

# University Finnerty Garden Friends



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**JULY 2006**

Dear Friends,

It seems only a very short time since I last wrote to you, but I realize that the year is almost half over—as I get older they seem to go by faster and faster!

As you will read in another report, the Sale was a huge success with over \$60,000 realized. Of course there will be expenses to deduct from the total, but it was wonderful to see the interest and the enthusiasm of the many patrons. Bill Cross and Judith Terry did a superb job organizing the sale and securing so many helpers, and were ably assisted by the many volunteers.

A special thanks must also go to the conveners of the various stalls, and to Tony James for his work in preparing the Gym for the sale. The

work of the many knowledgeable volunteers is what makes the sale so successful—people come with questions and can always find answers. The wide selection of plants is enough to tempt everyone.

Carmen and her Advisory Committee continue to work to improve the Gardens and it is wonderful that the Sale gives them money to buy those plants they have selected. If you haven't been to the Gardens since the peak of the rhododendron bloom, do go for a visit soon. Each year sees them much improved. We all owe the members of the committee a real debt of gratitude—each member brings an enormous amount of knowledge and experience to the Committee. Its membership includes some of the most expert

plants people and garden planners in Victoria.

Last newsletter, I told you that we hoped once again to reissue the Finnerty Calendar. Well, we succeeded and it is as beautiful as it has ever been. Daphne Donaldson has produced her collection of magnificent pictures, and the results are even lovelier. The price has gone up a couple of dollars, a move we regretted, but which became necessary when we hired a person to distribute the calendar to the various outlets. It still remains competitive with other calendars of the same type. I hope you will make a point of buying one or more. As you know the profits go to the Gardens.



*Finnerty Gardens*



This has been a very busy spring on Galiano. I am once again hosting several thousand rufous hummingbirds on their way north, and supporting the ones who choose to nest nearby. So far this year, I have provided them with 196 litres of syrup (1¼ cups of sugar to the litre) and they will be around for another month, although probably in diminishing numbers. The team of hummingbird banders has been here every second Monday, starting now, at 5:30 a.m. and continuing until 11 a.m. Even then, the birds are up ahead of them and have had their first feed of the day.

Many interesting facts are emerging from the program which is carried out in many places in North and South America. For example, of the hundreds of birds that have been banded here since 1999, only one has been banded anywhere else (Gabriola Island). Each year they trap birds that have been banded here on previous years. For example, on May 8, they trapped 107 birds, of which 37 were already banded. Of these, 10 were caught earlier this year, 12 in 2005, 11 in 2004, 3 in 2003, and 1 in 2000! All of the long-lived ones were females. Some birds are caught several times in one year—they are either greedy or not too bright. Most of the birds nesting in the area recognize the traps and avoid them. Then too, at this time of the year there are many flowers in the gardens and so they can get along without the feeders for short periods. I think that everyone has been surprised at the number of birds that are “repeaters.”

I hope all of you have a wonderful summer, and if you ever

do venture onto Galiano, please give me a call.

Betty Kennedy

## Childhood Lessons

Margaret deWeese

Two favourite books I loved as a child were written by Gene Stratton-Porter. One of them, entitled *Freckles*, dealt with the way the one-handed young man, cherished the woodland of the great hardwood trees: Mahogany, Black Walnut, Beech, Sweet Gum and Aspen of the woodland region of Indiana, and guarded them from poachers, and the other book, *A Girl of the Limberlost*, involved a girl who sought the delicate butterflies by escaping from her harsh life, by going into the deep woods to discover new miracles. I read those two books many times from my

city bedroom.

Then, later in life, I was blessed to have my own woodland with its treasures: Pileated Woodpeckers, herons, kingfishers, California Quail, Trillium, Calypso bulbosa, Erythronium amongst the Mahonia and Salal with tall Douglas Fir and Western Red Cedar. I don't care for housework but picking up branches and raking the paths through the woodland is not so much work as pure pleasure. We put down wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow of woodchips to make paths through the woods and on the sides of the paths planted Cyclamen coum and Anemone nervosa. My Danish friend says the woodland floors are carpeted with the white anemones. What a lovely way to light up the paths at dusk! I have planted magnolias and Japanese Acers for the mid-story trees and rhododendrons for the shrubs. There are four little doors for the fairy folk and the children when they visit, ferns by stumps filled with



Maddenii rhododendrons.

Imagine my dismay when on the four-acre adjoining lot two men on heavy machinery moved in with their chain saws and clear cut the property. Why? They want a jogging track. And this is not the only property to experience such drastic changes. The whole ambience of the area is changing as it already has in much of Southern Vancouver Island.

Now people may say Freckles was only protecting the fine hardwood trees from poachers and eventually they were to be cut down for his boss's profit sheet, and the girl of the Limberlost only collected the gossamer-winged butterflies to sell in order to help her pay for her education. This is true. But these two fictional characters revered the land which produced the trees and the insect life, the birds and the wild flowers, and would never have condoned clearcutting.

We teach by example. and I wonder how the children next door will learn to respect nature from jogging over a bare field. I guess a bare field is the closest thing they will see to a track.

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## Black Gold

*Tony James*

**Curator, Finnerty Gardens**

Mulch, compost, fertilizer, humus, topdressing, manure are all synonyms of that magic material that we in Finnerty Gardens cannot do without. Our intent is to mulch all beds at least annually with the depth dependent on the soil within that bed. In our case that varies considerably with the

areas near the ponds on heavy clay requiring a greater amount, while other beds, under the firs or oaks that have built up their own natural mulch, need less.

Sources of mulch and quality can be major problems. We are lucky in that we manufacture all our own product so that at least we know its constituents, unlike many of the products commercially sold. Our product is actually an accumulation of all grounds, yard and general non-biological waste generated on campus.

The bulk items are typically leaves in the fall and tree and shrub pruning and fallings throughout the year. Add to this sweeping from grass-mowing operations, road sweeping, pallets, surplus unpainted furniture, excess sand and gravel, stumps, lumber and anything else organic. These piles become quite massive and generally three times each year a large tub grinder is brought in to reduce them to a coarse grade material. This is windrowed to allow the decomposition process to begin. The result is compost.

The equipment to do this work can be expensive with rental rates often running at up to \$500 per hour for a number of days, making the eventual compost cost around \$25 per yard to produce. Added to this is the fact that compost making is strictly controlled by Provincial legislation as well as CRD by-laws. Run off and groundwater, leachate control and odour are the main problems that must be addressed on a continuous basis which, given the nature and scale of the material, is a difficult process.

A major issue in the compost is the high proportion of larger

ligneous material from lumber and trees. This does not decompose easily or quickly even with the addition of nitrogen. In fact it can take years to rot down entirely. Temperatures and moisture content must be constantly monitored to avoid fires and yet maintain heat for the composting process. The lack of quick decomposition is not a barrier to using the material. If it is employed as a surface mulch this is ideal as it remains longer, allows air to penetrate to the plant roots, holds moisture in the soil and stifles weed growth. As long as there has been some decomposition with temperatures reaching above 50 degrees, any weed seeds or other pathogens will also have been eliminated. This helps too when adding more mulch annually.

If mulch were to be placed straight onto the original soil without incorporation into it, severe problems would occur at the layer between the mulch and the soil, leading to anaerobic conditions and resulting in the death of the plants. Initial mulching to new areas always involves some mixing into the soils, especially in the case of the silts and clays that are common here. An example of such problems occurred on the original garden site prepared within the Ring when 18" of straight leaves were used on top of graded clay. No incorporation was done and the rhododendrons were planted directly into these leaves. Resulting decomposition reduced the medium to a few inches of a soggy mess on top of a clay layer impenetrable to air and water. Additional organic material placed on top just compounded the problem.

There are, of course, many





other materials that can be used as a form of mulch from newspapers to bark chips or any other organically based matter. In the case of Finnerty, aesthetics plays a part and with a new dark layer of material covering a bed and the weeds, the plants are set off very nicely. In the fall the heavy leaf drop from the trees is pushed well into the beds. They look a little bulky at first but eventually rot down to do the job as they would in nature. Care has to be taken that we are not proliferating any disease or pest issues from material that has not been through some composting process. The shallow rooted plants benefit most from this mulching so rhododendrons

top the list. There is some fertilizer value in the material but not enough to negate addition of a commercial product. Also, extra nitrogen must be added with insufficiently decomposed material as this process takes up nitrogen rapidly.

Because all organic matter whether in the soil or on top eventually decomposes completely, other soil amendments may need to be added to keep the soil open, especially on clays and silts. We may incorporate a coarse sand or smaller gravel to help here, but care has to be taken with the former that the proportions are not such that they make a form, a “concrete,” and compound the original soil structure problem.

The mulch is very useful for hiding the irrigation piping and yet having it readily available should repairs be needed. Also because we cannot rely on amended soil to infiltrate water and drain our soils, the beds are contoured for run off. Adding mulch slows this process because of the roughness in the material. This may be beneficial in summer but can spell doom for plants in winter. That is why our mulching is carried out in early spring, although there is then generally so much work and it can be quite a problem to get everything completed. Access may also be a concern as it is bulky material and with a 4” or more depth, equipment is necessary for efficient spreading. For us in the Gardens, this mulch is definitely black gold.



## The Ted and Mary Greig Rhododendron Walk

*Margaret deWeese*

Just as there is Finnerty Gardens inside the boundaries of the University of Victoria, there is a secret jewel set within the borders of Stanley Park in Vancouver. Between the sparkling waters of English Bay and the quiet ripples of Lost Lagoon, lies the Ted and Mary Greig Rhododendron Walk.

Flanked in the Spring by a huge colony of Great Blue Heron nests in the tall trees beside the Vancouver Parks Board Offices, the beginning of the heritage walk of such beauty for the nearby residents of high rises to savour, is

a half-hour circle walk, bordered on each side by established magnolia trees, rhododendrons, camellias and azaleas. These were donated to the park in the early seventies by the famous owners of the Royston Nursery of Vancouver Island, Ted and Mary Greig. The walk borders the Pitch and Putt golf course, separated by split cedar slab snake fencing. Beyond the incredible plantings of hostas, gunnera, rhododendrons, azaleas and specimen trees, is the verdant green of the golf course with its preserved enormous forest growth of Douglas Fir and Western Red Cedar.

Beside the walk is the elegant restaurant "The Fish House," perfect for a romantic lunch or dinner. The bird song, the butterflies and the bees all add to the restfulness of the walk, within the busy city of Vancouver, and the contrast, brings the best of both rural and urban worlds to the city.

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## UVic Plant Sale

*Judith Terry*

On the first Sunday in May the McKinnon Gym gets dressed up for the UVic Plant Sale, the popular annual event which has now been part of the UVic calendar for nearly thirty years. It is a unique occasion on campus. Instead of the sweat and tension of a ball game or anxious students labouring at their final exams, the Gym is full to overflowing with exhalations of green and growing things. The outdoors comes inside, and the very air seems different.

Over its long life, the Sale has attracted much loyalty. The volunteers come from all over the city and its outskirts as well as UVic. And with about 160 people helping, it is a huge community effort. The heavy work of protecting the Gym floor with rubber sheeting and setting up the tables is carried out on Friday morning by UVic ground staff, a number of them the expert gardeners who maintain Finnerty Gardens. Then the volunteers begin to move in the plants. Friday is characterized by stops and starts: when a truck arrives everyone is galvanized; in between there is time for a snack and a chat at the Coffee Corner with folk one has not seen since last year. By Saturday most of the plants are in place and priced, and the favourite hour of the day is the Pre-Sale for Volunteers.

This year Sale Day was doors-closed weather, showery and chilly, but the queue waiting patiently for the OFF was not noticeably shorter than usual, although there were certainly more umbrellas. At 10:00 a.m. precisely, hordes of green buggies (Thrifty's donated cast-offs) erupted into the Gym like monster beetles, and the volunteers, who had worked through Friday and Saturday, got ready for several hours of their most intense labour. There's a fair amount of noise, much earnest discussion, some queuing, generally conducted with exemplary patience and good nature.

The gross turnover continues to amaze: this year we again broke records with a total of \$60,231.31, \$8,700 more than 2005.

What is the special attraction? Well, perhaps it is the

Good Cause—the profit goes to improve Finnerty Gardens, after all—and this year that will be over \$20,000. Perhaps it is the exceptionally varied and beautiful assortment of plants, some of which are propagated from specimens in the Gardens. The Sale caters to everyone, from beginner to expert, and many of Victoria's best gardeners are available to help buyers make good choices. Perhaps it is an effect of the Sale's longevity. I look at the Magnolia Campbellii outside my kitchen window, now twenty feet high, and recall the moment when a friend behind the counter at a Sale twenty-five years ago shoved a little pot at me and said decisively that that was what I needed for my new garden.

And then, it's fun. It must be because so many volunteers come back year after year. As for the Plant Sale Committee, it has so many members of long standing that there is sometimes good-natured competition about who has been on it longest. (Last time this turned out to be twenty-seven years.) Long may the enthusiasm continue.







## Tree Ferns

Margaret deWeese

What is it about gardeners who want to grow plants which are not normally found in their climate zone? Plants in pots which grow bigger with each passing year and must be wrestled into protection for the winter months. Yes, even on Vancouver Island! Hobbyists who grow orchids usually do their gardening of these exotics indoors all year, and so are not conditioned to the back breaking job of moving heavy pots. They, in turn, worry about sun heat making the greenhouse into a toaster oven. But the gardeners who push the climate zone

and bring out their tree ferns, their tender rhododendrons, the *Maddenii* and vireyas, the scented gardenias, bougainvillea and cyclamen, these gardeners have either backs of steel or persistent backache.

I have had all the heavy pots out several times when a frost is predicted and then there is a mad scramble to put the pots back inside for another few days, until lulled into false security by the day-time sun, only to wrangle the pots outdoors again. One snowy winter I lost the hardest of the tree ferns which I gambled would be safe as I had covered their crowns with cut bracken, but they succumbed while the tender ones under glass sailed

through the cold even without indoor heat.

One day a garden visitor from New Zealand had to have her picture taken with the silver side of *Cyathea dealbata* or "Ponga" as it is called in New Zealand. She was suffused with pleasure in finding this treasure from her home island. *Cyathea dealbata*.

I, too, am permeated with satisfaction when I see the emerging croziers, be they golden, green or hairy black. Aboriginal people feel that the crozier represents life, the circle of intricate parts ready to unfold with such promise: *Cyathea cooperi crozier*.

Friends in England and Germany who have many tree ferns in pots communicate their



satisfaction with these ferns of the dinosaurs. Helga brings hers into their tiny living room in the winter by the window, so they keep healthy with light and warmth, while my friend keeps his in protective wrapping in a sheltered spot in his garden in Wimbledon.

I bought my nine varieties of tree ferns from Thimble Farms on Salt Spring Island where they are kept in a quonset hut in the winter months. Then in the spring they are brought out into that Douglas Fir and Western Red Cedar nursery to have the rain drops sparkle on the long green fronds—a prehistoric visual: *Cyathea medullaris*.

Honestly, they are worth it. Either that or move to New Zealand, Hawaii, Mexico, South America or New Caledonia! And the other thing about them, if they are given plenty of water in the summer and humusy soil, they are dead easy as well as dead weight!

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## China in Change

*Eryl Morton*

For two weeks in May, I escorted twenty intrepid travelers keen to see some of the classic gardens of China. But classic gardens were not the only wonders to behold. China is changing and changing at a pace hard to comprehend unless you see its progress with your own eyes.

Some of the statistics relating to China's booming economy are well known. An economic growth



*Shanghai – Yuyuan garden*

rate of over 9% for a number of years is fuelling the monetary stimulus needed to fund the massive structural changes taking place throughout the country. Also, as agriculture continues to become more efficient, millions of peasant farmers are moving into cities new and old to work in construction, factories, service industries and tourism—150 million more surplus farm workers will transfer to cities over the next four years seeking a share in this prosperity. In China, there is no shortage of people. New apartment buildings, 30 to 40 storeys high, designed by some of the world's best architects and town planners are sprouting up far and near in blocks so big you can't count them. Cranes are everywhere—60% of the world's cranes are in China—which Chinese refer to, jokingly, as their national bird. Building and road construction is using up 50% of the world's cement supply. Modern super

highways criss-cross the country, all beautifully landscaped to a depth either side of about 100 feet. For mile after mile there are swathes of undulating ornamental plantings in gold, green and burgundy, immaculately cropped into continuous topiaries backed by a shelter belt of cottonwood poplars planted 5 to 6 feet apart and 50 feet deep. Some cities are doubling in size in three or four years, yet it all seems so efficiently organized.

But notwithstanding all this change, much of China's cultural heritage has managed to survive the ravages of Mao's experiment with his Cultural Revolution. Although his Red Guards destroyed many ancient treasures, far more have survived and are now being brought back to their former glory with the added incentive of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Ordinary people speak much more freely of the past problems but often temper their comments with half truths, just in case a Party official might hear. These officials are still the privileged class who receive all the preferential perks from a One-Party State—like better housing and new Audi cars. However, there is a liberated air to most people's attitude to life. There is hope that a better life lies ahead and a greater freedom as a more caring, capitalist and prosperous society emerges from China's troubled past.

So it was the cultural heritage we went to see. In Beijing, we worked off our jet lag by climbing just one small but incredibly steep part of the Great Wall. We witnessed the splendors of the Forbidden City, the



extensive grounds and villas of the Summer Palace and the majestic Temple of Heaven, built in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and bigger than the Forbidden City. All were being restored and newly painted in readiness for the Olympics. We also visited an extensive garden constructed in the early 1980s for a Chinese TV series based on the classic Chinese book, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, and now maintained as a major tourist attraction.

A four-hour train journey took us south to Jinan, the city of springs, where we spent time visiting beauty spots surrounding the city and taking in arts and crafts markets. From there, we climbed by cable car to the sacred Mt. Taishan Buddhist temples before moving on to stay in the ancient town of Qufu, the home of Confucius with its maze of buildings and woodland setting containing temples, pavilions, sculptures and over 2,300 years of family tombstones.

An overnight train journey took us further south to the walled city of Nanjing on the Yangtse River and then on to Wuxi and Suzhou. These ancient towns contain some of China's



*Suzhou – Master of the Nets Garden*

finest classical gardens dating back some 500 years or so to the Ming Dynasty. Each garden we visited was distinctive in size and shape but all contained the same elements to be found in classical Chinese gardens. They are three-dimensional re-creations of natural landscapes formed around the living quarters and incorporating distinctive architectural elements of ornate buildings, bridges and covered corridors, each section having its own vista and focal points. All gardens contain the same five elements of buildings, rock mounds and sculptures, water, plants and animals and birds or ornaments of them. The overall effect is a harmonious blend of nature's beauty and human artistry contained within a confined space—a formula subsequently copied and enhanced by the Japanese in their own garden designs.

Then to finish, the tour moved on to bustling Shanghai, a huge, exciting cosmopolitan city that combines its 19<sup>th</sup> century

European colonial background with its modern, futuristic 21<sup>st</sup> century commercial development to create one of the world's major trading centres. But some of the traditional Chinese cultural treasures and gardens remain intact to remind you that this is still the Orient of old, with its own character and charm.

It was an exhilarating and fascinating tour featuring fine hotels, great food, compulsive shopping, wonderful gardens and friendly people. We will return there to tour again. But for next year we will be visiting some of Italy's finest gardens, art and architecture.

*Eryl Morton is a Victoria Garden Designer and a member of the Friends of Finnerly Gardens Advisory Board.*



*Shanghai – The view from our hotel room of the old colonial Post office roof with modern Shanghai beyond*