

# University Finnerty Garden Friends



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## OCTOBER 2006

Dear Friends,

When I typed in the date, I realized that the summer holidays for schools and the University are just about over and the regular fall work begins. On Galiano, it has been a trying two months. The forest fire hazard has been extreme for almost the entire period, and that is always a great worry with thousands of visitors on the island. Then we had the forest fire, and we were extremely lucky that the strong north wind which had driven it out of control dropped so the firefighters were able to make some headway. There were over 200 firefighters working on the blaze, in addition to the two Mars water bombers and numerous helicopters. For all of one day, a Mars bomber flew very low over my house every 7 minutes. At one time, the hydro lines from the mainland to Vancouver Island were in jeopardy, so every effort was being made to contain the blaze.

Over 100 people were evacuated from their homes and put up in various places on the island. Fortunately, no houses were lost and all residents returned safely to their homes in a couple of days. The experience made us all realize how vulnerable those who live surrounded by a forest are in the case of fire. The fire hazard has been particularly bad this year as

we have had only 11 mm. of rain since June 12! The forests are tinder dry and even the native vegetation (e.g. salal) is dying. There is rain predicted for next week, and I certainly hope it comes.

The hummingbird count is over for this year, and the numbers appear to be down all over Vancouver Island. There was an early build up of birds passing through, but the peak numbers of previous years did not materialize. Over the course of the spring and early summer, I fed them 204 litres of syrup, mixing up the first batch on March 10 and the last on June 24. Almost 30% of those currently trapped had been banded earlier this year or in previous years at my home. The oldest bird was first banded here in 2000 and has been caught at my home three times in the intervening years.

There have been a number of changes at the Finnerty Gardens. Tony James, who has been Curator of the Gardens for at least 20 years, has retired. We will all miss him, since he took a great interest in the Gardens and supported the Advisory Committee in all its work. This year, the Gardens have suffered a great deal of damage from rabbits and deer. The rabbits are a particularly serious problem because they kill shrubs by stripping the bark off at ground level. As a result, the decision was

made to fence the Gardens, and to gate the entrances. Visitors will be asked to make sure that the gates are closed when they pass through them. We all regret this step, but damage caused by the animals makes it necessary.

The Finnerty Garden Calendar for 2007 is now ready and is very lovely. Do buy some for yourself and for gifts. It is available at the University Bookstore and at many retail outlets in town. Daphne Donaldson's photographs are again featured, and she has done a wonderful job. Her love for the Gardens shows in her sensitive and beautiful compositions.

*Betty Kennedy*

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## The Garden Larder

*Margaret deWeese*

Somehow, and it is probably because I have never had to go hungry, I cannot get excited about watering a beet compared to a peony. But, nevertheless, the garden is a larder for many.

The muskrats have eaten all the water lily buds this summer and they may be seen on the turtle raft at dusk, munching their way through the pseudacorus iris



like elongated corn on the cob. The turtles enjoy the tadpoles, pond larvae and the dragonfly nymphs while the adult dragonflies eat the mosquitoes. We are quite free of those pesky insects which enjoy the blood which they consider is stored for them in our temperature controlled larder bodies. The deer—thank goodness, now on the right side of the fence—graze quietly on the wild briar and the wild cherry.

But, it is in the garden itself where the biggest groups eat and these groups are the birds.

From the tiny hatchlings, whose mothers diligently pull worms from the freshly watered

areas round the rhododendrons to the California Quail, who are constantly in search of grubs and other delicious morsels, and sound their alarm calls at the slightest noise, their huge families bob and trail looking for food. And when they are satiated for the moment, they take refuge from the sun, in the shade of half a dozen rhododendrons, dusting themselves in the composty soil I have spread round the trunks.

The Sakatoon and the holly trees are filled with whirring and chirring as beaks grab for the berries and wings steady their excited and precarious stances on the branches as they stretch

just a little further for the plump ones, not dissimilar to when I was a child and I used to reach for cherries in my neighbour's tree.

As this is all nature's bounteous larder, I am not minded with its disappearance, for it feeds our diverse friends and gives us great amusement and pleasure.



# KILDONAN: The Albert DeMezey Memorial Garden

*M. Paul Turmel*

This Samuel Maclure designed property—located at 931 Foul Bay Road, Oak Bay, and named for the builder's former home in Winnepeg—was purchased and restored following WWII, in 1946, by Hungarian Count Albert DeMezey. There he celebrated his love of plants, creating a unique collection of rhododendrons by cross breeding and seed collection as well as a fine assemblage of rock and alpine plants (especially Lewisias). He was a life member of the Victoria Rhododendron Society, as well as The Vancouver Island Rock and Alpine Society. He became a friend and mentor to many garden enthusiasts most famously to Peggy Abkhazi and some of the rhododendrons in her garden came originally as his cuttings. He even named one of his "Rhodo" crosses "Peggy Abkhazi". In 1988 Count DeMezey turned his property over to the Abbeyfield Society to be used as a retirement home. The property is home to a splendid collection of mature trees, many of which would have originated prior to Albert's arrival. Examples of this are: Garry Oak (native) Cedars-Himalayan and Atlas. With Albert's arrival The Chinese Cedar, and Spanish Fir take root.

With years of high maintenance costs, water restrictions

and local drought spells this horticultural and historical gem of a garden was at risk. When the situation came to the attention of the Oak Bay Heritage Foundation, a project to save the gardens was initiated. A call went out for help to assist in the preservation of this special and unique garden site. As a result, we now have the Kildonan Garden Volunteers (KGV).

"KGV" is a group of about 12 men and women who give of their time on Saturday and Wednesday mornings throughout the year to help in restoring and preserving a very special woodland setting. Our Motto is: "Do no harm to the garden." With money raised from garden tours and other events, a hazard tree assessment was made primarily of Garry Oaks, and the dangerous trees and unsafe branches were removed.

Next came the removal of unsuitable plant material such as noxious weeds, which is ongoing. Pathways are being repaired as needed, and rerouting is undertaken if necessary.

An on-site compost facility has been developed to process all our vegetative garden waste. This has provided a source of organic matter to use on the property for top dressing and anywhere "Black Gold" is needed. This activity received a boost with the donation by one of our members of a powered shredder/chipper.

Ongoing repair and upgrade to a deficient irrigation system is perhaps the most challenging aspect of our activities. We also have a program to move plants that are asking for a different location, and we have developed a small nursery area being used to bring on rooted rhodo cuttings as well as appropriate donated plant

material. In addition, a photo inventory of rhododendrons as they have bloomed has been made to be used in the identifying and labeling of plants. The possibilities seem endless.

Though the Garden is private, visitors are welcome when garden volunteers are on site, but Wednesday and Saturday 9am to 12 noon only please.

Visitors should park on Foul Bay Road.

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## All We Need is a Jack

*Margaret deWeese*

When my grandson came to visit I showed him the three *Pyracantha* bushes, shaped into a dragon. The topiary dragon was covered in white flowers and indeed looked rather benign. I told my grandson, aged about three, that when the dragon became angry he also became red and that I would find a picture to show him the red-berried bushes. Later on, he took my hand to go outside again, but first he whispered: "Is the dragon red now?"

Outside the front door there is a solitary climber which I call "The Beanstalk." It is the only plant my husband cares for, and over the summer he feeds it cups of tea several times a day. The climbing *Kiwi* reaches up into the Garry Oak tree and climbs ever higher, so that to a child, it does indeed look like Jack's beanstalk.

At the base of the large trees in the woods there are several little doors, created by various carpenters. One little visitor knelt



to look at the first door, knocked on it gently and then opened the door to reveal a hole under the maple burl. He said to his mother and me: "No one is at home!"

The crooked bridge, built with planks over old pilings for a defunct dock, is the bridge the grandchildren run over to see if they can entice the follower to run straight and fall in. It is supposed to work in Japan where the Oni cannot turn the corner quickly and will splash into the water. But in this Pacific Rim garden it is the Oma who likes to play the devil!

## Plant Ramblings

*David Whitehead*

Over the years, plant enthusiasts develop an affinity for certain specific plants. In time, this list grows and changes as our horticultural experience evolves. I have been fortunate in the variety of horticultural experiences I have enjoyed to this point. The plants on my special list reflect the varied experiences and the people who have influenced me

over the years. As I continue my exploration in horticulture, I continue to add plants to my list. Some do not last long and do not become permanent members, but others stand the test of time.

Early in my horticultural career I was impressed with plants that carried a close resemblance to my given name. Jean Pierre Armand David (Père David) made significant contributions to our modern gardening experience with his collections of plant material from the interior of China and Tibet. *Viburnum*, *Buddleia*, and *Acer* are a few of the genera to which *dauricum* is added to describe a noteworthy species. I remain impressed by the wonderful leathery foliage, metallic blue fruit and low habit of *Viburnum davidii*. *Buddleia davidii* produce their fragrant (and variously coloured racemes) at a perfect time in mid-summer when we need some fresh garden interest. I like how easy it is to root *Buddleia* from cuttings and I try to root some each year to give as gifts or otherwise distribute between acquaintances. Sometimes a favorite plant can lead to another that will work its way onto the list. *Buddleia alternifolia*, too rarely seen in cultivation, is a beautiful example of the diversity of this genus, and another of my favorites. Perhaps some day I will create a landscape made up solely of plants with a connection to Father David, highlighted by the fluttering white handkerchief flowers of the Dove Tree, *Davidia involucreata*.

But enough of plants with names that sound like mine. Another way a plant can make it onto my list is by its possession of a unique characteristic. I



*Climbing Kiwi*

am attracted to interesting bark. The elms that grow along much of Victoria's waterfront, *Ulmus thomasii*—also known as Rock or Cork Elm, develop a wonderful deeply furrowed bark at an early age. Branches less than half an inch in diameter often begin to show corky contrasts to their smooth juvenile bark. Layered suckers are a dependable method of propagating this Elm. Winged *Euonymus*, *Euonymus alata*, has always interested me, but it is its close relative *Euonymus europaeus*, the Spindle tree, that demands our attention in the fall with flaming foliage and exploding pink/orange fruit.

In my tiny front yard I must be frugal in the selection of shrubbery. Two very rewarding choices are *Clerodendron trichotomum*, Harlequin Glorybower, and *Decaisnea fargesii*, Dead Man's Fingers. There is hardly a time in the year that the *Clerodendron* is not generating interest. Sweetly scented late summer flowers are followed by deep blue berries surrounded by a red calyx which remain for most of the winter. It was the *Decaisnea's* nearly black spring buds that first attracted me, but I must admit it is the common name, a reference to the rubbery blue seed pods, which has resulted in a lasting interest.

In the past few years, our native plants have made a strong impression on me. In keeping to the suggested word count for this commentary, my ramblings on favorite natives must wait for another opportunity, and I haven't mentioned my experiments in fern propagation. In the meantime, my list of favorites will continue to evolve and change and grow.

## Autumnal Pond

A round world view  
Is what I see from my house  
A pond, a fringe of trees,  
And in the autumn,  
Golds, reds, oranges, and greens.  
It is the wrong end of a telescope  
A small orb on a giant globe  
Which is peaceful  
Would that the small globe  
In a giant universe  
Could be just so.

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## Arisaemas in Flight

*Margaret deWeese*

I sent a picture of *Arisaema speciosum* from my garden and another of *A. costatum* from the internet (below), to my friend Sally. She responded with the comment that the latter was like an exotic bird dancing.

Here is the site worth flipping through to appreciate their amazing differences in appearance: <http://www.plantdelights.com/Catalog/Spring/Detail/03016.html>.

On October 2nd the Victoria Rhododendron Society will have Dave Demers coming to talk on "A Woodland Monarchy: *Podophyllum*, *Paris* and *Arisaema*," a royal introduction to these three fascinating genera of woodlanders, from natural history all the way to hands-on gardening advice. The meeting is at the Garth Homer Centre, 811

Darwin St. at 7:30 p.m., and the cost is \$5 for non members who are most welcome.

My introduction to these strange and wonderful plants came about a few years ago when I put one into the fern bed. The conditions must have been right as I did not have hopes that it would come up again. To my surprise and delight it did and it was even bigger and more bizarre than ever. I, then went in search of different varieties, of which there are forty-two and counting, and so different from each other, from the tiny yellow flowered *A. flavum* to the large *Arisaema sikokianum* which can grow up to thirty inches tall with leaves as wide, to the almost throbbing glistening *A. speciosum*. It has a long thread-like appendage emanating from its spathe, thought to be a ladder for insects to use for pollinating the flower.

*Arisaema sikokianum* (Japanese Cobra Lily) was auctioned at the Hardy Plants Group meeting this Spring and everyone wanted to be the winning bidder! It is a stunner!

They like the constant moisture which I give the ferns, yet the ferns must protect them from being soaked which causes their roots to rot, as they are prone to do in warm temperatures. *Arisaemas* must like a fair amount of light as those which are very shaded by the tall glorious ferns, *Dryopteris wallichiana*, have healthy leaves but no flower spathes.

As I walk by the fern bed, these curious heads seem to be poking up out of the ferns, like periscopes from the ferny depths. You know, I think I have found my "Jacks!"—Jack-in-the-Pulpit.



# Tribute to Tony All Things Come to an End

Since its inception, Finnerty Gardens has been linked closely with Tony James. Although we have only been a small part of his overall responsibilities at UVic, I feel strongly that he, as Curator, has provided an integral building block for the Gardens. Tony has supported all the Advisory Board decisions and recommendations. Often, he has been obliged to manage a dwindling work force and budget constraints, yet the Gardens have grown and flourished under his leadership. In all the 20+ years that I have been involved with the Gardens, I've never heard the words "can't be done" from Tony! So Tony, the Advisory Board has really appreciated your time, efforts and patience at Finnerty. We wish you the very best in your upcoming retirement.

*Carmen Varcoe—Chair  
Finnerty Advisory Board*

## Note from the Editor

I feel that I, too, must insert a special note in this issue to thank Tony for the many important contributions that he has made to our Newsletter during the more than nine years during which I have been its editor. Tony's informative and professional reports have kept the University Finnerty Garden Friends in constant touch with current plans and developments in our Gardens. I wish him a happy and well-earned retirement.

*Sam Macey, Editor*

*Tony James  
Curator, Finnerty Gardens*

Because I am retiring from the University in the near future, this will probably be my last contribution in our Newsletter as Grounds Manager, and Curator, Finnerty Gardens I have experienced 31 enjoyable and interesting years overseeing many changes in the campus and in the Gardens. By coincidence, the first day I started with the University Grounds Division in August 1975 was the same day that ground was broken for the initial construction of the Gardens.

From an original 1.5 acres, the area has now expanded to 6.5 acres, including a major move of mature material around 1988. The Advisory Board has seen many members come and go over this period and consequently each may have had a potentially different focus on the Gardens. I have seen my role on the Board as providing some continuity as well as a University perspective and policy. Primarily Finnerty was a repository for rhododendron collections, but it has now expanded in range of material and area to be a true year-round garden of interest. The current Board is really fostering this intent and we are becoming more widely known. New liaisons with other gardens will help in this.

As no more expansion is possible, the focus in the future will be to improve on what already exists, whether by use of newer and better material, renovation

of outdated areas, increased labeling and direction finding—and, hopefully by this fall, the erection of a deer and rabbit barrier. The latter has become necessary due to the increasing loss of valuable plant material to these animals or pests, depending on one's point of view. They dig holes, chew leaves and bark, excavate and eat fine roots or physically destroy plant stems. As the presence of these animals has exploded in our area, and there is a reluctance to do anything about them, fencing remains the only option.

The trick with the deer fence is to protect the area without making it look enclosed with a high and visible security fence. We will therefore make use of black poly mesh varying from 5' to 7' in height according to the type of area it is going through. Open places will need the full height but where it goes through plant material, it can be lowered to 6'. This may not be an impenetrable barrier for rabbits as they have been known to chew through the mesh but if they are still a problem in the future, it will be very easy to add a lower stronger barrier. Also the mesh will be buried to prevent burrowing and where it is of a lower height, it will be doubled at the bottom.

Supports for the fence in the open will be thin black coated posts and in the thick planted areas, use of rebar and fixing to existing trees will suffice. Hopefully the fence will be very unobtrusive, except for the entrances. In these cases, swing gates will be hung with some method of self closure. It will be imperative that gates are kept closed at all times to prevent deer wandering around and finding

the nearest entrance. Some current secondary entrances may be permanently closed off. These would be the Chapel front lawn area path at the east end, the lawn access by the Henderson beds and the old trail through the woods at the far west side. This may risk upsetting a few people who have always used those trails and expect to retain their right of passage, but it is necessary for the protection and integrity of the Garden. Part of the Garry Oak meadow trails will

also be included as that can be achieved with a small diversion.

This type of fencing has worked very well in many areas of North America and is currently in place locally at what was the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific—now Glendale Gardens.

Included in this issue is a current plan of the Gardens similar to those on the new directory signs. It shows named beds and all the paths. At a future time, this may show a preferred route with some information of what

are the best areas to see. The problem is that the route would vary according to the time of year and the plants of interest. It will also be available as a handout for visitors from a stand somewhere near the Chapel.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all the members of the Garden Friends with whom I have had the pleasure of working over the years. We may not have always seen eye to eye on everything but that is the nature of my position. There are also many things that I would like to have seen or done and in hindsight there are things I would not have done. All in all mine has certainly been a very interesting and rewarding experience.

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*Arisaema costatum: Courtesy of Tony Avent*

