

WEEKLY UPDATE – SEPTEMBER 4 –10, 2015

“The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August
Over the grass in the West garden...”
Ezra Pound (1885-1972), “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter”

Guide Offerings

Thank you to Jaki (former Thursday guide) for pointing me in the direction of *Linnaea borealis* on one of my visits to Kaslo on Kootenay Lake. This lovely plant, also known as **twinflower**, was a favourite of Carl Linnaeus after whom it is named. Besides being his personal emblem, it is the provincial flower of Smaland, his home province. There are three subspecies of *L. borealis*, all of which are of conservation concern at the outer edges of their habitats. In VanDusen Garden, look for it in beds 22B and 24E.

The September Flower

September’s flower is the **aster** (from the Greek for star, i.e. *astrā*). It is a symbol of powerful love, faith and wisdom. In the Language of Flowers, a gift of asters sends the message “Take Care of Yourself for Me.” The Hungarian Revolution of October 31, 1918, became known as the Aster Revolution due to revolutionary protestors in Budapest wearing this flower in their lapels.

Plant Highlight – **Rose of Sharon** (*Hibiscus syriacus*)

“In the twilight rain
these brilliant-hued hibiscus-
a lovely sunset.”

Basho (1644-1694)

The weekend’s “perfect storm” of wind and rain seems to have released so much fragrance into the air. In the yard, the spicy scent of blowdowns from fir, pine and cedar trees is a reminder that Christmas is a few short months away. Out on the street on our walks, the exotic odour of the curry plant and the burnt sugar scent of katsura tease our nostrils which are finally emptying out of the acrid smell of smoke

While it has no scent, a lovely purple and white *Hibiscus syriacus*, one of many different species of flowering plants around the world called rose of Sharon, is in bloom now in an overgrown garden up the street. It was protected from the wind by large hydrangeas which took the brunt of the strong, ground-level gusts. *Hibiscus* is a genus of flowering plants in the Mallow family, Malvaceae; there are several hundred species which are used for landscaping as they are attractive to bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. One species is used extensively in papermaking, and

others for many varieties of hibiscus teas, both hot and cold. The tea is a mild diuretic, and USDA studies show that it may also lower blood pressure. Some species are food plants and many are used in Chinese herbology and Indian Ayurvedic medicine.

The common name, rose of Sharon, has Biblical origins, first appearing in 1611 in the King James Bible in the "Song of Solomon". Confusion over what the flower really is arises because of translation difficulties, and Biblical scholars suggest that the flower may be a crocus, a tulip, a lily or a narcissus. In popular culture, there are many references in poetry, music and literature including John Steinbeck's masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Hibiscus syriacus is the national flower of Haiti and South Korea. Look for lots of examples of rose of Sharon in bed 85 around the Korean Pavilion.