

WEEKLY UPDATE - JULY 24 –30, 2015

“A fly on your nose;
You slap and it goes;
If it comes back again
It will bring a good rain.”
English Rhyme

Lovely Lindens (*Tilia*)

“The linden, in the fervors of July,
Hums with a louder concert...”
William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878), “Among the Trees”

The genus *Tilia* in the Malvaceae family consists of about 30 species. In the UK it is known as the lime tree although it is unrelated in name or tree to the citrus lime. In the US it is called basswood, a reference to its inner bark, which was stripped, soaked, pounded and woven into fabric by the indigenous Ainu people of Japan. It is a large deciduous tree that can live a long time, perhaps over 2000 years. Linden fossils have been found on Ellesmere Island in northern Canada at 82 degrees N. latitude as well as in Norway.

It is hermaphroditic, exhibiting perfect flowers with both male and female parts. These flowers are used for herbal teas, tinctures and medicines and they also attract bees. In fact, linden trees are prized honey sources for beekeepers. The wood has many uses as it is soft and, with a very small grain, it is easily worked. The ancient Vikings used it to make shields and medieval wood carvers used it for model-building and puppet-making. It was the favourite medium for Grinling Gibbons (1648-1721), noted for his decorative Baroque garlands made to decorate the walls of churches and palaces, including Windsor Castle, Hampton Court and St. Paul’s Cathedrals among other London churches and English country homes. It is used for musical instruments including guitars, wind and percussion instruments.

In Ovid’s retelling of the story of Baucis and Philemon (from Greek mythology), she is changed into a linden tree and he to an oak when it is time for them to die. In both Slavic and Baltic cultures, the linden is a sacred tree while in German culture, it is the tree of lovers. Unter den Linden, Berlin’s most famous street, is lined with linden trees.

In his seemingly self-pitying poem, “This Lime-Tree Bower, My Prison” (1797), Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the Romantic poet, ultimately finds comfort in the inspiration that Nature provides to his friends as they wander the Quantock Hills while he is laid up with a wounded foot (his wife had poured scalding milk on it).

“... Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower, have I not mark’d

Much that has soothed me..."

VanDusen Garden has many varieties of lindens, most to be found in beds 60 and 60T across from the maples and Japanese maples collections.

A Flourish of Trumpets (*Campsis radicans* and *Brugmansia*)

While many plants claim a trumpet flower identification, always with a qualifying and descriptive adjective preceding it, including Chinese, Indian, Evening, Velvet, Flaming, Golden, and Devil's, to name just a few, let's focus on two which are presently in glorious bloom in VanDusen Garden.

The trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*) belongs to the Bignoniaceae family. It is also known as the cow itch vine because it can cause a rash similar to poison ivy (for some reason cows are particularly susceptible to this) and the hummingbird vine because it is attractive to hummingbirds as well as bees and birds. On one of our morning routes, Mocha and I see a splendid trumpet vine climbing up and over a huge arbor and spilling down over the fence. In the early morning light it is spectacular! It is native to the eastern US but has been naturalized in the western US and parts of Ontario.

The deciduous woody vine can grow up to 30 feet tall, and it is another potentially invasive plant. Why are so many beautiful plants invasive or potentially invasive? A particularly flamboyant variety, *C. radicans* f. *flava*, has been awarded the Royal Horticultural Society Award of Garden Merit and can be found in VanDusen Garden in bed 3 along Oak St. *C. grandiflora*, a Chinese trumpet creeper, is in bed 121C and *C. radicans* 'Flamenco' is in bed 126D in the Sino-Himalayan Garden.

Yet another flowering plant claiming the 'trumpet' identification is *Brugmansia* or 'Angel's trumpet', a genus of 7 species in the Solonaceae family. The International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources Red List currently lists all 7 species in the wild as extinct.

These woody trees have pendulous, not erect, flowers, which distinguish them from *Datura*, also called Angel's trumpet, whose flowers stand upright. *Brugmansia* flowers have a strong, pleasing scent, especially in the evening, to attract pollinating moths.

In 1753, Linnaeus classified it as *Datura*, but in 1805 it was transferred to a separate genus named after Sebald Justinus Brugmans, a Dutch naturalist. Until 1973 it seesawed back and forth between *Datura* and *Brugmansia*; finally the latter prevailed as a separate genus.

All parts of *Brugmansia* are toxic. Modern medicine recognizes the presence of alkaloids such as scopolamine, atropine and hyoscyamine.

In South American indigenous cultures, parts of the plant were used in religious and spiritual ceremonies. Externally, the leaves were used to treat various aches and pains and skin diseases. It was also used as a treatment for unruly children in the belief that ancestors in the spirit world would make children be more compliant. Mixed with maize and tobacco leaves, it was used to create a potent sedative used to drug the slaves and wives of dead lords and masters before being buried alive with them.

In the garden it is a seasonal plant; right now, lovely specimens are in bloom in the Tropical Garden.

“Almost any garden, if you see it at just the right moment, can be confused with paradise.”

Henry Mitchell (1924-1993), American garden writer