

## WEEKLY UPDATE – SEPTEMBER 17 -24, 2017

“Of autumn months September is the prime,  
Now day and night are equal in each clime...  
And apples now their yellow sides do show.”  
Mrs. Anne (Dudley) Bradstreet (1612-1672), “September”

How beautiful it was in the garden on Thursday afternoon: brilliant sunshine, warm breezes, the fragrance of the katsura trees up in the Stone Garden, the sunflower meadow behind the watercourse in the Alma VanDusen Meadow garden, the gorgeous fall colours in the bed next to the maze! It was a feast for the senses and a reminder that the official start of fall in the Northern Hemisphere will be at 1:02 pm next Friday on September 22! There is nothing to report.

### Guide Goings On

1. Thursday, September 28 – AV equipment training session  
10:30 – Floral Hall
2. FYI – October’s Gardener’s Walk has been cancelled.

Thank you to the Sunday guides for hosting Thursday’s Guide Education/ Business Meeting. The refreshments were wonderful and Guy P.’s presentation on some of the issues and concerns around the garden was both enlightening and reassuring. The questions submitted by Sunday guides provided a comprehensive framework for his informative and candid responses, and it was heartening to hear of the garden’s successes, including the Backyard Bird Garden, the American Public Garden Association Symposium to be held here in 2018 and the paving project. Guy, with his extensive background and experience, identified himself as a maintenance gardener. With Cynthia S. to advise on botanical aspects, they make a good team and the garden is in excellent hands.

Liese G. and Barbara E., both Thursday guides, are enjoying an excellent adventure in South Africa. You can follow their journey on Steve Whysall’s website as they make their way through some stunning landscapes. Their search for flowers in Namaqualand, however, was disappointing as an ongoing severe drought had prevented the flowering of the spring plants that make this part of South Africa a tourist destination at this time of year, their springtime. Check it out at [www.stevewhysall.com](http://www.stevewhysall.com)

### Garden Goings On

1. ZimCarvings with Patrick Sephani and visiting artist Peter Kanaji  
Until September 30 in the Discovery Room and in the Garden

2. Works by Anna Milton  
Until September 27 in the Library
3. Dried Flower Arrangers' Sale  
Friday, September 29; Saturday, September 30; Sunday, October 1  
1:00pm – 4:00pm – HSBC Arrival Hall In the Visitor Center
4. Soil, Manure and Compost Sale  
Saturday, September 30 – 10:00am-3:00pm  
West End of the Vandusen Parking Lot off West 37<sup>th</sup> Ave.

### **Garden Clippings**

1. In the "Weekly Update" archives for 2015  
September 18-24 – Maples  
In the "Weekly Update" archives for 2016  
September 17-24 – trembling aspens
2. Have you had a chance to look at VanDusen Garden's Twitterfeed? Aside from beautiful photographs of what is currently blooming in the garden, it provides information about events of interest. It is a very useful guiding resource.

### **Tree Highlight – the Weeping Willow – *Salix x sepulcralis* var. *chrysocoma***

“ Willow weep for me  
 Willow weep for me  
 Bend your branches green along the stream that runs to sea  
 Listen to my plea  
 Hear me willow and weep for me.”  
 Ann Ronell, 1932

These poignant lyrics, written by a young Radcliffe College student in 1932 and rendered over the years by jazz greats like Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald and Etta James as well as many instrumentalists and pop musicians, capture three of the weeping willow's essential features; its association with pain and loss, the flexibility and pliability of its branches and its affinity for water.

*Salix babylonica*, the 'all-purpose' botanical identification for the weeping willow, is a member of the Salicaceae family and is native to northern China. However, there are over 450 species in the Salix family and cross-pollination has given rise to numerous hybrids. Thus the more specific botanical name given to what we know as the weeping willow is *Salix x sepulcralis* which is a hybrid of *S. babylonica* from northern China and *S. alba* from Europe. The 'babylonica' designation seems to be an error on the part of Linnaeus who identified the trees in Psalm 137 on which the

captive Jews hung their harps beside the rivers of Babylon as willows when, in fact, they were probably poplars.

Willows take root very easily from cuttings and fallen branches as they contain a self-rooting hormone. It is thought that the C18 poet Alexander Pope bears the responsibility for introducing the willow to England in his garden at Twickenham when he took a twig from a bundle sent from Spain, planted it and it grew and thrived!

Willows, also called osiers or sallows, are dioecious and generally exhibit long narrow, elongated leaves. The catkins which appear in April and May are male and female. One of the first signs of spring, the beloved pussy willow, is the grey male catkin of *S. discolor*, the American pussy willow.

Willow leaves and bark have long been noted for their medicinal properties. They contain salicylin which metabolizes into salicylic acid, the precursor to our modern day Aspirin; this has been used for pain relief and fever reduction in cultures around the world. For example, it was documented and used by Hippocrates. First Nations people chewed willow bark and brewed willow teas for pain relief.

Depending on the type of willow tree, willow wood can be used for many different purposes, from furniture to musical instruments. Willow branches and rods can be crafted into obelisks, arches and pergolas to support plants. Wigwams and other lightweight shelters can be constructed. Osier willows are used for basket weaving and woven willow sculptures are a feature of many gardens and landscapes as, indeed, was the case in VanDusen Garden when Alistair Heseltine's woven willow sculpture by the Lathe House intrigued visitors during its creation as part of the glorious Touch Wood garden installations in 2013 and provided a great photo opportunity. Alas, it has been removed.

The ecologically minded can be buried in a willow coffin in some parts of Europe and North America, but not in BC – yet!

Willow is also grown for the energy industry as biomass or biofuel.

The roots of willows are tough and tenacious; willows are frequently planted as erosion control and to shore up embankments as is the case in the little stretch of 'country lane' below Point Grey Road in Kitsilano where high tides and heavy waves pulled down the foreshore rocks, threatening the path. The interlacing root structures have firmly secured and supported the crumbling parts and protected this heavily travelled popular path, making it safe for all who use it.

Willow trees are well-referenced as powerful symbols in a variety of spiritualities and mythologies and especially as symbols of grief, pain and loss in literature including the aforementioned Bible, as well as in Shakespeare's 'Merchant of Venice' and 'Hamlet'. In both the Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter series, willow magic is

associated with witchcraft and pagan beliefs which emanate from Celtic mythology. The willow tree was sacred to the Druids and was one of the seven sacred trees for the Irish.

Because willows love water and love to stand next to flowing water, they are also associated with creativity and inspiration.

Many varieties of willows can be found throughout VanDusen Garden; to find out what types the garden contains and their whereabouts, consult the Plant Collection Records. We are probably most familiar with the living willow fences found along the path beside the Waterfall and at the top of the Stone Garden. And the beautiful golden weeping willow beside Heron Lake, *S. x sepulcralis* var, *chrysocoma*, lonely without its mature companion tree which toppled a few years ago during a very wet spring, drops its graceful branches into the water. However, a new tree has been planted to replace it. Check out the April/May 2015 'Tree of the Month' for more information about this lovely tree.

Besides water lilies, willow trees were a favourite subject for Monet and now would be a good time to visit the Vancouver Art Gallery to see the current Monet exhibit; it will be ending soon.

Willows are natural survivors and they combine everyday practicality with mystery and magic to enhance our lives with beauty and functionality.

Please forward any questions, corrections or suggestions to [pkbuchanan@shaw.ca](mailto:pkbuchanan@shaw.ca) I look forward to and appreciate your responses and feedback. And don't forget about the valuable resources offered to guides in the Yosef Wosk Library and on [www.ericanotebook.com](http://www.ericanotebook.com)

It looks like the weather is about to change! Be prepared  
and have a great week of guiding.

"The bee sings low amid the fading grass,  
And golden sunflowers watch the sun's slow turning;  
The grapes are purpling on the vine..."

Mrs. Dulcie (Mason) Jordan (?), "September"