoire**

"... people would have noticed the giant ash tree at the center of the wood, and then, in time, they'd have noticed the little spring bubbling up among its roots in spite of the pebbles piled there to conceal it. And that would have been a disaster so immense that this weary old earth...would have trembled on its axis like a beetle on a pin."

Natalie Babbitt, *Tuck Everlasting*, 1975

In the novel, anyone who drinks from the little spring gains eternal life, for better or worse, mostly worse, as Pa Tuck explains so eloquently and passionately to Winnie, the young girl who has a serious choice to make.

The ash, a member of the Oleanaceae family and noted for the toughness and elasticity of its wood, is a sacred tree for the Druids who made their staffs and wands from it. All parts of the European ash have been used in traditional medicine: the bark for fevers, the leaves for gout and the sap as a remedy for earache and warts. In British folklore, it is a healing tree and you might be familiar with the little charm, "Ashen tree, ashen tree/Pray buy these warts from me!" It was also believed that the burning of ash leaves would drive evil spirits from the room.

The ash is also associated with enchantment. With the oak and the thorn, it is one element of the magical fairy trilogy. And in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Gandalf the Wizard carries a staff made of ash. Furthermore, the witch's traditional broom,

the Besom, was supposed to have been made with an ash staff, birch twigs and willow bindings.

In Norse mythology, Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life, was a giant ash that stood at the center of the world and connected all living things and phases of existence, i.e. the nine worlds of Norse cosmology. According to the myth, Odin carved the first man from its wood.

At its base flowed two springs, one whose waters provided wisdom and the other attended to by the Norns, three women who determined the fate of all humans, much like the Greek Fates did. Babbitt has incorporated elements of Norse mythology into her story in exploring the dilemma of the desire to live forever and the reality of such a possibility.

Although Yggdrasil is traditionally regarded as an ash tree, a few places in the poems in both the *Poetic Edda* and the *Prose Edda* make reference to a tree that is “forever green” and which oozes a hallucinatory substance. Neither attribute fits the ash tree, leaving the possibility that the World Tree might be a yew instead!

An example of the European ash, *Fraxinus excelsior*, can be found in the Eastern North America Garden in bed 10 and there are lots of cultivars in bed 104 up on the Great Lawn, where the Swedish Fountain panels temporarily enclose a majestic golden European ash, *F. excelsior* ‘Jaspidea’. These panels were made by Per Nilson-Ost and donated by the Swedish community in memory of BC’s Swedish pioneers. Seven bronze panels depict the work of these pioneers while the eighth depicts Swedish, Scandinavian and provincial symbols.

“For I hold that the best purpose of a garden is to give delight  
and to give refreshment of the mind, to soothe, to refine and  
to lift up the heart in a spirit of praise and thankfulness.”  
Gertrude Jekyll (1843-1932), *Wood and Garden*

**Have a Happy Father’s Day, Celebrate the Summer Solstice and Enjoy  
a Wonderful Week of Guiding!**