

## WEEKLY UPDATE – AUGUST 13 – AUGUST 20, 2016

“Fairest of the months!  
Ripe summer’s queen!  
The hey-dey of the year!  
With robes that gleam with sunny sheen  
Sweet August doth appear.”  
R. Combe Miller, “August”

This is a very different August from last year’s with its heat, drought and water restrictions.

1. A pest control company will be on site this week to deal with an infestation of large carpenter ants which is chewing up the westernmost totem pole. Bruce McD. noted a trail leading to a nearby Douglas fir so suspects they are also mining the sap. It is unfortunate but chemicals must be used to eradicate them.
2. Paving is underway on the path from the Perennial Garden past the Heather Garden and the ashes, so it is unavailable to carts.
3. Cart drivers should note the new format for collecting statistics. It should simplify the entire process and make it easier for Derek G. at the end of each month when he compiles them.
4. Please ensure that radios are turned OFF when you put them back on the charger at the end of your shift.

### Guide Goings On

1. Huge shout outs to Malcolm H. for the superb job he did of keeping guides up to date with what is going on in the garden and so well-informed about its plants, especially the lesser known ones. He sends this along for those who have enjoyed and been enlightened by his Mystery Plant section.

In the Black Garden, entering from the Sequoia end, are a dozen green plants throughout the bed on the right. They have birds-wing shaped leaves, are fuzzy felt pale green on top and are deep red underneath. They are probably *Begonia* ‘Alto Scharff’: <http://plantlust.com/plants/begonia-alto-scharff/>? Similar plants may be found, with a tiny stick label, on the Rhododendron Walk on your right, going uphill, next to the first (new) bark path, beside a Loebner’s Magnolia.

### Garden Goings On

1. Sale of Orchids and Companion Plants  
Saturday, August 20 – 10:00am-4:00pm  
Floral Hall  
Free

## Notes on the August Flowers

Traditionally, the August flower is the gladiolus, thought to be the “lilies of the field” mentioned by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount as they grew prolifically in the Holy Land. Also known as the “sword lily”, they were introduced to England by John Tradescant, the gardener to Charles I. The flower signifies strength, moral integrity, remembrance and infatuation. In the Victorian Language of Flowers, the gift of glads suggests that the recipient’s heart is being “pierced with love”.

“The brilliant poppy flaunts her head  
Amidst the ripening grain,  
And adds her voice to sell the song  
That August’s here again...”

Helen Winslow (1851-1938), American writer and  
Journalist, “August”

But the scarlet poppy, the flower of sleep and oblivion, is also identified as an August flower. It is associated with Ceres, the corn goddess, giving rise to the belief that the presence of poppies was essential for the growth of corn. But because one single poppy head can hold fifty thousand seeds, farmers do not necessarily like it as it overwhelms the corn crop.

Poppy seeds can lie dormant for many years, germinating when the soil is disturbed which is what happened in France during WWI. The digging of the battlefield trenches caused the poppies to bloom, making them a symbol of remembrance for those killed in war.

In France the scarlet poppy is cultivated for the oil in its seeds which is used for cooking. In England there are four types. It has many country names such as *cheesebowl* and *headache* and all poppies have a scent which encourages sleep.

A red poppy signifies pleasure.

Right now, you can enjoy “Offa’s Poppies”, a series of three paintings by Jan Henry, part of her display, *Flora*, which runs from August 5 to August 31 in the Discovery Room.

Tree Highlight – Silk Tree – *Albizia julibrissin*

A stroll down 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Kitsilano takes me past a massive silk tree just coming into spectacular rosy bloom. For the longest time it looks like it might be dead but then it starts to leaf out and flower.

Known as the Persian silk tree or pink siris and also called mimosa in the US, it is a member of the Fabaceae family and native to southwestern and eastern Asia.

It is named after an Italian nobleman, Filippo degli Albizzi, who introduced it to Europe in the mid C18. '*julibrissin*' is a corruption of the Persian word 'gul-i-abrisham' which means 'silk flower'. Because its bi-pinnate leaves close at night or when it rains, its Persian common name is 'shabkhosb' or 'night sleeper'. In Japan, where it has become an invasive species in some parts of the country, its common names all translate as 'sleeping tree'.

The flowers of the silk tree are produced in dense inflorescences with a tight cluster of stamens, 2 to 3 cm. long, which look like long silky threads. Ranging in colour from white to a rich red, the flowers provide an excellent nectar source for bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.

The long pods which hang on the trees in winter indicate that this is a nitrogen-fixing plant, enabling it to grow in poor soil.

The numerous seeds, used for food by livestock and wildlife, can remain fertile over long periods of drought and the invasive quality of the tree is now causing concern in the eastern US as it is difficult to remove once it is established.

In traditional Chinese medicine, an extract made from the plant seems to provide an anti-depressant effect used to 'nourish the heart and calm the spirit'.

VanDusen Garden has four specimens of *Albizia julibrissin*, two in the Sino-Himalayan Garden in beds 126D and 127B. *A. julibrissin* 'EH Wilson' is a selected cultivar of *A. julibrissin* f. *rosea* which has received the RHS Award of Garden Merit. A cold tolerant tree with deep pink flower colour, it is located in bed 35E in the Black Garden. *A. julibrissin* 'Red Silk' is in bed 120A in the Alma VanDusen Meadow area. According to the PCR, the Nursery has a specimen of *A. julibrissin* 'Summer Chocolate' which has red foliage ageing to dark bronze with pale pink flowers.

### Kootenay Notes

It's good to be home on the wet coast, back from the wet Columbia Mountains vegetation zone. This region lies in the southeastern corner of the province, an area drained by the big rivers: the Fraser, North Thompson, Columbia and Kootenay and their tributaries. The steep slopes of four mountain ranges, the Cariboo, Monashee, Selkirk and Purcell, rise from the narrow river and lake valleys. The climate of the southern part is similar to a coastal climate so many coastal species are common. With 17 out of a possible 22 conifer species represented, including the Interior Douglas-fir, *Pseudotsuga menziesii* var. *glauca*, distinguished by its bluish-green needles and shorter cones, this area of BC has the greatest diversity of conifer species represented.

What I loved was the variety of colourful wildflowers along the roadsides and in the meadows and clearings. With the help of my mother's excellent reference book,

*Plants of Southern Interior British Columbia* (Parrish, Coupe and Lloyd, 1996), I was able to identify many of them. They included the vivid blue chicory (mentioned by Miguel M. in last Thursday's Gardener's Walk), orange and yellow hawkweed, yellow common tansy and Canada goldenrod, pale pink yarrow, purple peavine and American vetch, meadow buttercups and the ubiquitous oxeye daisy. Early fireweed was blooming up in the mountains. Even the invasive purple knapweed and Canada thistles have their visual charm when they carpet a whole meadow. Monet might have loved this landscape!!

Many of these plants were used by First Nations people in a variety of ways, including as a food source and for traditional medicines

Due to the alternating heat and rain, the berry crop was abundant, so we had no bears this year, a good thing, perhaps, since we had no Mocha, the bear-chaser, with us. Although it was too early to pick the heavily laden blackberries, there were plenty of black huckleberries to be shaken into buckets for pies, jam or just to be eaten on their own. The coastal version doesn't even come close to these gorgeous, sweet, succulent morsels. Thimbleberries, Saskatoons, choke cherries, elderberries and Oregon grape berries were also accessible and abundant.

We are so fortunate to live in a province with such an abundance of flora and to have so many examples represented in this garden.

Please send any comments, suggestions, queries etc. to [pkbuchanan@shaw.ca](mailto:pkbuchanan@shaw.ca) and look for Tree of the Month, Gardeners' Walks and Self-Guided Tours at [www.ericanotebook.com](http://www.ericanotebook.com)

The heat is on again so wear your hats, sunscreen and have your water handy!

If you are inclined to stay up late, the Perseids meteor showers are expected to put on a spectacular show this weekend, the best in some time. For the best viewing experiences, you need to get away from the bright city lights.

**HAVE A GREAT WEEK OF GUIDING!!**

"If you find yourself worrying, go outside, take three breaths, address a tree and quietly say, "Thank you." If you can't find a tree, a dandelion will do... Nature is magic."

Robert Bateman (1930 – present), artist