

WEEKLY UPDATE - JUNE 19 - JUNE 25, 2015

“ It is dry hazy June weather. We are more of the earth,
further from heaven these days.”

Henry David Thoreau “Journal, June 17, 1857”

Garden Highlight – *Philadelphus*, Mock Orange or Syringa

Mocha, my faithful, but faltering, canine companion loves back alleys. One of his favourite lanes can best be described as “shabby”(not chic). It is unpaved and no fortresses of alarmed garages and high walls protect yards here. Instead, unruly trailing vines and unpruned branches spill over leaning wooden fences and huge clumps of lemon balm cluster at the bases of telephone poles. Some of the plants growing here are escapees and hardy self-seeders: day lilies, foxgloves, Icelandic poppies and wild sweetpea. Others are obnoxious invasives: bindweed, Japanese knotweed and ivy. But halfway down the old-fashioned lane the spicy fragrance of orange and jasmine announces the presence of a north-facing, later blooming *Philadelphus lewisii*.

The genus *Philadelphus*, named after an ancient Macedonian king of Egypt, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, is known as mock orange for its fragrance and because its flowers resemble those of oranges and lemons. There are more than 60 species of these shrubs. It is native to southeast Europe, Eurasia from the Caucasus and Himalayas into China and Siberia and thence to Japan and to North America, from BC down into Central America and east to the Rockies.

“I am the white syringa, falling now
When someone shakes the bough.
What matter if I lose my life's brief noon?
You laugh, “A snow in June!
I am the white syringa falling now.”

Margaret Gilman George-Davidson (1869-1896), “Moritura”

Where I grew up in the Kootenays, Western mock orange or *Philadelphus lewisii*, covers the hillsides in white drifts in May and June. It is named after Meriwether Lewis who, as one half of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, collected it on their return trip through Idaho and Montana in 1806. We called it syringa although it is unrelated to the lilacs. In fact, it belongs to the Hydrangeaceae family. First Nations people used the wood for combs, bows, arrows and fishing spears. The flowers and leaves, when rubbed in water, create a froth, making a kind of sweet-smelling shampoo.

P. lewisii is the state flower of Idaho.

Here in VanDusen Garden, you can find it in beds 22A, 88 and 135C.

Philadelphus x purpureomaculatus 'Belle Etoile' is a hybrid mock orange; specimens can be found in beds 61A, 39 and 21. One of the Thursday guides notes that hers has yet to bloom in her north-facing back garden. 'Belle Etoile' has received the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit.

Mock orange is a popular shrub in parks and gardens; its flower display is always reliable and its fragrance is highly valued.

(Information taken from *Pacific Horticulture*(April 2007) and the USDA Plants Database).

And still more roses...

"Let it be early, late or soon
I will enjoy my rose in June."

"My Rose In June" English folk song

(My thanks to John Hobbs, Tuesday guide, for sharing this lovely lyric)

The beautiful, candy-striped Gallica Rosa Mundi is in full, fragrant bloom in the Black Garden (bed 35D). Legends link it with Rosamund Clifford, the mistress of Henry II, who was allegedly poisoned by Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine. Henry ordered that she be laid to rest under a mound of her favourite roses. The rose is traditionally known as 'Fair Rosamond's Rose', 'Rosamunde' and 'Rosamonde'. It has also been associated with the Tudor rose, a parti-coloured Damask rose, *Rosa x damascene* 'Versicolor', also known as the York and Lancaster rose. Rosa Mundi emerged sometime before 1640 when Nicholas Robert painted it for Gaston d'Orleans.

(My thanks to Susan M., Thursday guide, for suggesting this rose. Information taken from *A Rose By Any Other Name* (2009) by Douglas Brenner and Stephen Scanniello and *Seven Flowers and How They Shaped Our World* (2013) by Jennifer Potter). Also in bed 35D, look for *Rosa* 'Carolina', a lovely bright pink pasture rose and *Rosa* 'Doncaster' which has already bloomed but which will produce elongated hips in the fall.

"No price may be set on the lavish summer;
June may be had by the poorest comer."

James Russell Lowell, *The Vision of Sir Launfel*

Enjoy the Summer Solstice, Have a Happy Father's Day and Have a Wonderful Week of Guiding.