

## WEEKLY UPDATE – OCTOBER 8 – 15, 2017

“October sunshine bathed the park with such a melting light that it had the dimmed impressive look of a landscape by an old master. Leaves, one, two at a time, sidled down through the windless air.”

Elizabeth Enright (1907-1968), “Apple Seed and Apple Thorn”

Did you see last Thursday’s gorgeous Full Corn Moon, a later moon than usual Harvest Moon? There is nothing to report other than that the garden is beautiful as the guiding season winds down. Enjoy this lovely Thanksgiving weekend!!

### Guide Goings On

1. Thursday, October 12 – Guide Education/Business Meeting  
The speaker is Lori Snyder; her topic is  
“Wild, Native, Edible and Medicinal Plants”
2. Thursday, October 19 – GLT Meeting – 10:00am – Cedar Room
3. Thursday, November 9 - Guide Education/Business Meeting  
The speaker is Carl C., a Tuesday guide;  
he will be talking about Chinese culture, myths,  
legends and folktales *vis a vis* plants of Chinese origin in the  
garden

### Garden Goings On

1. Works by Vicky Earle  
Until December 30 at the Bloedel Conservatory and the Josef Wosk Library
2. Vancouver Mycological Society 2017 Mushroom Show  
Sunday, October 22 – 11:00am - 4:00pm  
Floral Hall/Cedar Room  
Admission \$3.00
3. Dried Flower Arrangers’ Sale  
Friday, October 27; Saturday, October 28; Sunday, October 29  
1:00pm-4:00pm (Saturday, 10:00am-4:00pm) HSBC Arrival Hall
4. Oil Paintings by Grazyna Wolski  
Until October 31 in the Discovery Room

### Garden Clippings

1. In the “Weekly Update” archives for 2016  
October 8-15 – Fragrant Epaulette Tree
2. For some beautiful photographs of VanDusen Garden in the fall, have a look at [www.pampas2palms.com](http://www.pampas2palms.com). The post you are looking for is in October, 2012, but

there are lots of other beautiful gardens and places to linger over on this website.

### **Book Review – *Lab Girl* – Hope Jahrens**

The final book in my summer reading pile from the Yosef Wosk Library was *Lab Girl* by Hope Jahrens, a geobiologist (a scientist who studies fossilized plants), recipient of three Fulbright Awards, along with many others, and acclaimed writer who currently holds the J. Tuzo Wilson Professorship at the University of Norway in Oslo. The memoir won the 2016 National Book Critics Circle Award.

The title refers to the four labs she has built during her career to enable her to pursue her passion: the examination of fossilized plants to discover the environmental conditions in which they lived, to study closely the composition and structure of plants and to map how they lived out their lives. More significantly, however, it refers to a place that became her refuge, her father's laboratory at the community college in rural Minnesota where he taught, and where she spent many hours in her formative years, a retreat from the rest of her family where the chilly emotional distance between her and her uncompromising mother left her guarded and silent. Her father's lab, in contrast was warm, a comfort zone, where she "could most freely explore the mechanical world."

The book is divided into three sections; the chapters alternate between her personal experience and reflections on how plants grow, become established, change, adapt and flourish, struggle and survive. In both narratives, the reader gets a clear idea of the kind of scientific inquiry in which she is engaged. Her writing is clear, vivid and elegant. She maintains a blog [www.hopejahresurecanwrite.com](http://www.hopejahresurecanwrite.com), and this book proves she certainly can!

In the first section, "Roots and Leaves," Jahrens recounts some of the childhood experiences and early influences that eventually led her to become the research scientist she is today. After a series of jobs during her undergraduate years at the University of Minnesota where she started out as an English major, she was able to secure employment in a research lab which led her to pursue her Ph.D. In 1994, while supervising graduate students, she met Bill Hagopian, the brilliant, imaginative and practical individual who had suffered similar emotional "damage" as a youth and who became her remarkable lab assistant. Once they had both earned their degrees and Jahrens had been offered the position of assistant professor at Georgia Tech (she was only 26 years old), Bill accompanied her across the country to help her set up her first lab. The two have been together ever since, but not in the way you would expect.

The next section, "Wood and Knots," focuses on the professional and emotional challenges she and Bill faced as they struggled to establish their labs, to convince the scientific world of the value of their work, to secure funding and, for Jahrens, to overcome the systemic discrimination experienced by women, a minority group, in the world of scientific study. Mirroring the highs and lows of their professional experience were Jahren's struggles with her bipolarity about which she speaks candidly and which she was able to finally bring under control with medication and lifestyle changes. Happily, the work they were doing was finally receiving recognition and the offer of a tenured position as well as funding for Bill at Johns Hopkins saw Jahrens move their lab from Georgia to Baltimore.

The final section, "Flowers and Fruits" begins with Jahrens meeting the man whom she will eventually marry. Finding herself pregnant, she had to cease taking her medications leading

to a full-blown psychotic episode which necessitated weeks of hospitalization before the successful birth of a baby boy. But her work continued and, to her surprise, being a scientist became easier as she won contracts and more awards. After a year in Norway on a Fulbright Scholarship to study what tree memory means for today's spruce trees, her family, the lab and Bill moved to Hawaii where life became much easier.

For Jahrens, work is play; she does not seem to be able to compartmentalize. Even now with her family, students and personal and professional responsibilities, her lab is her real home. "It is self-contained. It is its own world... Because the outside world cannot come into the lab, the lab has become the place where I can become the real me... it is like a church because it is where I figure out what I believe...it is a refuge and an asylum." And to help her with the realization of the lab is her loyal scientific companion for over twenty years, Bill Hagopian, with whom she has travelled throughout North America, including Axel Heiberg in Canada's Nunavut territory, and Ireland to study the fossilized and living plant world. Their unique collaborative partnership has remained intact because they seem to have an intuitive understanding of each other's feelings and thoughts. Jahrens, herself, tries to explain it. "People still puzzle over the two of us, Bill and me. Are we siblings? Soulmates? Comrades? Novitiates? Accomplices? We eat almost every meal together, our finances are mixed, and we tell each other everything. We travel together, work together, finish each other's sentences, and have risked our lives for each other... I do us because us is what I know how to do."

A story of perseverance, dedication, courage and friendship, the book conveys meaning on many different levels. For some, it may be read as a cautionary tale of 'how to' and maybe 'how not to' pursue your dreams. But Jahren's passion for her scientific inquiry and her wonder at the interconnectedness of plant life across eons of evolutionary development will keep the reader enthralled.

*Lab Girl* is the featured book in the October VDG Membership News and it has been selected for discussion at the September 25, 2018 VanDusen Book Club meeting.

### **The Colour Purple – The Beautiful Beautyberry – *Callicarpa***

Providing a vivid contrast to the colours usually associated with the autumn landscape, the rich reds, bright oranges and yellows, burnished rusts and bronzes, are the softer and cooler hues: the vibrant pink of the nerine lilies, the blue/purple of the monkshood, the multiple blue tones of the Michaelmas daisies, the pale pinky/purple of the autumn crocus and the striking deeper purple of the berries on the beautyberry bush.

A member of the Lamiaceae family, *Callicarpa* is a genus of shrubs and small trees which may be deciduous or evergreen depending on whether they are a temperate or tropical species. Of the approximately 140 species comprising the genus, four are very well known and VanDusen Garden contains three of them.

The flowers grow in little clusters and produce fruit, almost always referred to as berries, but they are, more accurately, drupes. A drupe, also called a stone fruit, develops from a single carpel, the outer fleshy part surrounding a hardened woody shell, pit or stone, usually containing a single seed. They range in colour from pink to deep purple in dramatic clusters, especially on bare branches. However, one variety of *C. japonica*, native to Japan, 'Leucocarpa' produces white drupes. It can be seen in bed 3 in the Cascadia Garden.

The fruits last well into the winter and provide a food source for birds but it is usually their last choice, possibly because they are highly astringent. Four chemicals used in the production of insect repellent have been isolated in the fruits of *C. americana*, native to North America but not present in VanDusen Garden.

There are, however, some examples of *C. dichotoma*, the deep purple beautyberry, native to China, Korea and Japan, in bed 13A in the Winter Walk.

*C. bodinieri*, native to west central China, is more cold tolerant and therefore survives in northwestern Europe and the more northerly parts of North America. According to *The American Nurseryman*, the species of *Callicarpa* that offers the “best landscape value” is *C. bodinieri* var. *giraldii* ‘Profusion’ and VanDusen has plenty of examples. After eight years of trials at Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania, this cultivar was selected for its lilac-coloured flowers which develop into violet/purple berries in compact clusters on the graceful branches. Its striking fruits start to form in August and are on display from August to November, peaking in October, although they can last well into January. It is most beautiful in sunlight when the metallic lustre of the berries is clearly evident.

Look for it in the Sino-Himalayan Garden between the Korean Pavilion bed and the paved path leading to the Great Lawn and in bed 48S along the Rhododendron Walk near the south side of the deciduous azaleas.

It has been awarded the Royal Horticultural Society Award of Garden Merit.

Please send any corrections, comments, questions etc. to [pkbuchanan@shaw.ca](mailto:pkbuchanan@shaw.ca)

**Have a great week of guiding!**

“Pale amber sunlight falls across  
The reddening October trees...”  
Ernest Dowson (1867-1900), “Autumnal”