

WEEKLY UPDATE - JULY 31 – AUGUST 6, 2015

“The first week of August hangs at the very top of summer, the top of the live-long year, like the highest seat of a Ferris wheel when it pauses in its turning...the first week of August is motionless and hot...”

Natalie Babbitt, *Tuck Everlasting*, 1975

Once in a Blue Moon...

“Blue moon,
you saw me standing alone
without a dream in my heart,
without a love on my own...”

Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart,
Manhattan Melodrama, 1934

There are 2 kinds of blue moons; a seasonal blue moon is the third full moon in an astronomical season with 4 full moons. This Friday’s full moon, however, is a calendar blue moon, i.e. a second full moon in a calendar month. The moon can appear to be blue due to the presence of forest fire particulate, smoke and volcanic ash.

A blue moon is frequently referenced in popular culture, including music, literature, film and television. “Blue Moon of Kentucky”, written in 1946 by Bill Munroe, acclaimed bluegrass musician, is the official bluegrass song of Kentucky.

The next calendar blue moon will occur on January 31, 2018.

The August Flower - Gladiolus

Traditionally the August flower is the gladiolus, the “sword lily” which signifies strength, moral integrity, remembrance and infatuation. In the language of flowers, the gift of gladioli suggests that the recipient’s heart is being “pierced with love.” It is also the 40th wedding anniversary flower.

It is a popular subject in botanical painting. Pierre-Josephe Redoute painted gladioli and they were featured in paintings in *Curtis’s Botanical Magazine* in 1790 and 1801. In 1886, Van Gogh painted “Vase with Red Gladioli”.

Like *Crocsmia*, it is a member of the Iridaceae family. Another member of this family in glorious bloom in VanDusen Garden right now is *Dierama*, better known as Angel’s Fishing Rods or wandflowers. They are attractive to bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. Look for *D. pulcherrimum* in bed 57 on the peninsula; others are planted near the weeping sequoia by the Formal Rose Garden and in beds 57A and 57B. Other examples of *Dierama* can be found in beds 58A and 58B in the Mediterranean Garden area.

Edibles in the Mediterranean Garden

The Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*) and the Cardoon (*Cynara cardunculus*)

Mocha moves very slowly and we pause frequently; one of his favourite rest stops is at the top of a gentle incline under a lovely strawberry tree. The strawberry tree is a beautiful small tree or evergreen shrub in the Ericaceae family. It is native to the Mediterranean region but because of its presence in Ireland it is also known as the Irish strawberry tree or the Killarney strawberry tree (in beds 47 and 47C). It arrived in England from western Ireland when it was given to the Earl of Leicester and Sir Francis Walsingham, both courtiers of Elizabeth I.

The fruit, which resemble little strawberries, was described by Pliny; he said “unum tantum edo” or “I eat only one.” A more contemporary interpretation riffs on *unedo* as in “you needa only one”! The fruit can be eaten raw but they are bland and mealy and better made into jam. In Portugal, they are used to make a strong, brandy-like liqueur called medronho.

Because the fruit take 12 months to ripen, the tree carries both fruit and flowers at the same time.

The strawberry tree appears in the painting “The Garden of Earthly Delights” by Hieronymus Bosch and it makes up part of the coat of arms of the city of Madrid. The strawberry tree can be found in the Mediterranean Garden in bed 32A.

Another plant native to the western and central part of the Mediterranean, where it was domesticated in ancient times, is the cardoon, *Cynara cardunculus*, or artichoke thistle. Like the artichoke, it is a member of the Asteraceae family.

While is considered to be an invasive weed on the pampas of Argentina and classified as a weed in Australia and California, it is a vegetarian source of enzymes for cheese production in Portugal and the oil extracted from its seeds, called artichoke oil, is similar in composition and use to sunflower and safflower oils. Most importantly, it is a popular ingredient in Mediterranean cuisine.

An interesting article in the *Telegraph* (May 11, 2014) entitled “Bring back the great cardoon” discusses cardoon cultivation in the UK and provides a wonderful recipe for cardoon gratin.

It has earned the Royal Horticultural Society Award of Garden Merit. You can find cardoons in the Mediterranean Garden in beds 32A, 68 and 143; the globe artichoke is also in bed 68 in the Perennial Garden.

Forecasting the Weather – Still a “New” Science!

A recently published book, *The Weather Experiment: The Pioneers Who Sought to See the Future*, by Peter Moore will be of interest to those who want to know more about the development of meteorological science.

The first chief meteorologist in Great Britain was Robert FitzRoy who, besides being a weather forecaster (he coined the term 'forecast'), was also the captain of the *Beagle*, the ship that carried Charles Darwin on his famous expeditions. The invention of the electrical telegraph enabled him to collect weather data from all around the British Isles and send a digest out to newspapers. Because weather forecasting was a "new" science, the concept was met with some skepticism. In fact, in 1854, FitzRoy's request for sufficient government funding to establish a Met office for forecasting was met with howls of raucous laughter in the House of Commons. The British public, however, came to rely on the daily weather reports produced by the Met office. Forecasting accurately is not always possible though and after a couple of bad calls and the subsequent public criticism they caused, FitzRoy fell into despondency and took his own life in 1865.

FitzRoy is one of the many pioneers, European and American, in the area of meteorological science discussed in this informative and entertaining book. For a more detailed review, please refer to the *NYTimes* "Book Review" section for Sunday, July 19, 2015.

" Summer afternoon – summer afternoon; to me, those have always been
the two most beautiful words in the English language."

Henry James (quoted by Edith Wharton in
A Backward Glance, 1934)