



University of Victoria

April 2008

# University Finnerty Garden Friends

Dear Friends,

The months do roll by quickly, and here we are almost into spring. In fact, you could say it was already here these last few days which have been so lovely.

Do visit Finnerty Gardens soon—the spring bloom is well under way and a number of the rhododendrons are in flower. This time of the year is so wonderful that I feel I want to share it with everyone. And I was hearing last evening from my brother-in-law in Ottawa about the winter they have had. We truly are blessed.

My garden at Galiano is lovely. My home is on a southeast facing slope right above Active Pass, and is well sheltered by a surround of firs and oaks. These do a very good job of breaking the wind from all but the southwest. Then, when we have a sunny day, the hillside acts as a sun trap. The plants love it and thrive, provided I can keep enough water on them.

The soil is very shallow—about a foot deep—and is underlain with conglomerate rock. It is very well drained! I suspect that I am mad to consider trying to garden under these circumstances, but!! My water tanks are almost full, so that will give me a good start. However, one advantage of the early spring is that I do not have to water. As a result, I wander around, pulling weeds, and admiring the various plants as they bloom. I have been quite excited recently to discover that one of my seeding hellebores is a double very dark reddish-purple. I do not have a 'mother' plant that resembles it.

As many of you know, I have been keeping rainfall records at Galiano since 1987—a period of over 20 years. This past January was drier than all but four other years, and this February is shaping up to be the same.

Now I can start worrying about my garden water supply. My well is very reliable and produces excellent drinking water, but its flow rate is fairly limited by the end of the summer. Since the bottom of the well is below sea level, I am very careful not to lower the level in the well and hence, affect the aquifer. Many homes on Galiano have had the salt water invade their wells. Some have become so salty that the water cannot even be used to water a garden. If you live on one of the islands, you must become aware of the restrictions on water use and you very quickly develop all the water saving practices, such as “do not run the water while you are cleaning your teeth”. We often don't think about our consumption, especially if we live on a municipal water system.

The Garden Sale is coming up on Sunday, May 11 and you will find there an exciting selection of plants. I think all true gardeners love to buy plants, and we do it even when we aren't quite sure where the particular plant is going to go. Then we stand with the plant in our hands and look for just the right place to plant it— or at least I do. And isn't it fun!

Betty Kennedy  
*University of Victoria  
Finnerty Garden Friends*

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PO Box 1700, STN CSC, Victoria, BC V8W 2Y2

[www.external.uvic.ca/gardens](http://www.external.uvic.ca/gardens) | 250-721-7014

## Borrowed Views

Margaret deWeeses

*Shakkei* is a term translated from the Japanese to mean distant views that are part of the overall garden design. Just so lucky are the gardeners who have views of Mount Baker, Mount Fuji, the Olympic Mountains, a deep cove or a lovely valley. The eye travels from the immediate garden to these stunning views and back again. It only needs to be a narrow glimpse to achieve the sensation of the beauty of the outside world, or it can be framed with favourite trees. One garden which comes to mind is the Milner Garden with the views of the Strait of Georgia framed as two large picture windows.

When I first purchased my property it was totally non-Shakkei and I liked it as my own secluded round world of trees surrounding the main feature of the large pond. I planted more trees (the deciduous kind) and groaned when the elements blew down a tree or six in the bog, their roots sucked up by the north-easterly winds, the municipality's decision to widen the road, or the neighbours clear cutting their acreage; and bit

by bit, the view has opened up. Of course, the rhododendrons and the deciduous trees are glad to have more light, the views of the starry skies have improved, and all of a sudden there are mountains to see.

Now my mountains do not compare with Mount Baker, Mount Fuji and the Olympic Mountains, but they are beautiful just the same—that violet blue of the distant mountains, the rosy pinks of the sun setting on the near mountains of Salt Spring Island and Maple Mountain, the yellows and soft greens of the Maple macrophyllum in their respective seasons and the dark greens of the ubiquitous Douglas Fir. “Ubiquitous?” you murmur, “how her tone has changed!” On Tuesday, although I have owned the book *Space & Illusion in the Japanese Garden* by Teiji Itoh for twenty-five years, the message has finally sunk in—the tree faller is going to open up that mountain view and I'll try to claim it is now part of the overall garden design.

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## University of Victoria Finnerty Garden Friends

### ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mr. Hector Bussiere  
1826 Quamichan, Victoria BC V8S 2B3  
Telephone: 592-5808  
Email: torben\_b@telus.net

Ms. Carol Dancer  
3950 Sherwood, Victoria BC V8N 4E6  
Telephone: 721-5273  
Email: dcdancer@shaw.ca

Mr. Robert Degros  
10954 Stechell Road, North Saanich BC V8L 5P2  
Telephone: 655-1003  
Email: robdegros@shaw.ca

Mr. John Gordon  
2924 Seaview Road, Victoria, B.C. V8N 1L1  
Telephone: 477-4695  
Email: john\_gordon@shaw.ca

Dr. Betty Kennedy  
101 - 1440 Beach Drive, Victoria, B.C. V8S 2N8  
Telephone: 592-2070  
Email: dekenn@telus.net

Ms. Anne Mace  
3935 Holland Avenue, Victoria BC V8Z 5K2  
Telephone: 479-7677  
Email: amace@telus.net

Ms. Eryl Morton  
1883 Hillcrest Avenue, Victoria, B.C. V8N 2R7  
Telephone: 477-0133  
Email: erylynn@shaw.ca

Mrs. Valerie Murray  
2920 Lansdowne, Victoria, B.C. V8R 3R2  
Telephone: 592-2005  
Email: vmurray@telus.net

Mr. Paul Turmel  
636 Belton Avenue, Victoria BC V9A 2Z6  
Telephone: 598-0748  
Email: oolala@shaw.ca

Mrs. Carmen Varcoe (Chair)  
5450 Old West Saanich Road, Victoria BC V8X 3X1  
Telephone: 479-7629  
Email: cmvarcoe@shaw.ca

Mr. David Whitehead  
517 Victoria, Victoria BC V8S 4M8  
Telephone: 595-7965  
Email: davewwhitehead@shaw.ca

### CURATOR

Mr. Bentley Sly, Manager, Grounds  
University of Victoria  
Box 1700 STN CSC, Victoria, B.C. V8W 2Y2  
Telephone: 721-7606  
Email: bsly@fmgt.uvic.ca

### UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

Dr. Valerie Kuehne,  
Vice-President External Relations  
University of Victoria  
P.O. Box 1700 STN CSC, Victoria, B.C. V8W 2Y2  
Telephone: 721-7014

Shirley Lyon  
UVic Finnerty Garden Friends  
Phone: 721-7014  
Email: slyon@uvic.ca

# Coffee Anyone?

Margaret deWeeses



Gardener, if you listen, listen well. Some guests from Lexington, Kentucky came to stay. After they had taken a stroll round the garden, I asked if they had seen the Kentucky Coffeetree for I was delighted to have them welcomed by a tree of their state. They had not noticed it, nor had they ever heard of it!

The tree's scientific name is *Gymnocladus dioica*, which means "naked branch." In the winter and spring it looks like a dead stalk that needs to be ripped out and deposited on the compost heap. Seemingly the French in Canada called it Chicot (the dead tree), but in very late spring the buds swell on its upper stalks which grow to be pinnate leaved branches of great beauty. It is my Cinderella tree for when fall ticks to nearly ten o'clock it goes to the ball in green and gold dress.

Large specimen trees have a rough grayish scored bark, but my tree, only fifteen years old,

has two brownish stalks for a double trunk and is about ten feet tall. The bipinnate compound leaved branchlets which drop off after the frost are still short compared to the mature width of about forty feet! The record height was recorded at eighty feet but I won't see that. The tree has long brown pods which have large seeds that were used to make coffee in the early immigrant years, although I would imagine a Tim Horton's nearby would soon have stopped such practice.

It likes the wet of the pond and provides an umbrella of light on dark rainy days. I think that in the future any more guests from Kentucky will certainly notice their state beauty. Now I need its two beautiful sisters from Asia, the Chinese Coffeetree *Gymnocladus chinensis* and the Burmese Coffeetree *Gymnocladus burmanicus* in Myanmar and watch as they all vie for the sparkling slipper.

# The Oscars at Finnerty

*Carmen Varcoe*

Since we are just over the Oscars, I thought it would be fitting to employ the same terminology for recognizing some of our star performers in Finnerty Gardens. Some plants have a brief display of bloom, of bark or of fall foliage. However, there are other plants that are imposing in their stature whatever the season.

When I think of rhododendrons that give us superb curb appeal, I always think of the large stately Rhododendron 'Mrs. Josephine Firth' in the Loderi Bed. This dowager is really the star performer of all our rhododendrons in the garden. Being a loderi it never fails to impress when in bloom with her large lax pale pink trusses heavenly scented. Even after the bloom has finished, this plant has the most amazing structure with large branches reaching down to the ground all around the major trunk. It is truly one of our best specimens of the species.

Another rhododendron that never fails to impress is 'Sir Charles Lemon'. This is the consummate foliage plant with cinnamon brown indumentum under each leaf. It does bloom and they are largish white trusses but I really think the Sir Charles can take a prize for the best foliage whatever the time of year.

Just inside the entrance gate at the Chapel we have another wonderful plant that deserves special recognition for its beautiful winter structure and then its glorious variegated foliage all displayed in a tier like fashion. This is the Cornus controversa 'Variegata' or sometimes referred to as the "wedding cake tree". Although slow growing, it is quickly becoming one of the signature plants for this area.

Alongside this choice dogwood is the imposing handkerchief tree or the Davidia involucreta. When in bloom, it never fails to elicit oohs and aahs for its large white drooping bracts. This is another plant that takes time to show its best talents and the

Davidia is now of the age when it is really showing its wow power.

Opposite the Loderi Bed is the stately looking stand of timber bamboo Phyllostachys. Whether in the depths of winter or the highs of summer, it always looks good. Thanks to the vigilance of Rhonda and now Pat, this bamboo has been kept within its bounds with careful pruning. Looking through its attractive canes into the pond makes one imagine that one has been transposed into a tropical jungle.

Magnolias abound in Finnerty, but there's one that never fails to impress me whatever the season. It is the Magnolia grandiflora in the Chapel lawn area. Its wonderfully shiny foliage always looks healthy. When it blooms in late summer, the plant looks even more stunning, with very large lemon scented blooms. Even though these magnolias took such a beating from our winds and wet snow of last year, they look remarkably plump and seem to have bounced back very quickly after such damage.

In a bed named just for itself Magnolia 'Iolanthe' is really a show stopper. This beautiful tree can be found just west of the Memorial Garden. In April it is covered in large open lax purplish pink flowers. They remind one of large water lilies, though on a tree. Along the outer periphery of the gardens near the Tree Bowl you will find a stupendous climbing rose, Rose 'Sir Cedric Morris'. It always elicits applause when in wondrous bloom in early July. At the time when the large oak limb fell under last winter's gales, the Grounds shop designed a wonderful metal structure to support this magnificent rose.

There are many other stars in Finnerty Gardens and these are only a few of the "Oscar" winners. Do walk around and check for yourself.

# Hen Happenings

Margaret deWeese



In May I became the proud parent of six balls of yellow fluff with beaks. They resided in my bathroom for one month, cosy in a large cardboard box with a heat lamp, as I read up on how to raise poultry successfully. I was amazed to learn that these six little hens would eventually produce more eggs than I could possibly eat and it became a concern as to what to do with the imagined avalanche of brown

eggs. I decided on a Bed and Breakfast, which would serve a lot of egg dishes.

Now free range chickens in a garden might be good for eliminating harmful grubs but having adopted a rescued dog from the SPCA, I feel sure that my chickens would be the ones to be eliminated. Therefore I take the garden to them in their fenced pen. Weeding now has a purpose beyond making the garden beds tidier. The weeds provide the foodstuffs my soft feathery girls crave and I am greeted with them running toward me with fluffed up feathers and squatting curtsies. Thus far they have produced two quite small brown eggs—great wonder—so, I continue buying brown farm fresh eggs for the guests.

A garden with chickens has a certain ambience. If it looks rather unkempt one can always claim the property is a farm. If it looks particularly attractive one can always point to the chickens

as the reason for the garden's healthy appearance. My vegetable garden has that wildness seldom seen in other people's vegetable gardens with their neat rows and precise delineation. Mine is a spill over of squash flowers and vines crossing with horizontal sweet peas and climbing nasturtiums. But the chickens benefit from the radishes that didn't get thinned and the cabbages with their lacy leaves, the celery which would never enjoy a ribbon. However, the hundreds of tomato plants which erupted from the 50/50 manure/compost mix with their yellow flowers never to produce a single tomato, are sadly not for my pullets as I worry about the toxicity of the tomato leaves.

Nevertheless, I have to tell you that the melon, kiwi, strawberry, and citrus leftovers from the B & B gourmet breakfasts are producing some healthy looking chickens.

*"A garden with chickens has a certain ambience"*

Thomas Baxter  
photo - Margaret deWeese.



## A Progress Report

*R. Bentley Sly,  
Grounds Curator, Finnerty Gardens*



As I write this article, February is nearly over. It is reading week at the university and finally we are beginning to feel more warmth from the sun with each passing day. Actually, the weather this winter was quite mild by comparison to last year and overall the Gardens have fared very well as a result.

The Advisory Board has been busy over the past few months working on a number of important projects. They are currently finishing up a review of the plant inventory in the Gardens so that Rhonda can compare this information with the inventory that was last taken in June of 2006. When completed, it will be entered into the university's new Facilities Asset Management Information System database where it can be tracked and updated as required. As well, Rhonda has been busy working with the Board on the evaluation of plants that appear to require replacement as well as choosing plants to replace those that were previously lost due to damage or disease. She has also been working with Pat who was assigned last year to work in Finnerty Gardens on a regular basis. He has been busy with the pruning and mulching of beds as part of a regular maintenance program that is carried out in the Gardens each winter and spring. Pat is very knowledgeable about plants and is keen to continue assisting in the enhancement of the Gardens.

Many of the improvement projects that were in the planning stages last year will be moving from the drawing board to implementation in 2008. One such project that the university and the Advisory Board are very proud to be able to present is the new Self-Guided Walking Tour brochure. It looks great, is completely in colour and provides an updated location map of all of the planting beds and a corresponding description of the plant materials in

each of those beds. A copy is being included in this newsletter. For those who would like to obtain additional copies, please contact a member of the Advisory Board. The brochure was totally developed and published in-house and we thank the university Graphics and Printing departments for their assistance with this initiative. Also, the Gardens will be putting new gates on the pergolas starting with the main entrance at the university Chapel. The gate design is being overseen by the highly regarded landscape architect, Don Vaughan of Vaughan Planning and Design. However, more updates on this and other planned enhancements will appear in future newsletters.

Also, look for a continued presence of the Finnerty Gardens in the 2008 Garden Trails brochure. It is a very attractive pamphlet that identifies a number of prominent horticultural venues on the Island and is widely distributed through Vancouver Island tourist outlets. Our special thanks go to Shirley and Rhonda for their efforts in editing the final text for the 2008 edition and for handily meeting the publishing deadline.

In closing, 2008 is expected to be an exceptionally busy year for the Grounds maintenance team at the University of Victoria. Several new faculty and administration buildings are in their final stages of construction. All the new buildings are being landscaped by this group, and promise to provide a fresh and invigorating appearance to the ever-changing face of our university campus

# An Invitation to Submit Articles for the Finnerty Gardens Newsletter

All Friends of Finnerty Gardens—including present and past members of the Advisory Board—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.

**NEWSLETTER EDITOR Sam Macey**

■ 592-1991(home) ■ e-mail: [slmacey@shaw.ca](mailto:slmacey@shaw.ca)

## Upcoming Events



### University of Victoria's Annual Plant Sale

When: Sunday, May 11, 2008 (Mother's Day!)

Where: McKinnon Gym on the UVic campus

Time: 10:00 am to 1:00 pm

Come and join us on our 30th anniversary of 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, hanging baskets, shrubs, trees, herbs, vegetables and much more.

For more information call 721-7014.



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*Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary presents the*

### 13th annual Gardening for Wildlife

– A native plant gardening sale and demonstration.

Where: 3873 Swan Lake Road

When: Saturday and Sunday, April 19 and 20, 2008

Time: 10:00 am to 3:00 pm

For more information on admission costs and presentation schedules call 479-0211 or visit the website at [www.swanlake.bc.ca](http://www.swanlake.bc.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: <http://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

Phone: 721-7014

Email: [slyon@uvic.ca](mailto:slyon@uvic.ca)

