



University
of Victoria

University Finnerty Garden Friends

April 2011 Newsletter

Dear Friends, what a winter! And it isn't over yet! As you all know, it has been cold, snowy, and generally miserable. But surprisingly, it has been dry. My rainfall records show that we are running about 50 mm behind last year at this time. I have been keeping records since 1987, and have gone back over the last few el niño la niña combinations. Each of the years following the la niña winter has been drier than usual. It will be interesting to see if this year follows the pattern. I will make sure that I start the summer with all my tanks of water for the garden completely full. This last heavy snowfall when Victoria got about 8 inches, missed me completely.

I have been checking the garden where a number of rhododendrons were in full bloom—their blossoms have all turned brown from the frost. Several of the big leafed rhodos such as *R. macabeanum* have lost all of their leaves, but I am hopeful that the plants will still be alive. I planted a new *R. sinogrande* in October, and it has been killed. Some of the others look a bit sick—the November frost caught them unprepared and this latest cold spell was very hard on the early ones. I was interested to see that the daffodils which were in bloom appear to have escaped any damage—and so did the crocus, snowdrops and some of the flowering

trees. I hope that the Finnerty Gardens escaped serious damage. I look forward to doing a tour when I am in town next week.

Talking about the Gardens, I must remind you all about UVic's annual Plant Sale on May 1. It is planned that this will feature a good selection of plants from the Finnerty Gardens, and they will certainly be worth having in your own garden. A combination of garden staff and volunteers have prepared them for the sale, and I thank them all. Also, the major collection of big leafed rhododendrons will be coming into bloom in the next month, and they are spectacular. Do plan to visit them and see the excellent collection of spring bulbs and plants.

The alpine garden, dedicated to the memory of Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan, is progressing well, and his daughter Ann Schau is contributing some plants for it. He was a wonderful man, much missed by many of us, and it will be good to have his contributions to the Gardens recognized in this way.

I wish you all a good spring of gardening and look forward to seeing many of you at the Plant Sale.

— Betty Kennedy

The Lazy Gardener: 3 Bulbs

M.J. Harvey

Bulbs are a group of plants whose life cycle fits the almost Mediterranean climate that southern Vancouver Island blesses us with. Most provide a brilliant display with little effort from the owner. The secret of being our notionally lazy gardener is to examine each species from a strictly utilitarian point of view and reject any that give problems, be it too few flowers, obnoxious foliage or seeding or creeping around. Be ruthless, there is no point in making work for yourself such as tying floppy old daffodil leaves into cute little knots. Your aim is a neat garden, lots of flowers, low labour.

For any pedants on the prowl I confess that I am using 'bulbs' in the loose sense for geophyte and include also corms, rhizomes and tubers.

So following I shall mention a spectrum of plants ranging from the well behaved ones that auto tidy up after flowering to the baddies that may look good while flowering but then hang on with painfully untidy leaves or possess other faults.

Where along this continuum your own personal cut off lies is a matter for the individual to decide or, as I am quaintly putting it, exactly how lazy are you? My point being that growing a particular plant should be a decision, not an accident.

Starting seasonally, in winter the snowdrops, *Galanthus*, are a lovely group of about 15 species of which two or three are common in the region (note, I am not considering rarities in this article). First comes the giant snowdrop, *G. elwesii*, with broad, sheathing leaves covered in a grayish coating. This one comes from southern Europe and can take extremes of heat and drought in the summer so site it accordingly. Next comes the common snowdrop, *G. nivalis*, with its narrow strap shaped leaves. In Europe this has naturalized as far north as Scotland and does well in damper soil and in shade. It also has an excellent double form. Then there is the less familiar *G. woronowii* (Russian botanist, pronounce the 'w' as 'v'). This is now being commonly sold in nurseries and



Photo by Daphne Donaldson

supermarkets. I think some entrepreneur in Europe is multiplying it in large quantities – this is for reasons of plant conservation and CITES smuggling laws. *Woronowii* is sold under several names at random (never trust a label) but is readily recognized by its broad, brilliant green, shiny leaves and somewhat smaller flowers. Give shade.

Related to the above are the spring and summer snowflakes, *Leucojum vernum* and *aestivum*. Cute while flowering the leaves keep growing and growing and you have to use them carefully if at all. Continuing through the seasons there is the tiny, delicate, fall flowering *L. autumnale* with the palest pink flowers and inconspicuous grass like leaves. This is wholly delightful but unfortunately rare. I left mine in our previous garden to deep regret.

In the same early season comes winter aconite, *Eranthis hiemalis*, possibly the ideal plant. It appears as if from nowhere sometimes pushing through snow, the bright yellow flowers surrounded by an Elizabethan ruff of bright green leaves. Then it vanishes. You couldn't ask for better, except possibly the next item.

Crocus has many species, some yellow, some blue and all excellent. Common in local gardens is *C. vernus*, the spring crocus, which comes in blue, white or striped. Very closely related is *C. tomassinianus* which, in certain old gardens, has gone wild and spread. You

can tell tommies from springs because on a spring day with the least glint of sun the tommies flop their petals flat on the ground while the springs maintain a dignified goblet shape. Surely, you must be thinking, I would not recommend anything that spreads freely by seed? This is the exception. Tommies have millimeter wide leaves that shrivel away rapidly. They not only set the table but they clear away the dishes! Local nurseries seem no longer to stock tommies so you have to get a start from a friend but I saw 'Yalta' with no other name attached at Elk Lake Nursery and the picture looked like a tommy.

The smaller blue squills such as *Scilla bifolia* and *sibirica* give no problems, similarly *Pushkinia* and *Chionodoxa*, but *Muscari*, the grape hyacinths, in general are a pain especially the overly common *M. armeniacum* which spreads by seed and offsets, displacing even European grasses on some boulevards. There is a Cambridge blue form which has not given any problems so far. As regards the English and Spanish bluebells, *Hyacinthoides* and camas the less said the better.

Irises are generally disease riddled and unsightly, only the dwarf *I. danfordiae* in yellow and the *reticulate hystrioides* hybrids in many shades of blue are well behaved early spring bulbs that withdraw their leaves quickly.

The cheerful spring *Cyclamen coum*, *alpinum* and *repandum* are a delight, the leaves persist but look neat. However the fall flowering *C. hederifolium* is getting a bad reputation because ants carry its seeds to the darndest places and it is now placed on some lists of plants too weedy to cultivate. (This, after I spent years raising many plants with leaves marbled in various patterns.)

The hybrid tulips and daffodils are too messy. Grow them in pots if you must then hide them away in their off season. Some of the dwarf narcissi such as *N. asturiensis*,

bulbocodium, 'Jack Snipe' and 'Tête à Tête' are useful. Similarly some dwarf tulips: *pulchella*, *clusiana*, etc. survive modestly. My own efforts with tulips and daffodils have been frustrated by deer and narcissus bulb fly respectively.

Anemone blanda has cheerful, starry flowers as do *A. nemoralis* and its yellow hybrid *xlipsiensis*, but the foliage hangs on so place them in some shady corner where they will not be too conspicuous.

The crown imperial, *Fritillaria imperialis*, makes a regal statement and then retires fairly gracefully. If you have a heavy clay soil they are for you. I just bought one and the label said 'fragrant' — such a droll sense of humour those Dutch have!

Across Eurasia and North America are some 700 species of *Allium* — onions in the broad sense. Many are very decorative and garden worthy, even the common and Chinese chives grown for eating. Most appreciate sun. A few, such as *A. schubertii* and *christophii* have long persisting, very decorative flower heads (I have seen them dried and hung as mobiles). A very few onions are to be avoided, principally the drumstick onion *A. sphaerocephalum* — pretty but spreads too freely.

For woodland or shady positions there are many well behaved plants. Let me start at *Podophyllum* with the Asiatic species sporting decorative leaves, some developing reddish geometric patterns when young and others, *P. pleianthum* with huge glossy, angular leaves with a texture resembling polystyrene. Only avoid the original mayapple, *P. peltatum*, from eastern North America — once it gets going, nothing stops it.

The Solomon's seals, *Polygonum*, produce gracefully arching shoots with pendent flowers. Bloodroot, *Sanguinaria*, has attractive leaves, circular with splits and single or double white flowers. *Corydalis* has contrasting finely divided leaves. *C. solida* and *bulbosa* do well



Photo by Daphne Donaldson

locally and the Chinese blue flowered group do well if watered (which I did not). Avoid the yellow flowered *lutea* and *ochroleuca*, they self seed. Some thoughtful taxonomist has recently put these two into a new genus, *Paracorydalis*. Good!

Shade suits most *Erythroniums* including our native, drought proof fawn or Easter lily, *E. oregonum*. More moisture loving are the pink *revolutum* (also native) and the Eurasian *dens canis*, dog's tooth violet the tuber of which is said to resemble the tooth of a dog. In addition to flowers the leaves are attractively mottled except in the larger species and their hybrids, including 'Pagoda'.

Then, what are becoming my favourite plants (exciting hybrids) is the genus *Trillium*, with not a bad sheep among the lot of them. BC has two native species, the common and easily grown *T. ovatum* and the rare *T. hibbersonii*. Numerous others come from the Californian region, eastern North America and eastern Asia. They have a wide variety of leaf sizes and markings but all are divided into threes — hence the name.

A close relative of *Trillium* is Paris — defined as a *Trillium* that can't count. They have parts in 4's or more. They are excessively modest plants you can safely ignore but I like growing *P. polyphyllum* because I can stand someone in front of it and it will be invisible until pointed out. The flowers have the most exquisite fine details. Very Zen, Paris.

Another well behaved group is *Lilium*. The modern hybrids tend to be a bit gauche (you may disagree) but my money is on the Martagon group with their hanging flowers. Currently I am trying *L. wardii*. *Cardiocrinum*, the giant lily with scented flowers is one of the seven wonders of the world and should be planted if you think you will live to see it flower.

Bulbs for late summer include the outstanding *Amaryllis belladonna*, one of the plants called 'naked ladies' (along with *Colchicum*). By *Amaryllis* I mean the South African native not the popular but tender houseplant "Amaryllis" (now *Hippeastrum*), originally from Mexico. Also from South Africa is *Nerine bowdenii*, smaller than *Amaryllis* but very free flowering with pink umbels. Yet another Cape bulb is *Schizostylis* which starts at the end of August and can trickle the occasional flower through the milder winters. But with this species we start to get into a mess of long leaves so I think keep it in a large pot and just bring it forward when it is at its best. For a touch of yellow *Sternbergia lutea* is a diminutive bulb that needs a hot sunny open site to suit its natural range of Spain to Iran.

To break conventional writing rules I end on a negative note. Following are some spready, leggy, leafy, untidy louts: *Agapanthus*, *Alstroemeria*, *Colchicum*, *Convallaria* (lily of the valley), *Crinum*, *Crococsmia* and *Hemerocallis* (day lily). All I have to say about them is Never! Never! Never!

The Owl Reappears in Finnerty Gardens

Jeremy Quin and Karen Grose

If you find yourself in the Finnerty Gardens alone on an early fall morning, think twice because you might not be entirely alone. Look up in the trees and you will see two beautiful eyes watching you. These are the eyes of a Barred owl who visits every fall. Sometimes he can be discovered right in front of you on a stump. Next time you are in the Gardens look up and you may find yourself a new friend.



Our UVic Plant Sale: Sunday, May 1, 2011

A major attraction of the UVic Plant Sale on the first Sunday in May is the stall dedicated to plants from Finnerty Gardens. There have long been Finnerty plants around at the Sale, but now that the Gardens have achieved maturity, many more are available. All the gardeners, those on staff and volunteers, work enthusiastically at dividing and taking cuttings, and by May the greenhouses are bursting with flourishing plants. In its second year, 2010, the UVic stall was a great success, and the identification of its plants by green instead of white price tags focuses on what makes the UVic Sale unique.

This year the stall will again carry a great many plants from the Gardens that are excellent for landscaping: hardy perennials like *Rodgersia podophylla*, one of the best large leaved perennials for woodland; *Arum italicum* 'Pictum' which retains its marbled foliage all through the winter; *Ligularia stenocephala* (also known as The Rocket) has stunning black stems topped with rich yellow flowers, and the delicate silver patterned leaves of *Brunnera* 'Jack Frost' are a must for every garden. There will be a huge selection of fuchsias,

probably the widest range to be found locally, from the handsome golden foliage of hardy species like 'Wessex Belle', to the orange, pendant blossoms of hybrids such as 'Bugle Boy', and 'Delta's Groom,' each blossom of which combines pink and deep aubergine in striking contrast. Numbers of shade tolerant hostas will be for sale, including 'Patriot', which has especially clear white and green variegation, and 'Frances Williams' with huge lime and green leaves. So will bamboos, from the dwarf to the giant black stemmed Timber Bamboo, which in ten years grows to 40 feet high with stems 3 to 4 inches across. There will also be several kinds of tender scented geraniums, with inconspicuous flowers but leaves which release a delicious fragrance, and many Tibouchinas whose royal purple flowers guarantee instant popularity.

This is only a sampling of the rich array of plants from Finnerty Gardens which will be available. Since profits from the Sale are all ploughed back into the development of the Gardens, it is particularly fitting that the UVic plant stall is now one of its highlights.



Photo by Daphne Donaldson

Winter Reality

Karen Grose

Winter storms occasionally provide us with bad news. This Christmas we lost a large branch off the *Cedrus atlantica* 'Glauca' and the tree had to be removed. It was located at the edge of the front lawn and much to our surprise none of the material around it was damaged.

With the cool weather come the winter blooms. The Mahonia 'Charity' were out in full bloom before December as were the *Viburnum x Bodnantense*. Shortly into January the pendulous male and female catkins of the *Garrya elliptica* were fully open. I can't say enough about this shrub—it is amazing.

After Christmas, we were greeted by the aroma of *Sarcococca hookerana humilis* (sweet box), *Skimmia japonica* and the *Chimonanthus praecox*. The *Chimonanthus* was not a great bloomer this year because we had pruned some of the oldest branches to rejuvenate it.

We enjoyed the *Hamamelis* this year, especially the *Hamamelis mollis* in the Michiela bed, *Hamamelis*

mollis pallida in the Victoria bed and the *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Arnold's Promise' in the Abies bed. They were all full of the crumpled mop heads that the Western Garden book describes as 'shredded coconut' petals. The fragrance of these shrubs is subtle but stunning.

Some of the rhododendrons that decided to show their winter flowers were *R. dauricum*, *R. hookeri*, *R. eclecteum* and *R. brachycarpum*. Unfortunately, last week snow, another winter reality, ruined all the flowers.

The *Lonicera fragrantissima* and *Ribes sanguinum* impressed us and the Annas hummingbirds for whom they provided many fragrant flowers to feed both them and our senses.

The winter aconites, snow drops, iris and cyclamen covered parts of the ground providing small bursts of fireworks to feast our eyes. This year's winter seems colder, longer and drearier but seeing colour in the garden gives some hope that spring is around the corner and winter will soon be a memory.

An Invitation

to Submit Articles for the Finnerty Gardens Newsletter

All Friends of Finnerty Gardens—including present and past Members of the Advisory Committee—are invited to submit articles of interest to horticulturists for publication in the Newsletter. The purpose is to maintain the eclectic range of horticultural interests that the Newsletter has espoused in recent years.

Ideally, articles should be of 500-1,000 words in length, and should be emailed to the editor as soon as they are ready. When articles are accepted, they will be published as quickly as space becomes available. Since the editor is an English professor rather than a horticulturist, authors must hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the horticultural content.

Contact **Sam Macey, Newsletter Editor**
250-592-1991 (home) | slmacey@shaw.ca

Membership

Membership in the Friends of Finnerty Gardens is \$10 per year (single or couple). Membership includes an informative newsletter published four times a year. Funds raised through membership support enhancements within the Gardens which would not be possible otherwise.

This newsletter is also available on the University of Victoria's website at www.external.uvic.ca/gardens/. If you would prefer to view it electronically rather than in hard copy, please let us know and we'll update our mailing list accordingly.

Contact **Shirley Lyon, UVic Finnerty Garden Friends**
250-721-7014 | slyon@uvic.ca

Upcoming Events

University of Victoria's Annual Plant Sale

Sunday, May 1, 2011 – 10:00 am to 1:00 pm

McKinnon Gym on the UVic campus

Come join us at the ever-popular UVic Plant Sale in support of Finnerty Gardens. You will find almost everything for your garden: alpiners, annuals, perennials, aquatics, exotics, native plants, geraniums, fuschias, hanging baskets, shrubs, trees, herbs, vegetables, berries and much more. We also have an entire sale table dedicated to plants which have been propagated from the Finnerty Gardens including rhododendrons, scented geraniums, fuschias, hardy perennials, hostas, bamboo and more.

Contact **Shirley Lyon, UVic Finnerty Garden Friends**
250-721-7014 | slyon@uvic.ca

Call for Volunteers

We are looking for volunteers to assist with the plant sale on Friday, April 29, Saturday, April 30 or Sunday, May 1. Plant sale volunteers are invited to a pre-sale on Saturday, April 30 at 12:00 noon as a thank you.

Contact **Kathleen Bellows**
250-472-5045 | bellowsk@uvic.ca

Native Plant Sale Spring 2011

Presented by:
The Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary
Sat. and Sun. April 16 and 17, 2011 - 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. Admission: \$2/day; Friends Members Free



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