

WEEKLY UPDATE - JUNE 5 - 11, 2015

“I wonder what it would be like to live in a world where it is always June.”

L.M. Montgomery

Dogwoods, Briefly

It would be remiss not to draw your attention to the pink dogwoods which are in beautiful bloom. VanDusen Garden's eight *Cornus kousapendula* 'Satomi' form a lovely allee beside the Phyllis Bentall pool. You can read a little more about them in the "Tree of the Month" publication for June 2013.

Book Review

A brief review of *How Plants Work: The Science Behind the Amazing Things Plants Do* (Timber Press, 2015) by Linda Chalker-Scott appears in the *New York Times* "Book Review" for May 31, 2015. You will recall that Dr. Chalker-Scott was our guest at the April Guide Education meeting at which she spoke about and demonstrated some of the principles pertaining to bare root planting. A copy of this review, along with others from Dominique Browning's Gardening section, is in the front pocket of the Guide Information Binder.

In Praise of **Peonies**

“It always seems to me that the herbaceous peony is the very epitome of June. Larger than any rose, it has something of the cabbage rose's voluminous quality; and when it finally drops from the vase, it sheds its vast petticoats with a bump on the table, all in an intact heap, much as a rose will suddenly fall, making us look up from our book or conversation, to notice from one moment the death of what had still appeared to be a living beauty.”

Vita Sackville-West

The peony, a flowering plant in the genus *Paeonia*, is named after Paeon, a student of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine and healing. According to one story, when Asclepius became jealous of his student and threatened harm to him, Zeus saved Paeon by turning him into a peony.

Herbaceous peonies (Chinese or Japanese peonies), *Paeonia lactiflora*, die back each autumn, whereas tree peonies, *Paeonia suffruticosa*, produce permanent woody stems. Itoh hybrid peonies (or Intersectionals) are an intermediate between herbaceous and tree peonies developed in Japan by Toichi Itoh in 1948. VanDusen Garden has some lovely Itoh peonies in the Perennial Garden, namely *P.* 'Morning Lilac' and *P.* 'Cara Louise' in bed 68 and *P.* 'Bartzella' in bed 69.

As mentioned in an earlier “Weekly Update”, the peony has rich cultural significance in Japan, Korea and China where it is the flower of wealth and honour. Please refer also to Steve Whysall’s article on peonies in the front pocket of the Guide Information Binder.

In the language of flowers, the peony signifies bashfulness or shame, allegedly because mischievous forest nymphs were said to hide in its flowers. But it also signifies a happy life and happy marriage, making it an appropriate symbol for the 12<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

The European native red peony, *Paeonia officinalis* ‘Rubra Plena’, also called the Memorial Day peony, is an antique cultivar brought to the Americas and planted extensively by early colonists to remind them of home. The peony is the state flower of Indiana.

Peonies are favourite subjects in Eastern art, including lacquer ware and tattoos, but Western artists, e.g. Gessner, Renoir and Van Gogh, have also featured them in their paintings.

Enjoy these “fattest and most scrumptious of all flowers, a rare fusion of fluff and majesty” (Henry Mitchell) now because they do not last long and, sadly, because everything is about three weeks early this spring, they are pretty much finished at the garden.

### Tree Highlight

One of my faithful canine companion’s favourite spots to stop and smell the roses (in this case, he’s checking his pee-mail) is beneath a stately **black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) or false acacia**. While he sniffs out the latest news, I admire the beautiful fragrant flowers which grow together in a droopy cluster. Nectar bearing, they are pollinated by bees and hummingbirds. A member of the pea family (Fabaceae), black locust is a major honey plant in the eastern US while in France and Italy, it is the source of acacia monfloral honey.

The leaves of the black locust are pinnately compound, i.e. 7-19 leaflets on one stem; at night, the leaflets fold up and droop. At the base of each leaf is a pair of short spines.

Black locust wood is extremely hard, resistant to rot and very durable; it is used for furniture, flooring, paneling and as firewood for wood-burning stoves. It can burn even when wet.

On Thursday’s Gardener’s Walk, Dean showed us the new black locust planted in bed 140 to replace the towering black locust that blew down in a windstorm last year. That tall, beautiful tree functioned very much like a forest nurse log; brambles,

a maple and a mountain ash grew from its trunk. Dean noted the characteristic of suckering from the roots which renders the black locust a weed in some parts of the world, including South Africa.

VanDusen Garden also has many fine examples of the golden *Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia' cultivar which looks absolutely magnificent against a bright blue sky.

### **Some Roses Worth Noting**

Climbing up the iron arch at the entrance to the Formal Rose Garden are two specimens of the rambling shrub rose, *Rosa* 'Ghislaine de Feligonde' while in bed 50H is a lovely hybrid tea, *Rosa* 'Cocdestin' Remember Me whose petals range in colour from cream to bright orange. One bloom was edged in red.

And up by the Korean Pavilion, a glorious *Rosa filipes* 'Kiftsgate' is rambling up and over a tree whose foliage can barely be detected under the blooms of this tea-scented giant.

"It was not in the winter  
Our loving lot was cast!  
It was the time of roses,  
We plucked them as we passed!"

Thomas Hood (1799-1845), "Time of Roses"