

WEEKLY UPDATE – SEPTEMBER 24 – OCTOBER 1, 2016

“Wet morning garden...
My sunny
Chrysanthemums
Are sea-mist shrouded”
Sanpu (1647-1732)

One day, rainy mists rather than sea mists are shrouding my chrysanthemums, leading to the conclusion that summer is over. The next day, the sun is back and the garden is glowing with fall colour. Then it rains again. Fall seems as fickle and capricious as April, but today is beautiful. There is very little to report.

1. Cart #3 is back in action. Please read the reminders that Midge sent around.
2. Autumn croci are in bloom on the first day of autumn.

Guide Goings On

1. Thursday, October 6 – Gardener’s Walk with Cynthia Sayre, Curator of Collections at the garden with a focus on collection-related issues.
2. Thursday, October 13 – Guide/Education Business Meeting
The speaker will be Lyn Grants, a teacher of History and Natural History and a UBC FOG. Her topic, with its intriguing title, will be “Where is New Holland? And Who was Ferdinand Bauer?”

Garden Goings On

1. Zimcarvings – until September 30 in the Glasshouse and the Formal Rose Garden.
2. The Nature of Art - until September 28 in the Discovery Room.
3. The Signature of All Things – October 2 – 31 in the Discovery Room.
An art exhibition inspired by Elizabeth Gilbert’s botanical novel.
The Opening Reception will be on October 2 from 1:00pm-4:00pm.

Garden Clippings

1. Michaelmas, the Feast of Michael and All Angels (also known as the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel) falls on September 29. Because it falls near the Autumnal equinox, it is associated in the northern hemisphere with the beginning of autumn and the shortening of days. It is also a time for paying rents and hiring servants. Michaelmas Fairs continue to be a part of country life. “A tree planted at Michaelmas/Will surely not go amiss.”

2. To add to the list of “Hips, Haws, Fruits, Berries and Nuts” published in the most recent *Gazette*, here are two more.

Drupe – also called a stone fruit; the outer fleshy part surrounds a hardened woody shell, pit or stone, usually enclosing a single seed, e.g. peaches, plums, cherries.

- the development is from a single carpel.
- an aggregate fruit such as raspberry consists of drupelets.
- dogwood fruits are called drupes.

Pome - a fruit produced by flowering plants in the Rosaceae family; the flesh arises from a greatly swollen receptacle, not from the carpels.

- common examples are apples and pears, but members of the *Sorbus* genus, e.g. mountain ash, as well as quince and medlars, also produce pomes.

Book Review - *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate – Discoveries from a Secret World*
by Peter Wohlleben

A new book, just released this month in North America, suggests that trees are sentient beings. In the same vein as *What a Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses* by Daniel Chamovitz, Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life...* suggests that trees have emotions, they feel pain, they nurture their children and support each other and they communicate both distress and contentment among many other attributes.

Peter Wohlleben is a German forester who carefully manages a private ‘continuous cover forest’ of beeches and oaks in an environmentally friendly manner near Hummel in the Eifel Mountains in Germany. His is not the malevolent forest of Grimms’ fairytales with its grotesque twisted oaks; nor is it the sentimental forest of romanticized and rustic innocence. Rather, it is a benevolent community where mutual support is offered, but where life and death dramas play out, albeit at a much slower pace. Even so, his notion of the ideal forest is a place of wonderment and enchantment.

This is a fascinating and engaging book and there are many interesting ideas in it. In the interests of brevity, I will focus on three that struck me. First, trees communicate with each other through a kind of social network of scent compounds as well as the chemical signals transmitted through the underground network of mycorrhizal fungal species, a busy mycelial “wood wide web.” The phrase first appeared in *Nature* in 1997 and was the result of research on the synergy and mutualistic relationship between paper birches and Douglas firs conducted by Dr. Suzanne Simard, a Professor of Forest

Ecology at UBC. There is powerful and convincing science underpinning what some might regard only as the charming anthropomorphism of trees.

Another intriguing notion is that the roots of the tree constitute its brain. Wohlleben demonstrates that trees can learn; therefore, they must store experiences somewhere and the most logical place is in the roots because the root network is in charge of all the chemical activity in the tree. In addition, scientists have long been able to measure electrical impulses in trees. So, do plants have intelligence? Can they think?

A third idea pertains to the benefits of walking in the forest and breathing the clean air; the Japanese call this *shinrin-yoku* or “forest bathing”. Wohlleben believes that this occurs in the undisturbed, ancient deciduous forests because they are healthy and transmit happy tree thoughts and messages. Research has shown that trees’ essential oils, the phytoncides, enhance the body’s immune system, producing natural killer cells which fight disease, including cancer, diabetes, stress and anxiety, depression and heart disease. In contrast, he suggests that walking through planted, coniferous forests won’t provide the same benefits because they are artificial, their networks are inadequately developed and they communicate distress signals, not the contented forest talk that makes us feel better. In fact, their “screaming” may be transmitted to us and make us feel worse.

Reading *The Hidden Life...* will guarantee that a walk in the woods could be a profoundly transformative experience. At any rate, we might look at trees in quite the same way.

Peter Wohlleben will be appearing at the Vancouver Writers’ Festival in conversation with John Vaillant, author of *The Golden Spruce*, on October 11.

Indian Summer

“It is only here in large proportions in Canada that wondrous second wind, the Indian summer, attains its amplitude and heavenly perfection, - the temperatures; the sunny haze; the mellow, rich, delicate, almost flavoured air: Enough to live – enough merely to be.”

Walt Whiman (1819-1892), *Diary in Canada*, 1904

Browsing the internet the other day, I came across a headline from the August 29, 2016 edition of the *Daily Mail* – “Another Indian Summer!” A subsequent headline from September 18 announced “Autumn is finally here: Britain’s balmy Indian summer disappears overnight...” Storms had finally brought an end to the Indian summer in South Devon, the English Riviera.. Since autumn had not yet officially arrived, it seemed to be somewhat premature for that term to be used. However, a day later, when the rain was starting to fall, a colleague remarked somewhat wistfully, “I hope we can look

forward to an Indian summer this fall." Two references in two days have resulted in a little investigation into what an Indian summer is and how it got that name.

The first reference to an Indian summer comes in 1778 from a French-American soldier turned farmer, J.H. St. John de Crevecoeur, who wrote:

"Sometimes the rain is followed by an interval of calm and warmth which is called the Indian summer; its characteristics are a tranquil atmosphere and general smokiness."

Letters from an American Farmer

Generally, an Indian summer is a warm, calm spell of weather occurring in autumn, anywhere from late September to mid-November. The *Old Farmer's Almanac*, however, is much more specific as to the conditions needed and the dates. Warm days must follow a spell of cold weather or a good hard frost. The nights are typically clear and chilly while the days are warm and the atmosphere is hazy and smoky. Furthermore, these conditions must occur between St. Martin's Day (November 11) and November 20! The *OFA* establishes a very narrow window.

The haziness associated with the Indian summer could have been caused by the prairie fires set by American native tribes as they harvested crops in preparation for winter. There is no evidence to support the theory that the native Americans chose this time to attack European settlements, although the *OFA* certainly favours this one. Nor is there any evidence to connect the name with the colour of fall leaves .

What is clear, however, is that earlier onset and increased incidence of what we call Indian summer may be a symptom of global warming.

In many European countries, the seasonal warmth is associated with autumn feast days or saints' days, including St. Luke's Little Summer on October 18 and St. Martin's day on November 11.

In the meantime, the latest headline from the Grimsby newspaper in Britain is asking if their Indian summer will return while we, here on the west coast, are wondering if we will have one.

HAVE A GREAT WEEK OF GUIDING!!

"That is the charm of woods, anyway. Things live and breathe quietly out of sight. You can sense it, but you don't know what or even if it isn't the wood itself, more alive than it seems.

Lucy M. Boston (1892-1990), *A Stranger at Green Knowe*