



University
of Victoria

University Finnerty Garden Friends

July 2010

Dear Friends, first of all, I hope that many of you went to the UVic Plant Sale. It was a great success and the funds raised will enable the Advisory Committee to do further work in the Gardens. We all owe the hard working Plant Sale committee a great vote of thanks for their effort and congratulate them on their success. A feature this year was the fine display of plants from the Finnerty Gardens. It is wonderful that we are now able to supply so many plants in the perennial section.

This spring has been a wonderful one for rhododendrons—I suppose as a result of the very mild winter and the slow approach to summer, which has enabled the plants to hold onto their blooms for quite a period. I hope you were able to visit the Gardens this spring and enjoy their beauty. Whenever I visit the Gardens, I am always happy to see so many people walking in them. A new development in the area not far from the main entrance to the university is the establishment of a stumpery. Stumps were collected from other parts of the Gardens and moved, together with some stocks, to an area which was undeveloped. This new area is now being planted with a collection of native plants and some others particularly suited to the natural setting. Paths have been made through it and a bench will be placed there. Another area undergoing renovation is the

alpine area where some old heathers have been removed.

We were all saddened this month to learn of the death of Ian McTaggart Cowan. He was one of the founders of the Gardens and contributed many plants. We benefitted greatly from his knowledge. He ran the Plant Sale successfully for a number of years when it was held in the Old Gym and staffed the plant advice table for many more years. I shall miss him and so will many others. He was a wonderful man who gave freely of his time and knowledge.

On Galiano, the hummingbirds have finally returned. I thought they were late last year, but this year they were even later, and were slow to arrive in numbers. They are now eating 4–5 litres of syrup a day and it is exciting to watch them as they zip around the garden and fill the air around the feeders. We should see the arrival of juveniles very shortly. The rufous hummingbirds are not with us long—they will almost all be gone by the end of June, and have already consumed about 160 litres of syrup.

I hope you all enjoy a good summer, and thanks to all of you for your interest and support.

Betty Kennedy



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Photo: Gary McKinstry

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A Report From Our Curator

R. Bentley Sly

Good afternoon Friends, as I begin to write this article, I find it hard to believe that it has been over two years since I last had the opportunity to contribute an article to the newsletter. Much has transpired since that time, of course, both in the Gardens and around the university campus. In the Gardens, new entry gates by the University Chapel were installed, the peony bed was added and the Kreiss Family Rhododendron collection in Sooke was largely relocated to what is now the West Coast bed, to name but a few. UVic Grounds staff were a major force behind the move and deserve our continued recognition for their outstanding contribution to the success of this initiative. What a spectacular addition the new collection has made to the overall presentation of our facility. We cannot thank the Kreiss family enough for their outstanding donation. It will continue to provide seasonal viewing pleasure to both the university and horticultural communities for many years to come.

The work of the Friends of Finnerty Gardens Advisory Board, however, is apparently not over yet. Board members, under the guiding baton of Chair, Carmen Varcoe, are continuing to develop new ideas on how to enhance the overall appeal through plant diversity and presentation. The new stumpery bed with its focus on ferns is just about complete and an extensive makeover of the Alpine bed is set to begin sometime in the near future. Plans for this project are currently being finalized and the ideas were flying fast and furious at the last Board meeting, so I expect it will be impressive once completed. Of course, all of these improvements and enhancements would not be possible without the untold efforts of the Plant Sale Committee et al and the generous donations made by individual members from within the Friends membership. We are all grateful and thank them for their continued support.

Around the University of Victoria campus, change is still very much in the wind. Construction of the six new faculty and administration buildings that began three years ago is now complete and \$43 million in federal and provincial stimulus funding is being invested into upgrading six of the oldest faculty buildings. Work on these projects is expected to be completed in 2011, but the value in terms of the enhanced teaching, learning and researching opportunity at UVic will be felt for many decades to come. Development plans on the Athletics and Recreation side of campus are also very much on the horizon. Construction of a new sand-based soccer pitch on the west side of Wallace rugby field will commence shortly, and architectural drawings for a new, \$60 million state-of-the-art sport and education complex on the corner of Gabriola and McKenzie Roads, are being finalized. Construction is expected to commence in the near future.

UVic Plant Sale 2010

Judith Terry

Tradition has it that the first words spoken on the first day of the month should be “Hares and Rabbits!” The UVic Plant Sale this year was on 2 May, but the old saw was no less apt for being a day late. UVic’s bunnies have become national news, and a never-ending source of letters to the *Times Colonist*, some wonderfully dotty, some wrathful, and just a few demonstrating common (should that be uncommon?) sense. Thank goodness the university is developing a rabbit management plan. (For up-to-date information about the university’s approach on this issue, visit www.uvic.ca/rabbits.) It is unlikely to please everyone, so highly charged is the issue, but a clearly articulated statement by UVic deserves to bring some calm to the conflict and encourage goodwill.

No bunnies marched on the Plant Sale, although they must have been sorely tempted, sensing the green goodies within the gym. It is a relief that Finnerty Gardens does not suffer more from their depredations, but a wire fence and rugged determination by the gardeners to cover up bare spaces, are a great help. Certainly our customers would not realize, from the wonderful number of plants grown in and propagated from the Gardens this year for the Plant Sale, the number of four-footed problems that have to be dealt with. The focus upon plants from the Gardens was the result of a special effort by the Advisory Committee of the UVic Finnerty Garden Friends, and by the garden staff themselves. For the first time there was a large stall devoted entirely to UVic plants (differentiated by pale green pot labels instead of the usual white). This development spotlights one of the unique aspects of the sale. Finnerty Gardens belong to the Greater Victoria community, whose share in them is now increased by the possibility of having a little bit of the Gardens in their own backyard. It is an initiative entirely in keeping with the guiding principle of the original plan laid out for the Gordon Head campus: that in keeping with Victoria’s reputation as a garden city, landscaping, rather than architecture, should provide unity of design for the university.

What is particularly striking is the pleasure and pride the grounds staff responsible for the Gardens have taken in expanding the number of Finnerty Gardens plants for sale. That speaks well for the continuing success of the scheme. Should you fancy something from the Gardens next year, look out for *Tibouchinas*—which go out the doors in great numbers, very cheaply—scented *Geraniums* and *Hostas*. This year one of the first buyers on Sunday was ecstatic to find a bamboo he had long been searching for. Timber bamboo is so hard to find that a small plant can cost \$100. It is slow-growing, but

in ten years will have stems 3–4 inches across and be over 40-foot high. The four specimens for sale, culled from spots in the Gardens where they were encroaching on paths, about ten feet tall and bargain-priced at \$65 each, sold in the first half-hour, buyers standing guard over their prospective purchases until shipment could be sorted out.

Other recent innovations continue. Price tags are still recycled: washing and drying takes place in the summer, followed by a sorting bee in January. After five or six years of this economy, a certain brittleness in the plastic shows up, and also the upward direction in prices: \$1.00 or \$1.50 labels now go almost unused, and like pennies in the purse, they just serve to recall days long ago. Electronic point-of-sale machines no longer faze the volunteers, especially since the Bookstore keeps us abreast of improvements, and delicate cables are protected in neat layouts. There is no need for nostalgia for the lowly shoe-box. It is still in use.

That invaluable commodity, manure, was once more available this year, thanks to the Victoria Riding for the Disabled Association (VRDA). After last year's success, the number of bags was doubled, the tiresome task of filling them generously undertaken by the Rotary Club of Sidney. VRDA sold out all 200 after an hour and a half, and garnered new supporters for their organization. This, mind you, is really good poop: three-years old and composted. Even those with sensitive noses were persuaded to buy. More next year!

The weather on sale day does not deserve to be mentioned. Aeons ago, sale days were so hot that all the gym doors had to be flung wide, and even then we sweltered. Alas, letting in the early queue to shelter from the chilly wind is now becoming the tradition. In total about a thousand people pass through the doors (we have not yet used a clicker), and this year, for the first time, we welcomed a busload of forty shoppers who came all the way from Comox.

Regular customers, of whom we have a good number, know not to trip over the rubber mats laid to protect the gym floor. Laying the mats is a heavy task, but so is the sealing of the seams with duct tape, yards of which must be

used in the interests of safety. This year a single indefatigable first-time volunteer worked early on the job, and managed to complete it with neat efficiency ahead of the carts rolling in to offload plants. It was a huge improvement and maybe he will be tempted to do a repeat performance if we offer a special pair of knee-pads.

Another much-valued contribution to the success of the sale is provided by two or three members of the current graduating class of Master Gardeners, who man a table by the Coffee Corner called Garden Advice. Unexpected questions are the pleasure and bane of all the volunteers, of course, and fundamental to selling: Shade or sun? Deciduous? Tender? Invasive? Drought-resistant? The most notable of 2010 was "Have you any marijuana plants?" We couldn't oblige, but the question did set us wondering about the potential effect of marijuana leaves on the digestion of our four-footed nibblers, deer and rabbits alike.

Gross receipts for this sale were just a rabbit's whisker (\$46) above those for 2009, and thus the second-highest ever (\$59,129): cause for celebration, and a sure sign, in this still very uncertain financial climate, that gardens are lovable things and that our gigantic Plant Sale helps to keep them that way.



Our Beautiful Skunk Cabbage

M.J. Harvey

One of the truly great plants of British Columbia is the skunk cabbage, *Lysichiton americanum*. It got its rather insulting common name by accident. This came about because early explorers on the east coast of North America had discovered an aroid plant in swamps from Nova Scotia to Georgia with small, ground-hugging brown and greenish striped flowers that gave off a really bad smell of putrid flesh.

The smell is actually useful to the plant because when it flowers in very early spring there is a shortage of pollinating insects. The fake carrion-type of smell it gives off attracts flies, which are highly mobile strong fliers, to distribute the pollen. It is of course pure deception and yes, plants do tell lies. To ensure a good volatilization of the, ahem, perfume, the spadix heats up by a biochemical reaction. This heat will also melt any snow covering the inflorescence.

Having discovered a black and white striped animal in the same region, European explorers badly transliterated the Abnaki name as “skunk” and putting two and two together called the plant “skunk cabbage”—*Symplocarpus foetidus*.

On the west coast, from Alaska to California, is an unrelated (apart from being another aroid) swamp plant but, remembering the east coast species, the early explorers gave it the knee-jerk name of western skunk cabbage. “What is in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” Oh yeah! Are we affected by a name? You bet! Many people would grow it if it had a more appealing name.

The problem with the name skunk cabbage is that it is instantly memorable. When telling someone what it is you don’t have to repeat it. I once wrote a joke article for the Hardy Plant Group proposing that the name should be changed to “marsh candles”. This is possibly a better name but of course was a non-starter.

By contrast, the genus name is charming. *Lysichiton* is from Greek *lysis*, shedding or spreading, and *chiton*, cloak. I like to think of the plant as a Walter Raleigh type, gallantly throwing its yellow cloak, the spathe, in front of the woodland fairies, naiads no doubt, to prevent their feet getting muddy. Incidentally, I looked up the name derivation in the Dictionary of Plant Names by Allen Coombes—we were at Kew together.

Having spent 27 years on the East Coast I am familiar with the eastern skunk cabbage and I can tell you that when I came here I was very impressed by the west coast plants—favourably impressed I must emphasize. It is a much more statuesque, garden-friendly species. This opinion is borne out by its reception on other continents. Most of the great estates in the UK have it and are proud of it. I have also seen it used effectively in New Zealand, whose damp climate suits it better than Australia, excepting Tasmania. But if you were born in British Columbia, I know that you are reading this with an expression of disgust or disbelief on your face. Like our musicians, plants have to go elsewhere to get recognition.



“What is in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

Oh yeah! Are we affected by a name? You bet! Many people would grow it if it had a more appealing name.

And the smell. It is nothing like the east coast species—very mild. I have had friends with dogs that smelled worse—the dogs, not the friends. The reason? The western plant is pollinated by mosquitoes. Mosquitoes are attracted by carbon dioxide and slightly sweaty body-odours, not dead deer. But a skunk cabbage is a skunk cabbage is a skunk cabbage—don't expect any British Columbian to approve.

But grace is at hand. There is another species, very closely related, very similar, smaller overall and with pure white flowers. Look west—way, way, west—to eastern Siberia and northern Japan, especially along streams running off the mountain wilderness and volcanoes of the Kamchatka Peninsula—one of the great under visited places on Earth. This is *L. camtschatcensis* and my copy of Phillips and Rix Perennials says “Flowers sweetly scented”.

Now I have been accused of having a one-track mind; being a geneticist I immediately want to make the hybrid. In fact, the hybrid is already well known since it crops up spontaneously where the two species are cultivated together. For instance, on a Magnolia Society trip my wife and I were shown the hybrid at Chyverton in Cornwall by the owners. The two species had been planted by the stream at least a century ago and the hybrids stood out of the shallow stream bed as slightly taller plants with intermediate cream-coloured spathes.

At the time we lived in Sooke with the Veitch Creek running across the property. We had the native yellow plants by the hundreds. To make hybrids the problem was thus to get the white one. Seedlings, available at Fraser's Thimble Farm, would take several years to flower. Fortunately, one of our local expert gardeners, Carmen Varcoe, had the white species growing in her garden and was willing to allow me to get pollen from it and also to use it as a seed source. I ended up attempting reciprocal crosses: putting pollen of the yellow species on stigmas of the white one, and white pollen on yellow stigmas.

Readers should understand that making hybrids is a very speculative enterprise. The chances of ending up with hybrid seedlings are low. Normal tricks in making hybrids involve bringing the plants into an insect-free greenhouse and removing the stamens before any pollen is shed. These lessen the chance of self-pollination. In this case, neither was possible: the rhizomes are attached to enormous masses of roots held down by a high-suction swamp; and the individual unit flowers are tiny things compressed together on the spadix with the anthers hidden below the surface.

I ended up taking an unopened spathe of *americanum* and

smearing pollen of *camtschatcense* on the projecting tiny knobs of the stigmas. I covered the whole thing with a paper bag secured with a rubber band. The white flowers in Carmen's garden were treated in a similar but reciprocal manner. After about ten days the anthers on the yellow flowers burst out and shed surprisingly large amounts of pollen which blew about and, of course, covered the previously pollinated stigmas. What had resulted? I had no idea—I was just winging it. This is “Hail Mary” hybridization.

Luck, I think, was on my side. Apparently the flowers mature the stigmas first (protogyny), the pollen grows down the style and fertilizes the egg. After this has happened, the pollen is shed but by then it is too late to result in self-pollination. But I was not to know this for at least six years, when the first seedlings flowered. So, making hybrids is a form of gambling, but at least it is cheaper than the casino.

In 2000 I got several dozen seeds, stratified them over winter in damp peaty soil and got good but irregular germination in 2001. Unfortunately, there are no leaf characteristics to detect whether they were hybrid or selfed seedlings so I just kept on growing them.

I donated seedlings from Carmen's *camtschatcensis* to Hatley, Finnerty and Abkhazi gardens. The idea being that the plants would look good if they were hybrids, but if they were not hybrids they would still look good because they would be white. The Abkhazi plant died but several at Finnerty were planted by Rhonda Rose on the far side of the long pond at the water's edge, and have done magnificently. Go see them in spring. The flowers are pretty much white so I was afraid they were pure *camtschatcensis* but their size is so huge that they are probably hybrids.

Plants from the Sooke yellow plant I variously sold, gave away or planted alongside the Veitch Creek. The property was sold before they flowered so what resulted is not known. I saved one plant for our new garden where it is in the corner of a small pond but has not flowered yet.

Anyone brave enough to risk opprobrium by planting a skunk cabbage needs a damp spot although I have thought of sinking a half barrel or a plastic tub in the ground to maintain a local wet habitat. Bear in mind that these are large plants whose leaves grow to over a metre long by late summer. So you either make it a feature plant of part of your garden, or you hide it away in a corner. Be bold—think “beautiful marsh candles”.

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Finnerty's New Stumpery

Anne Mace

A stroll through Finnerty Gardens can be a magical journey. Soft mossy paths guide you under a ceiling of gnarled Garry Oaks and towering Douglas Fir. Magnificent rhododendrons, some with huge leaves and mammoth flower clusters would look at home in the jungle. Dense clumps of our beautiful native sword fern surround you. Lingering beside the exotic giant timber bamboo, a glimpse of the pond beyond can take you to another world.

Walking through this wonderful mix of luscious vegetation leads me, in some convoluted way, to wondering if a stumpery would be an appropriate addition to this garden.

The idea took me to Google where I was amazed to discover that stumperies have been around since the 19th century and it seems they have now become the oldest newest thing in gardening! Highgrove, Prince Charles' stumpery, is well known. In 2006, the Morris Arboretum at the University of Pennsylvania installed a stumpery and hardy fern garden. In the Pacific Northwest, Pat and Walt Riehl have recently developed a stumpery on their large woodland property on Vashon Island and The Hardy Fern Foundation has built a Victorian fern stumpery within the grounds of the Rhododendron Species Foundation Garden at Weyerhaeuser Campus in Seattle.

The Advisory Board, always open to new ideas, agreed to undertake the adventure. Rhonda Rose, our intrepid Supervisor of Horticulture for the university, showed us an underutilized area that could easily be accessed by the required machinery. The underbrush has been cleared (revealing an intriguing Garry Oak) and mulch has been applied. We plotted the placement of paths, stumps and irrigation. Amazingly, there are stumps available on campus! A contingent of eager and able-bodied grounds workers wrestled the stumps in place with enthusiasm and vision. Rhonda has found a few large rhododendrons to provide a back drop and set the mood.

Of course, the Advisory Board are now eagerly composing lists of choice ferns and companions to complete the scene: a grove of evergreen *Dryopteris Wallichiana*, huge deepwoods *Woodwardia*, tall and elegant *Osmunda regalis*, prehistoric looking *Dryopteris sieboldii*, add some *Cypripedium*, a carpet of *Adiantum venustum*, vines twining and climbing up and around the fantastic oak ... perhaps a rustic bench will be waiting for you to rest a moment and enjoy the transformation.

P.S. In the interim, the first stage of planting took place recently on a beautiful spring morning. To the delight of garden visitors, we placed over 150 ferns plus many companion plants. We were immediately rewarded with the look and feel of an ancient Pacific North West forest!



An Invitation

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 500–1000 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.

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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.

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