

WEEKLY UPDATE – SEPTEMBER 11 – 17, 2015

“A late summer garden has a tranquility found no other time of year.”

William Longgood, *Voices from the Earth: A Year
In the Life of a Garden*, 1991

Autumn Crocus – *Colchicum autumnale*

Last Thursday on the Gardener’s Walk, James P. pointed out the autumn croci in the newly redesigned beds across from the Marshall sculptures. *Colchicum autumnale* is also known as meadow saffron and “naked ladies”, the latter name based on the appearance of the flower with no surrounding leaves.

It has an unusual growing season with the leaves appearing in March; they feed the flower capsule and then wither away. This is one of the few flowers that blooms after its leaves have died.

Autumn croci are highly poisonous; they contain both colchicine and colchicine, the former being the more toxic chemical. Death has occurred as a result of the ingestion of the bulbs which are sometimes mistaken for wild garlic.

Fall Colours

“Autumn carries more gold in its pocket than all the other seasons.”

Jim Bishop (1907-1987)

The combination of cooler temperatures and the smoke clearing from his lungs has rendered Mocha positively frisky in the mornings (the Celebex helps too) so we have been able to extend our walks. Our familiar neighbourhood is changing colour: mountain ash berries have turned brilliant orangey-red; the Kiftsgate rose is developing showy clusters of orange hips; the magnificent panicles of the oak-leaf hydrangeas have turned from creamy white to pale green and are ready for cutting and drying; the tree leaves are turning every shade of glowing red, gold and orange.

Our lengthened route takes us by a lovely *Oyama magnolia* (*Magnolia sieboldii*) with its brilliant dark-pink seedpods hanging like little shining lanterns off the branches. The *Oyama magnolia*, named after the German doctor Philip Franz von Siebold (1796-1866), is native to China, Korea and China. Unlike the blooms of the spring-flowering magnolias, its fragrant white pendulous flowers, distinguished by their rosy red stamens, open primarily in early summer but continue to bloom intermittently until late summer. This is why the colourful new seed heads appear on the same branch as the dried-out pods which have already split open to release their seeds. In Japan, the *Oyama magnolia* is planted in tea gardens where seated guests enjoy the pendant flowers from below.

You will find this beautiful tree in beds 122, 123 and 126D in the Sino-Himalayan Garden, in beds 26A and B in the Woodland Garden and in bed 46D along the Rhododendron Walk.

“Happily we bask in the warm September sun, which
illuminates all creatures.”

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)