

WEEKLY UPDATE – AUGUST 20 –AUGUST 27, 2016

“An August day! a dreamy haze
Films air, and mingles with the skies:
Sweetly the rich dark sunshine plays,
Bronzing each object where it lays...”

Alfred Billings Street (1811-1881), “An August Day”

Summer is here at last! Are you enjoying our little hot spell? In spite of the warm temperatures, there are little hints that fall is not far away: katsura fragrance up by the Stone Garden; dead leaves crunching underfoot; ripening berries; and a more southerly sunset. There are a few items to report.

1. #8 radio is acting up. Please monitor its performance if you use it.
2. The binding on the Hillier book has come off. Please be gentle with it until repairs can be undertaken.
3. Does anyone know the whereabouts of the *Sunset Western Garden Book*?
4. Is the other high stool being repaired? Will it be back soon? It is missed!!

Guide Goings On

1. Thursday, September 1 – Gardener’s Walk – Bruce McD. will discuss special projects including the garden’s bird strategy.
2. Thursday, September 8 - Guide Education - Alan Garr, the garden’s volunteer beekeeper, will speak on bees with a focus on the garden.

Garden Goings On

1. Twilight Tour in the Garden
Thursday, August 25, 7:30pm-9:30pm
Join Sam S., our Plant Documentation Technician, as she leads a tour through the garden that is sure to appeal to and stimulate all the senses! See the Adult Education Brochure for details.

A Notable August Date

August 24 is St. Bartholomew’s Day. The patron saint of butchers, tanners and beekeepers, his feast days were celebrated with great fairs, featuring apples and pears.

“If Bartlemas Day be fine and clear

You may hope for a prosperous autumn this year.”

Garden Clippings

1. Correction: in spite of what the PCR (June, 2016) says, there doesn't appear to be a Silk tree in bed 35E.
2. Zombie bees: please see the clipping in the front pocket of the Information Binder. The attack on honeybees across North America by the zombie fly is such an alarming phenomenon that BNN devoted a ten-minute segment to it on Thursday, August 18. For more information go to www.bnn.ca

Plant Highlight – Sunflowers - *Helianthus annuus*

“I am working with the enthusiasm of a man from Marseilles eating bouillabaisse, which shouldn't come as a surprise to you, because I am busy painting huge sunflowers.”

Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), in a letter to his brother, Theo

Driving back to Vancouver, across from the Mariposa Farm stand at the western end of beautiful Keremeos, I pass a long row of eastern-facing sunflowers, their massive heads seeming to say hello and goodbye at the same time and wishing me safe travels on the last leg of my journey home.

It is hard to ignore sunflowers at this time of year as they seem to be everywhere: potted varieties in the garden stores, bundled bouquets at grocery stores and farmers' markets, growing rogue in alleys and carefully planted in gardens. Here at VanDusen, their presence in the plaza planters provides a cheerful greeting to garden visitors, while up in the Alma VanDusen Garden and in the seasonally planted area beside the Maze, they are happily sharing space with cannas, gazanias, amaranthus and the delphiniums. To me, they are the Labrador retrievers of the plant world: happy, vibrant and fun, often big, easy-going, steady and reliable, useful and oh so pretty!

Helianthus (*helios*, meaning 'sun', *anthos*, meaning 'flower') is a genus in the Asteraceae family. It consists of about 70 species; except for 3 species in South America, all are native to the US. *Helianthus annuus* is the familiar domesticated species.

First cultivated in Mexico (although this is currently being challenged), indigenous peoples used many parts of the sunflowers as food sources, in traditional medicines, and for dyes and body paint. Sunflowers are sometimes referred to as the “fourth sister” to the “three sisters” of corn, squash and beans (which can currently be seen in the Canadian Heritage Garden).

In the wild, sunflowers are many branched with small flower heads and correspondingly small seeds. The domesticated sunflower, on the other hand, consists of a single flowerhead on an unbranched stem. The outside 'petals' of a sunflower consist of bright yellow, red or orange sterile ray florets. The inner disk florets which range in colour from yellow to maroon to brown are spirally arranged and eventually turn into seeds.

Sunflowers are well known for the symmetry of their flowerhead; this efficient arrangement is based on Fibonacci numbers and the Golden Angle of 137.5 degrees. Each sunflower head can contain as many as 1,000 to 2,000 seeds. The black seeds are used to produce sunflower oil, while the striped ones are used for snacks, the familiar 'spits'. They are attractive to both birds and bees and a dried sunflower head makes a terrific bird feeder.

The seeds and oil are used to make to make a peanut butter substitute, sunflower butter. They are also used to make a flour which, in Germany, is mixed with rye flour to make *sonnenblumenkernbrot*, literally, sunflower whole wheat seed bread.

Contrary to popular myth, sunflowers do not follow the sun as it passes across the sky, except during growth. This movement, known as heliotropism, stops once they start blooming as the stems harden. The mature flowers generally face east.

The mistaken belief that they do follow the sun has its roots in the writings of the ancient Greeks, including Ovid's recounting of the tragic story of the nymph, Clytie, and her unrequited love for the sun god, Apollo. Her ultimate fate was to be turned into 'a flower 'like a violet' (not a sunflower), whose face adoringly follows the path of the sun.

Sunflowers arrived in Europe in C16 from the Americas, brought back by the Spanish, and became very popular. In the European consciousness, the sunflower supplanted whatever flower Ovid had in mind, giving rise to their symbolic association, in moral and spiritual teaching as well as in the language of flowers, with faith, loyalty and adoration.

Kansas is known as the Sunflower State. However, in some parts of the Midwest, sunflowers are considered to be invasive weeds because they interfere with corn and soybean crop yield.

The sunflower is the national flower of Ukraine. Introduced into Russia in C17, reputedly by Peter the Great, it became very popular because sunflower oil could be used during the Fasting period of Lent. Today, Russia and Ukraine lead the world in sunflower production.

Sunflowers are noted for their ability to absorb toxins and soak up radiation and millions were planted after the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl and after the

earthquake and resulting tsunami destroyed the nuclear reactors in Fukushima in Japan.

The sunflower has become associated with political and social movements and good causes. It is the trademark of the British Vegan Society and the symbol of the International Sunflower Guerilla Gardening Day. The Sunflower Movement was a mass protest in Taiwan in 2014.

For an informative and more detailed discussion about the influence of the sunflower on moral and spiritual teachings, the decorative arts, especially the Aesthetic Movement and art, e.g. Van Gogh and Gauguin, as well as horticultural practices, I recommend *Seven Flowers And How They Shaped Our World* by Jennifer Potter (2013).

In the meantime, enjoy their cheerful faces as you come into the garden.

Please send queries, comments, corrections, suggestions etc. to pkbuchanan@shaw.ca . You can find more information about the garden at www.ericanotebook.com

HAVE A GREAT SUNNY WEEK OF GUIDING!!

The final two stanzas of Winslow's poem perfectly capture this hot August day.

"The dusty thistle by the road
Scatters a silvery spray;
The sun pours down his scorching beams
Upon the fainting day.

The blackberry vine bends with its weight
Of fruit down in the lanes,
And adds its testimony, too,
That August's here again."

Helen Winslow (1851-1938), "August"