

WEEKLY UPDATE - MAY 22 - 28, 2015

“What is so sweet and dear
As a prosperous morn in May,
The confident prime of the day,
And the dauntless youth of the year,
When nothing that asks for bliss
Asking aright, is denied,
And half of the world a bridegroom is,
And half of the world a bride?”

Sir William Watson (1858-1935), “Ode in May”

Garden Highlight - The Laburnum Walk

“...Through the laburnum’s dropping gold
Rose the light shaft of orient mould
And Europe’s violets, faintly sweet,
Purpled the moss-beds at its feet.

Felicia Hemans (1793-1835), “The Palm Tree”

The obscure English poet, Felicia Hemans, recognized the drama of one of the world’s most celebrated planting colour combinations, yellow and purple, and anticipated Rosemary Verey’s successful pairing of laburnum and purple allium which has been reproduced in gardens all over the world, including VanDusen Garden’s beautiful Laburnum Walk which is presently in bloom.

Much has already been written about this much photographed area of the garden (please see “Tree of the Month” for May/June 2011) which consists of a curving pathway lined with *Laburnum watereri* ‘Vossii’, also known as the golden chain tree.

The original underplantings for the Laburnum Walk were thyme and lavender; however, because they did not always survive our wet winters, they were replaced by alliums in the early 1990’s. This choice may have been inspired by the laburnum walk that Verey created in her garden at Barnsley House in Gloucestershire in 1964. She, in turn, may have been inspired by a discussion in Russell Page’s book, *The Education of a Gardener*, in which he comments on the successful pairing of yellow and blue flowering plants in the Laburnum Arch in Bodnant Garden. In her own book, *The Art of Planting*, Verey notes that “the alliums...being darker than the laburnum, act almost as shadows, with the laburnum as the lighting overhead” which we see now to spectacular effect.

However, according to a recent article in *The Telegraph* (March 9, 2015), the original trees, the wisteria and the original angle iron framework in Rosemary Verey’s famous laburnum walk are to be torn out and replaced. According to Richard Gatenby, the head gardener, at Barnsley House, laburnum weakens at the roots and has a limited life span. The aging trees (they are 50 years old) had been

splitting and dying off. Some had grown into the supporting metal arches, while those that had been replaced over the years did not thrive due to competition for light and nutrients with the remaining trees. Gatenby believes that once the reconstruction of the arch and the replanting of the trees, the alliums and other plants are complete, it will take around five years for the laburnum walk to return to its former glory.

This raises the question of whether VanDusen's lovely Laburnum Walk will be facing a similar fate in another decade or so.

"The laburnum will be as yellow next June as it is now.

In a month there will be purple stars in the clematis, and year after year, the green night of its leaves will hold its purple stars. But we never get back to our youth.

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Grey*

A Few Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Winners

Best in Show and Gold Medal

Designer Dan Pearson has won for a recreation of a corner of the garden at Chatsworth, the home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, in Derbyshire.

The Royal Bank of Canada Garden won a Silver Gilt. This garden consists of three parts: a zero irrigation dry garden; a central water harvesting storage garden; and an edible garden

Plant of the Year

The winner is *Viburnum plicatum f. tomentosum* 'Kilimanjaro Sunrise.' Plant breeder Charles Williams of Burncoose Nurseries, part of Cornwall's Caerhays Estate, said, "This is a lovely form of Viburnum that is tinged with pink at first, then has lovely white flowers before fading to pink again. It produces beautiful orange berries in the autumn and has wonderful autumn colour."

Viburnum plicatum is Japanese Snowball and VanDusen Garden has many specimens of this lovely flowering shrub. One is in stunning bloom right now at the lower end of the Rhododendron Walk.

A Footnote to the Tree Peony Item ("Weekly Update" May 8-13, 2015)

Please have a look at Steve Whysall's article, "Into China's peony paradise" (Vancouver Sun, May 15, 2015, C3), about the Shenzhou peony garden in Luoyang in Henan province. In it, he explores the possibility of establishing a peony garden here

in Vancouver similar to the Chinese garden in Seattle. You can find a copy of the article in the front pocket of the Information Binder.

Also, you can read Steve's blog and follow his May tour of some of the great British gardens. So far, he has been to Kew, Hidcote, Wisley, Cliveden and Stowe with more to come. Just Google 'Steve Whysall blog'.

"Be like a flower and turn your face to the sun."

Kahlil Gibran