

WEEKLY UPDATE – APRIL 16 – 23, 2017

“The land with laughing light was crowned,
All shadows scorning
When swiftly rose a cloud, and frowned
Upon the morning,
Down in a torrent dropped amain
The clattering, pattering, sobbing rain...”
Sydney Grey (?), “An April Shower”

1. A note for cart drivers: if inclement weather means that no one takes a cart tour during your shift, please make a NIL report. Just write BAD WEATHER - NO TOURS on the daily Master Cart Log form and place it in the usual place in the Driving Guides Binder in the VL.
2. Please make sure that the cart is fully charged before you take it out and keep an eye on the level of charge in the cart during your shift. Cart #1 seems to have lost its charge rapidly last week. Also, at the end of your shift please make sure when you park the cart that the charging cable is securely connected and that the charging needle has swung completely to the right.
3. Cart shadowing begins this week.
4. Does anyone know where the #7 radio is? Out of commission? Misplaced?
5. If you are available to cover shifts, walking or driving, on other days, please let Lyn A. know.
6. New trolley resources – *Vancouver Tree Book* by David Tracey (first mentioned here in the “WU” almost exactly one year ago)
The Birder’s Guide to Vancouver and the Lower Mainland published by Nature Vancouver
Please do not remove these books from the trolley.

Garden Goings On

1. BC Plein Air Artists’ Exhibition (the final week)
Thursday, April 6 – Sunday, April 23
Discovery Room – Visitor Center
2. BC Fuchsia and Begonia Society – Plant, Bake and Craft Sale
Saturday, April 22 – 9:00am-3:00pm
Floral Hall
Free
3. THE BIG ONE!! Vandusen Garden Plant Sale
Sunday, April 30 – 10:00am-4:00pm
The Great Lawn
FREE

Garden Clippings

1. Last year, in the “WU” for April 9-16, I mentioned that the monarch butterfly, while not yet considered endangered, was being observed less and less in North America. Sadly, this year, it, along with the polar bear, has been placed on an international list of species and subspecies that are at risk of disappearing entirely from the planet.

If you would like to learn more about monarchs, a new book by Kylee Baumle, entitled *The Monarch: Saving Our Most-Loved Butterfly*, is being released next week.

2. Check out the dainty weeping Snow Fountains cherry trees in the Japanese Collection and at the bottom of the Great Lawn just before the junction taking you into the Perennial Garden.

Earth Day

Saturday, April 22, is the 47th Earth Day celebration. Founded in 1970 by Senator Gaylord Nelson to promote ecology and respect for life on the planet as well as to encourage awareness of the growing problems of air, water and soil pollution, it represents the anniversary of the birth of the modern environmental movement.

Last year, Earth Day Canada undertook to achieve an ambitious goal of planting 35,000,000 trees, one for every person in Canada, by 2020. This meant planting 25,000 trees a day. The initiative has been folded into a new program, the Canopy Project.

This year, Earth Day Canada’s focus, EarthPLAY for Earth Day, is to bring back adventure playgrounds to encourage everyone, especially children, to get outside to play and connect with nature.

In Vancouver, the Earth Day Celebration, March and Festivities, a small student-centered event, will be held on Saturday, April 22 at 1:00pm beginning with a parade that starts at Commercial and Broadway and proceeds to Grandview Park for the performances.

Another odiferous sign of spring - Stinking Benjamin - *Trillium Erecta*

Stinking Benjamin, also known as purple or red wakerobin, birthroot and wet dog trillium, is a member of the Melanthiaceae family, a part of the Liliales (Lily) order. A spring ephemeral, it is native to eastern Canada and the US.

The name ‘wakerobin’ derives probably from the European robin redbreast which is also a harbinger of spring. The ‘Benjamin’ descriptor seems to be a corruption of the word ‘benzoin’ which is a corruption of an even earlier word ‘benjoin’, an ingredient used in the manufacture of perfume. ‘Wet dog’ needs no explanation!

Growing on rhizomes and featuring the typical trillium arrangement of leaves, sepals and petals in groups of three, it exhibits deep red or purplish flowers. There is also a white form; however, it has a dark purple gynoecium, i.e the parts of the flower that produce ovules and ultimately develop into fruits and seeds.

Trillium erecta shares some similar characteristics with skunk cabbage. For example, its leaves also contain calcium oxalate crystals which are toxic if ingested and it exudes an odour of rotting meat to attract its pollinators, in this case, flies.

It has received the RHS Award of Garden Merit. Look for it in the Eastern North America Garden, throughout the Canadian Heritage Garden and around the Cypress Pond.

Book Review – *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier and More Creative* Florence Williams

When Florence Williams, a journalist and contributing writer to *Outside* magazine, left her Denver home and outdoor lifestyle to take up residence in Washington, DC, she found herself in a depressed state. She could neither focus nor express her thoughts; she felt disoriented and overwhelmed.

Wanting very much to survive in her new urban environment and unwilling to suffer from this Nature Deficit Disorder, she set out to research the significance of the link between our nervous systems and the natural world to see whether it really existed and to determine whether there was science to support the idea that our disconnection from nature results in a plethora of mental and physical disorders. Her search, which took her all over the world, not only provided answers to these questions, but also raised many others.

In Part One, she unpacks for the lay reader the two dominant theories that try to explain why our brains need nature. In Japan, she engages in the practice of *shinrin-yoku* (forest bathing) said to lower stress and boost mental health. The framework researchers are using here is based on the biophilia hypothesis, first laid out by E O Wilson who posited the idea that we feel most at home in nature because we evolved there. Her follow-up is a lengthy hike in Arches National Park in southern Utah with a team of neuroscientists to watch and measure how nature helps us think, solve problems and work together. In a stressful world of distraction and screen addiction, their study focuses not so much on the feel good benefits, but more on how can nature restore our brains to a state of sharper cognition.

In Part Two, Williams looks at the effects of small, quick doses of nature on our three main senses: smell, hearing and sight. In South Korea, she walks with forest healing instructors through hinoki cypress forests, breathing in phytoncides which have been definitively shown to reduce stress and lower blood pressure. Back in the US, her explorations into the most soothing sounds for humans, birdsong, wind and water, take her into labs where she is hooked up to a heart monitor to measure the effect of sound on heart rate variability; furthermore, saliva samples are taken to read her cortisol levels before, during and after her exposure to various sounds from the natural world. The fractal patterns found in nature and in the paintings of Jackson Pollock spark her interest in the effect of nature views, i.e. trees, lawns, shrubs and plantings and overall greenery; her curiosity takes her to the University of Waterloo (which “many Silicon Valley gurus consider to be their best feeder school, topping even Stanford.”) to meet a young researcher who has developed a smartphone app able to rate and categorize nature scenes according to their restorative potential and ultimately synthesize them for the purpose of providing a virtual reality experience when the real thing is not readily available. The jury is still out on the success of this initiative.

In Part Three, she travels to Finland, where researchers are examining what happens to our brains and bodies when we linger in nature for longer periods; according to the Finns we

need a minimum dose of five hours a month. The benefits of longer exposure in nature therapy programs such as gardening, short-term wilderness programs and walking in natural settings are also shown to benefit people experiencing stress, depression and anger.

In Part Four, she returns to Utah to participate in an intensive three day wilderness field trip as part of research into whether senses, perspective and cognition sharpen over time, eventually leading to a state of transcendent awe. A river-rafting trip down the Salmon River in Idaho enables her to explore the effects of therapeutic adventure on the mental health of veterans suffering from PTSD, while time spent at a camp in North Carolina for children with ADHD offers her the opportunity to see how they benefit from nature-based exploration.

Finally, in Part Five, subtitled “The City in a Garden”, Williams takes her readers to Singapore, where the parks department has a mandate “to develop scenery” and create greenspace; in this Future City she visits the 155 acre Singapore Botanic Garden, also a UNESCO World Heritage site, and the Gardens by the Bay with its grove of eighteen fake Supertrees! Her experiences here, where nature is a “mix of metaphor, technology and evolutionary impulse”, leave her with a longing for real trees in urban environments and she chooses Toronto as the city where trees are taken very seriously indeed.

This is a very readable book; her style is conversational and engaging and the tone is upbeat and positive. In an age in which nature seems to be undervalued, this is an important book. Reading it, I am sure that you will come away with many ideas that, while not new to garden guides who already understand the importance of connecting people with nature, in general, and with plants, in particular, will enhance and enrich your guiding practice.

Florence Williams’ advice for all who are seeking relief from Nature Deficit Disorder?
“Go outside, often, sometimes in wild places. Bring friends, or not. Breathe.”

Please send any comments, questions, suggestions and corrections to pkbuchanan@shaw.ca and take a few moments, if you haven’t already done so, to explore the wealth of information available to you at www.ericanotebook.com
It has archived collections of “Tree of the Month”, the monthly Gardener’s Walk, Self-Guided Tours and the “Weekly Update”.

Hopefully, less rain this week; whatever the weather, have a great week of guiding!

“O, how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun
And by and by a cloud takes all away...”

William Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, (I, iii, 84-87)