



University of Victoria

July 2008

# University Finnerty Garden Friends

Dear Friends,

I have just finished taking hot scones and coffee and tea out to the hummingbird banders who arrived at 5:30 this morning (it is now 7:30 am). They are following an international protocol used by banders in North and South America. They band for five hours, starting within half an hour of sunrise. The birds are trapped and then measured for length of beak, length of wing, weight, parasites, number of throat feathers and in addition with the females, whether or not they are gravid or sitting on eggs. Then, if the birds are already banded, the band number is recorded; otherwise a new band (they are very tiny) is put on their leg. The first banding session was on March 24, and they occur every second Monday. In addition to the banding, I keep an ongoing record of the amount of syrup I am mixing for them. I have 13 feeders up at the present moment, many of them in a grouping behind the house under a large rhododendron. The first banding took place here in 1997, but not on a regular basis. The banding protocol as established by the Hummingbird Monitoring Network programme has been followed now since 2004. Almost all of the birds trapped here are Rufous, although in Victoria large numbers of Anna's are also caught.

The results this year have been quite different. When the birds first arrived, there was little bloom because the weather had been so cold, so they had very large appetites. By the end of April, I had already mixed up 55 litres of syrup. Since then, the number of birds caught have been disappointingly low. And today, even though there are many birds around, most of them are trap shy, although a number have been caught several times. During the first three sessions, most of the females were gravid. This implies that most of them are nesting fairly near here, so many of the birds have established

themselves in the area around my house. These birds have learned to avoid the traps! It is a fascinating project, and we all hope that this type of study will give us information about the hummingbirds— little is really known about them at the moment. For example, the areas where they winter are not known and the same applies to their routes of migration. I feel very privileged to be part of the project.

As you are all aware, this has been a funny spring—it really has not yet settled into a steady pattern. The lateness of the spring seriously affected the Rhododendron Show held at the end of April. There were very few entries, and many of them showed frost damage. Similarly, the bloom at Finnerty Gardens has been later than usual this year. However, all plants seem to have benefited from last summer's rain, and they put on an especially voluptuous show. It was very strange here to see crocus, daffodils, tulips and many of the rhododendrons all blooming at once. The Gardens put on a great show, although I was disappointed to see that many of the beds needed weeding. We miss Rhonda's hand there. Rabbits are still somewhat of a problem, and I gather that someone stole about 100 feet of the fencing! I am sure the animals enjoyed the unexpected treats. I was very pleased to visit UVic's Plant Sale on Mothers' Day weekend. It was wonderful to see so many old friends and to find the gym full of superb plants. The sale's total was somewhat behind last year's—it is always difficult to predict what people will buy. I hope all of you will have a great summer—and be sure to visit the Gardens regularly.

Betty Kennedy  
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Finnerty Garden Friends*

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## Wake Up and Smell the Daisies

*Margaret deWeeses*

What exactly does that mean? My newly acquired SPCA rescue dog seems to instinctively know, for a more relaxed, contented visage of this particularly troubled canine I have not seen. This was all before her smart red and black dragon collar was chewed to bits, her reputation as a cat chasing escapee had grown in the neighborhood and her hole digging has left bear pit traps on her run. I have noted some dogs in wonderful gardens have been trained to keep off the beds, walk to heel and generally have a lovely disposition toward garden visitors.

But I digress—back to the meaning of the title. Life has a way of being fast-tracked, especially if you are inclined to take on more jobs than you can manage successfully. Many people spend so much time walking to and from their parking areas to work, smelling exhaust fumes of the passing or parking cars. Air conditioning and air purifiers remove office odours, except for those who crowd round the coffee machine for the aroma of that stimulant. Classrooms have an odour of their own: damp heat, sweaty sneakers, perfumed deodorants



and hair sprays and the distinctive urine odour of the classroom pet, usually a rabbit or a hamster. Construction jobs have the benefits of being outdoors but the smell of wet concrete, newly milled lumber, smells of new carpeting, and the list goes on takes away the pleasure of our olfactory sense.

And here is where gardens, parkland and the forests, rivers and oceans give us that fresh invigorating and soothing feeling of being at peace. Surfers, skiers, bike riders, hikers and kayakers may experience the thrill of extreme sports but they are also enjoying that freshness of their active world. For the less active among us, gardening is a wonderful sport which builds up body tone: wheel barrowing, shoveling, weeding, planting, pruning, shaping, admiring, mourning, photographing, marveling

but most of all, smelling the pungent scents, the delicious sweetness of roses, the bitterness of marigolds, the lavender memory smells and as for daisies, even the dogs close their eyes and smell those meadow wildflowers.

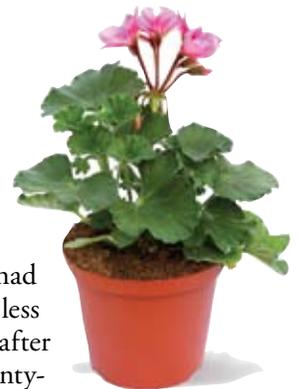
## Plant Sale 2008

*Judith Terry*

It was definitely NOT that time of year again. It was our thirtieth anniversary for one thing, but more like March, even though the calendar showed differently. And it was the second Sunday of the month, not the first, the Plant Sale having bowed its head to the demands of international sport so that UVic could host a prestigious international pre-Olympic Lawn Hockey qualifier. This it had done very successfully, and after the bleachers were cleared and Gabriola Road reopened, the Plant Sale was ready to go. Mid-May was here, and on Sunday morning there was no rain, but instead a wind so chilly that as much of the queue as would fit came inside the McKinnon Gym in advance of the 10:00 am start to

avoid perishing with cold. They could admire its eccentric, leafy, scented appearance, full if not overflowing with plants—which had been inhibited by the weather no less than the human beings. It had, after all, been the coldest April for seventy-five years.

Thirty years ago! The sale has grown and changed much since the days when Liz Wilson, wife of the former Chancellor, R.B. Wilson, pressed for the development of a garden on campus. The idea was welcomed by President Petch, whose wife, Linda,



went eagerly to work sprouting seeds in her new greenhouse for that first sale to support the garden. Indeed the idea—though not without opposition in the early days—sprouted like the seeds, took firm root and grew into Finnerly Gardens, now a treasure of the community, which demonstrates its affection by supporting the annual sale, one of the biggest plant sales around, with all profits dedicated to the gardens.

The sale now sells plants commercially grown, as well as highly-prized specimens from Finnerly Gardens themselves. There are also still a few contributions from individual gardens, the kind that were in the beginning the mainstay of the sale's offerings, and community organizations, like the local dahlia and chrysanthemum societies, play a part. Some people who were around at the very beginning are now thirty-year veterans. But it is not difficult to find twenty-year veterans either, especially amongst the sizeable committee of dedicated gardeners which now runs the sale.



What a wonderful tradition. It is a tradition which has to keep up with the times, of course. In 2008, a major development to the checkout system was completed. The UVic Bookstore, which has always been most generous with its expertise and machines, loaned us seven Point-of-Sale machines. These electronic marvels speed up the processing of cards, but last year, when we tried them out for the first time, the delicacy of the cables made it imperative to place the checkout tables against a wall, and the traffic flow was badly disrupted as a result. This year we obtained cable protectors to encase the numerous wires and prevent damage from buggies. As a result, and after considerable work and some very necessary tutoring by Gerry Currie of Network Services, and Maurice Lizin of the Bookstore, we (some of us!) were able to understand how to manage the new machines. The former traffic flow was restored, and for the first time all checkouts could deal with any method of payment.

The system works smoothly, not least because we have established similarly cordial relations with a number of departments across campus, from the Division of External Relations, our mainstay, which oversees communications, marketing and sponsorship, to Facilities Management, which not only hands over four security vests for the weekend, but whose



Grounds crew provides much-needed muscle in the conversion of the Gym. Many of the Grounds crew have become quite attached to the Plant Sale, and are very much part of the team as they greet familiar faces among the volunteers while setting up and taking down tables, chairs and signs, and mopping floors. As for Athletics and Recreation, we could not manage at all without the loan of the McKinnon, or without their help in rolling out—and rolling up again—the heavyweight rubber mats which protect the Gym's precious wood floor. The goodwill on all sides is very heartening. Many of these kind folk can be spotted shopping for plants too!

This year, the familiar rush of buggy wheels over the floor began—always an exciting moment (like the engines gathering power before take-off on the first stage of a holiday). Everything seemed as usual. But it wasn't quite. The overall take on Sunday was down—\$53,300, compared with \$64,900 in 2007—and that seemed to bear out many people's impression that customers were fewer.

Initially the drop was bound to be a bit of a disappointment, but on reflection it would be hard to imagine sustaining the dizzying increases we have most recently achieved. Our total in 2006 was \$60,231, in 2005, \$51,500, and it was only in 2004 that we topped \$50,000 for the first time. That puts this year's figure into perspective: it is a more than respectable total and will still yield around \$20,000 for the Gardens. What caused the drop is anybody's guess, from Mother's Day brunches to the price of gas and other garden sales and tours now abounding. I favour the most obvious: the generally cold state of the weather,

One thing I am sure of, it had nothing to do with lack of effort. Everyone was buzzing around with the usual enthusiasm. One of UVic's most important strategic objectives is community engagement, and there could hardly be a better example of it than the annual Plant Sale to support Finnerly Gardens.

## Garden Art

*Margaret deWeese*

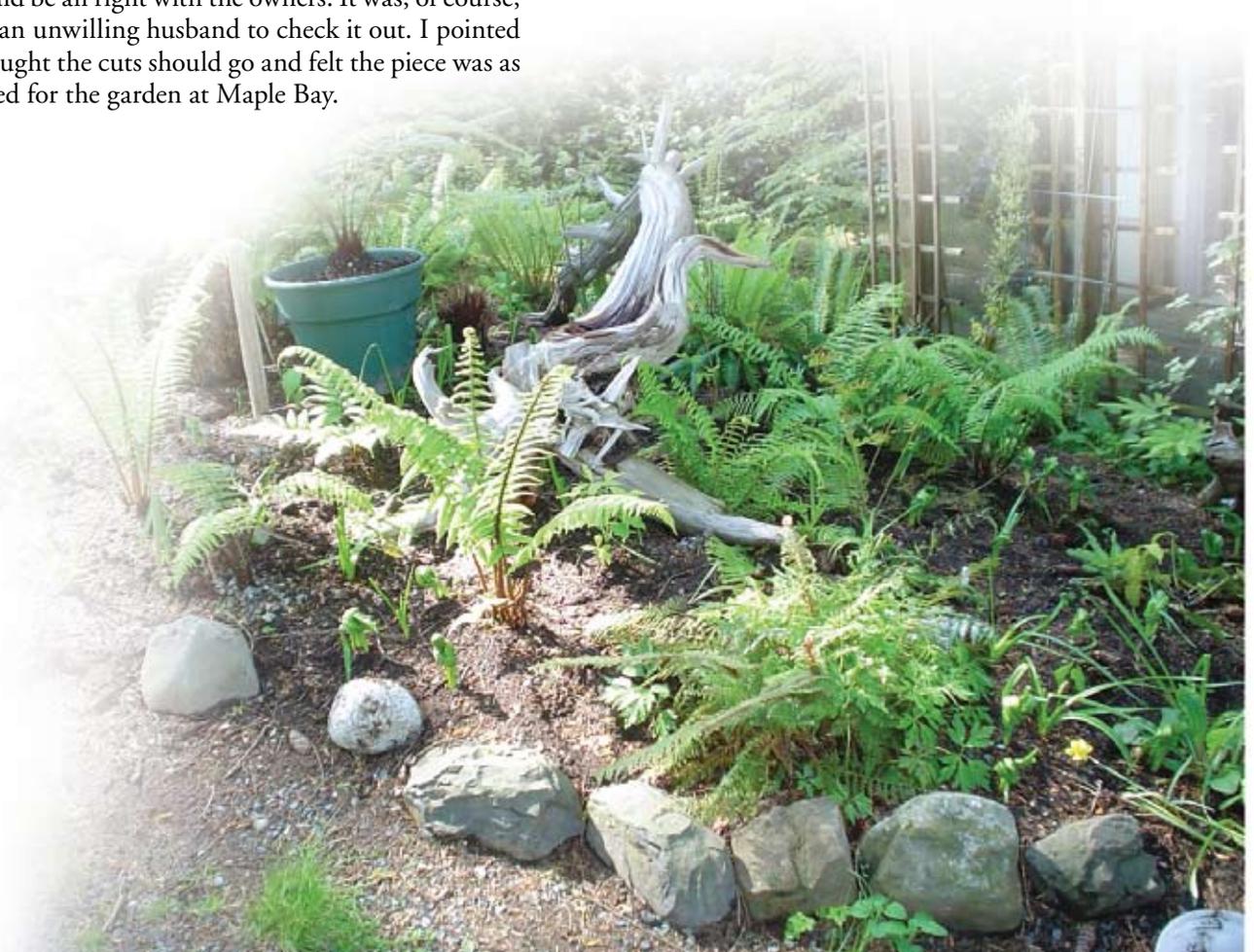
There is Garden Art and garden art. I admire people who are creative with structural art for their gardens of ziggurats, twiggery hangings, mobiles of shiny CDs, and willow arbors to pottery thises and thats. Then there are those who can afford marble statuary, bronze sundials, urns and falling water over basalt. I have to admit to a certain envy for the last item. I believe, however, the true art in a garden is the plant: its shape, its leaf structure and colour and its bloom both flower and fruit. Nevertheless, I did succumb to a piece of garden art several years ago and this is its story.

On a small magical island off Lasqueti Island with the great name of Boho, while walking the shores, I came across a fallen trunk of juniper. I returned to the cabin to announce I had found a piece of wood I would like to take home if it would be all right with the owners. It was, of course, and so I took an unwilling husband to check it out. I pointed to where I thought the cuts should go and felt the piece was as good as secured for the garden at Maple Bay.



Now, those of you who know how dense juniper wood is, will understand how heavy this piece was. It was sawn at the places indicated and left for later removal to the Gig, a retired naval tender from WWII. Later on it was announced that that piece was staying on Boho as it was impossible to move from its location. Undeterred I managed to walk it on its two front legs from side to side to the dock, a formidable feat I must say, putting the men to shame. But that was only the start. Getting it aboard the Gig, strapping it like a recumbent dragon to the deck, manoeuvring it up the dock at Frenchman's Creek to the trunk of a Honda Civic. The piece fitted like a glove with its tail tied to the car roof.

Finally at home it was unloaded right into the fern garden and I, delightedly, had my first piece of garden art.



# A Gardener's Finnerly Experience

*Rhonda L. Rose*

Finnerly Gardens is one of the places on campus where you can encounter many different experiences. As a gardener there is the maintenance part of the day to day work, the changing seasons and the many relationships created with those who visit daily as well as first-time visitors. I must also mention the relationship we have with the four-legged creatures, not necessarily a friendly relationship, and with the feathered friends who stay year round or stop by on the way to their summer or winter refuge.

The Garden is on a bus route and many students just pass by on their way to classes, some totally in their own world, never noticing you or the plants around them. I used to see a young girl coming and going to school everyday, but when I recently stopped to chat I found out that she is already finishing her degree. Where does the time go? These warm days of spring bring some of the students out from their classes into the Garden to practice their lines for a play, an instrument, or a song for a recital; a great opportunity for the gardener to experience a little culture at work. There are many who come for the quiet solitude to read or just sit and reflect. The first week of June will find the Garden full of black gowns with colourful collars to differentiate the graduating students from the many faculties on campus. When they are having their photos taken in front of the many rhododendrons and azaleas, the gardener has now taken on the role of a set director.

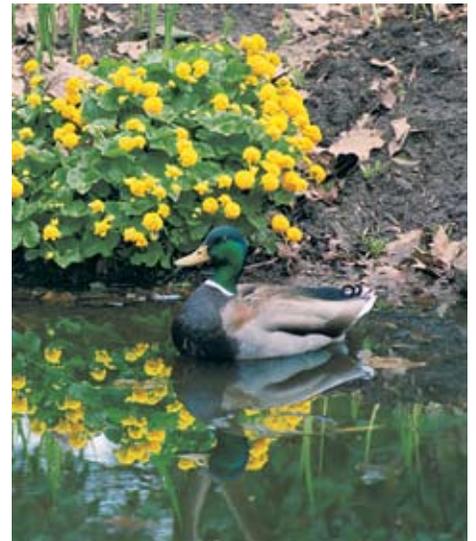
The Garden is also in the middle of the community and there are many neighbours who visit to compare notes on what they should be doing in their own gardens or whether what you are doing is even right at all. You hear about their dogs, their children and sometimes meet the grandchildren. Unfortunately you sometimes don't see a regular visitor for a week or two only to find out that they are no longer able to make their regular walk through the Garden. This news is like losing a plant: a friendship that you have nurtured is suddenly not around.

The Garden tests the gardener every day to distinguish the sound of a certain bird or the fragrance of a certain plant, something challenging to the sensory perception be it good or bad. This can involve the visual stimulation of the transforming of winter twigs to the soft vibrant foliage of spring, the fireworks display of the summer perennials, or even the fall display of dazzling autumn colour.

The Garden is a dynamic place where strangely enough a plant put in a few years ago is now a mature specimen that you can stand beside and reflect on the day it was planted. It is also a place where a winter storm can wipe out years of hard work leaving the gardener devastated and with only a blank canvas on which to continue the work. It is a place where a few can see what commonly only appears in books or slide shows.

The gardener in Finnerly has the opportunity to work with the expertise of the Advisory Board, Rhododendron Society and others to create something they can be proud to present to the world. It provides a unique opportunity that allows a gardener to work, learn and grow while facing the challenges we all meet when we work with nature.

I have moved out of Finnerly Gardens to a supervisory position, and every visit to the Garden reminds me that you can move a gardener out of the garden but you can never take the gardener out of the person.



## Magnolias: Cheery Heralds of the Spring

Robert DeGros

I love magnolias. They're cheerful and glorious and extroverted. They shout, rather boldly, that winter is over. And that warm, luxurious, sunny days lie just around the corner. We do seem to be having a little trouble getting around that corner this year. The magnolias are doing their bit, loudly trumpeting "Spring!" But old man winter doesn't seem to be listening. The recent weeks of bone-chilling winds and hailstorms have given way to a white blanket of snow. And all this is happening in Victoria on April 19th, scarcely eight weeks before the days begin to get shorter again. It's that flower count in February—too smug, we're paying for it now.

But back to the magnolias. I know a little about them. And I mean a little. Now Dorothy Calloway, who wrote *The World of Magnolias*, she knows a lot about them. And so, I dip into that lovely book, and others, when I need to know more. I tend to think of magnolias in three groups: the evergreen magnolias, the various star and saucer flowered magnolias—which are typically small to medium size and readily available, and the larger deciduous magnolias more often found in parks and arboretums.

The evergreen magnolias, mainly cultivars of *Magnolia grandiflora*, are lush, tropical looking plants whose large and lustrous, deep green leaves combine nicely with palms, bamboos and choisya. I would recommend buying a named cultivar in order to ensure good form, flowering and hardiness. Both "Victoria" and "Edith Bogue" are good sturdy, reliable forms. The variety "D.D. Blanshard" has the additional bonus of a pronounced russet-coloured indumentum on the undersides of the leaves. Very handsome indeed. And the huge, lemon-scented flowers of the evergreen magnolias are a real treat, especially if picked and taken indoors where they can easily fill a whole house with their exotic fragrance. Contrary to the book lore, I have found that these trees will withstand strong winds without damage, and they are quite tolerant of drought. The big enemy is snowload—resulting in broken limbs. A bit devastating at first, they usually recover thanks to their vigorous constitution.



Less vigorous, but still lovely, is the more dwarf "Little Gem". This is a very useful tree for espaliering, provided that the wall or fence is warm and sunny and protected from harsh winter winds. I have also seen the full-size evergreen magnolia used as an espalier; unusual but effective, and no doubt requiring considerable pruning, it was cloaking the entire front wall of an old three story character house but for the doors, windows and verandah—rather a courageous experiment and perhaps not for everyone, but very beautiful.

The star and saucer flowering magnolias come in a great variety of shapes and sizes. My personal favorite is the saucer magnolia *Magnolia soulangeana*. Typically medium to large in size, they don't get there in any great hurry, especially in Victoria where dry soils and strong winds have a stunting effect, so they are often suitable for smaller gardens. As they mature, the branching habit becomes spreading and graceful—lovely. As with other magnolias they don't exactly light up the world with fall colours but they do carry very large and pretty flower buds all winter—like pussy willows on steroids. There are many varieties to choose from. "San Jose" has nice pink-white flowers and develops a pleasant shape as it ages. "Caerhay's Belle" has enormous, light pink flowers, though a stiffer, upright form. The huge buds, as they swell and break open, are a sight to see. "Yellow Bird" has a strong growing upright form with amazingly deep yellow flowers.

*Magnolia sieboldii* is a later blooming species with fragrant, white, cup-shaped flowers. The leaves are quite rounded and held on wide-spreading branches. A pleasing contrast to other foliage in the garden. Nice with hostas.

The true star magnolia *Magnolia stellata* is very small growing, almost bonsai-ish in shape. For larger star flowering magnolias, "Merrill" is a lovely choice—multi-stemmed with beautiful,

lush foliage, and often tinged with a bit of purple. And for purple-pink star flowers there is “Leonard Messel” a small to medium-size tree, also with handsome foliage and form. The colour is quite strong and combines well with rhodo “PJM”, heathers, narcissus and the like.

There are so many others deserving of mention. Of the last group—the park or large garden-scale trees, a good example would be *Magnolia hypoleuca*. I have seen it in the front garden of a house in Vancouver, a garden neither large nor park-like, but with a fantastic, tropical-jungle character provided by

the overhanging canopy of extremely large leaves that this species carries. And creamy, fragrant, early-summer blooming flowers. Some of these more exotic species of magnolia will take a while before they decide to start flowering, but they are well worth the wait.

A last note: Magnolias will tolerate heavy soils but have fairly delicate root systems and don't like to be moved. Don't be surprised if a newly-planted tree sulks and refuses to flower or grow much for a couple of years. Just supply TLC, compost, liquid transplanter—and patience.

## No Honour Among Thieves

*Margaret deWeese*

The gardening world is not immune to theft. There used to be a joke that all gardeners were thieves carrying small scissors or secateurs in their handbags or back packs. I don't mean that kind of theft; I mean the kind where the plant is actually dug up and taken away to be used in another space or worse. Before I moved into my present place I started planting several small acer palmatum trees but, sadly, I found them missing a week or so later. I rationalized that because there was no house someone might have thought they were just pretty trees which would look good in their landscaping. However, it wasn't until I peered into the pond one day weeks later that I saw submerged reddish spots and realized that the trees had been vandalized and thrown into the water. That makes me mad for it is deliberately drowning friends.



Public gardens and nurseries are subject to more than their share of thievery. I remember Island Specialty Nursery had an unusual acer growing tall and wide in the field which Don MacWatt used for grafting. When it disappeared, leaving a large hole in the ground and truck marks in the earth, Don took a previously taken photograph of the tree to the

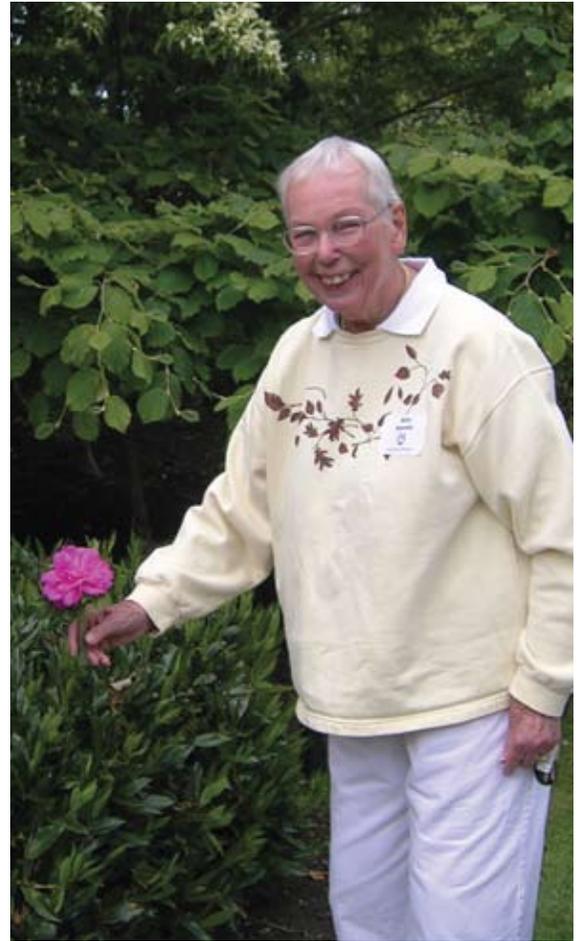
newspaper with the caption “Have you seen this tree?” It was recovered from a new garden in Crofton days later as neighbours recognized the tree from the photograph.

People need a plant guard, be it in the form of a fence, a dog or even a goose or rooster. Twenty-three years ago my friend Ann, living with her husband and a goose who was in love with their Volvo, had their house broken into and Ann's heirloom jewelry was taken. How the thieves bypassed the goose was a mystery as he used to attack Ann as soon as she stepped from the Volvo. Once Ann had managed to reach the safety of the house, the goose would court the chrome bumper. Of course, Ann was devastated to have lost her mother's exquisite pieces. To help compensate for her loss, I gave her a piece which had been passed down to me.

Thank goodness I did, because a few years later our house was broken into and my family jewelry was stolen. The odd thing was that our rooster was inside the house when we came home. Days later the thief was apprehended in a stolen vehicle, and all that was left of my treasures was the gold Maltese Cross pendant, missing the diamond which had been pried out of its setting. In court the thief told the story of being attacked by a shrieking rooster as he broke into the house and that he had finally shut the rooster inside as he left with the jewelry. Today, sitting atop the playhouse, is a weathervane of our little rooster wearing a gold medal for bravery. And twenty-three years later my friend gave me back, a brown velvet pouch with the even more precious brooch for me to pass on to one of my children or grandchild.



*Mrs. Iris Wallner and family attending a dedication to Tony Wallner for his generosity to the Finnerty Gardens.*



*Dr. Betty Kennedy holding a “Betty Kennedy Rose” named in her honour by Robin Dening in recognition of her outstanding support to the Finnerty Gardens.*

## 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**

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