



University
of Victoria

University Finnerty Garden Friends January 2011 Newsletter

Dear Friends, first, I wish you all a very good and happy New Year. I would wish you a merry Christmas too, but by the time you receive this issue of the newsletter, it will be into January. Consider the wishes sent through the ether to you.

I am just recuperating from the snow, and wind. Here on Galiano, I had almost six inches late Friday night and early Saturday morning. The fall made the place look like a fairy wonderland. The firs were covered, and their branches weighed down were only too happy to dump it on you as you walked underneath. Needless to say, there were a lot of branches broken so there is a major cleanup to do. Many of the shrubs were flattened, and have not yet recovered. Some, I am afraid, may die back since many were in flower and had no warning of the coming cold. We had had no frost so the plants were very vulnerable, especially after the unusually warm October and early November. Many of the rhododendrons were blooming, but we will have to wait until spring to find out if any are seriously damaged. I have been looking at my hardy fuchsias which are looking very unhappy—should I cut them to the ground or should I just do a moderate trimming? I finally decided to cut them right back.

They say that Canadians always want to talk about the weather, and I guess that is true—but it is also reasonable since it never stays the same for any length of time. And this

year has been no exception—a cold spring and an absolutely gorgeous fall, after very heavy rain in September. This has led to a spectacular mushroom year. There was a festival on the island which featured over one hundred different kinds. The lunch included a mushroom pâté and a quiche, both made with local wild mushrooms. I gather that only a relatively few are actually poisonous, but many are not very appetizing and some can produce upsets of one kind or another. There is even one which, by itself, is edible, but if you have a drink of alcohol within a few days, you will be very ill.

The new stumpery at Finnerty is beginning to look attractive as the various woodland plants and ferns settle in. It should be delightful in a couple of years. The Gardens have many areas of interest and they give gardeners an insight into ways they can develop their own gardens. They are a rich resource for the whole gardening community in Victoria and a delightful place to enjoy the peace and quiet of nature.

This year, when you visit the plant sale in May, be sure to check out the many perennials from the Garden. They are well rooted and strong specimens and worth having in your garden. The sale is May 1 in the gymnasium. Do come to restock your garden, to see new and different plants, and most important, to see old friends.

— *Betty Kennedy*

The Lazy Gardener: 2. Trees and Shrubs

M.J. Harvey

I should point out to readers that the “lazy” of the title refers to the deliberate planning of a garden layout so that it produces an exquisite result the continuation of which requires a minimum of maintenance. Was it Ben Franklin who said that good luck was what resulted from a lifetime of careful planning? In other words don't make work for yourself by initial ill advised choices of material or layout.

In the above ambition you will get no help from nurseries—their aim is to make a profit, and fast growing plants is their best way to achieve this. For instance, *Viola riviniana* ('labradorica' of nurseries) and goutweed (*Aegopodium*) are still sold. These guarantee a lifetime of misery for the unfortunate recipient. They should be banned.

Neither have I seen much evidence that landscape designers and constructors show any awareness of the time bombs they may be leaving the owner. Their job is to get it done, leave a nice looking immediate result and cash the cheque. An unfortunate choice of material may, in fact, generate future contracts—don't forget the redwoods on Moss Street.

But to be honest landscapers provide what the public demands, which is to look like their better neighbours and it is fair to say that the customers are generally satisfied with the product. The ideas that I am presenting have no currency in gardening magazines or present practice. The local gardens that we really admire seem to me to be the result of hard work in keeping them at their peak. After mowing the lawn with a push mower my father used to say that he wanted green concrete. Is beauty with pleasure impossible—a fool's mirage?

So this series is about low maintenance. What exactly do I mean by that? Well the most famous garden (after the Taj Mahal which is a bit overbalanced by the mausoleum) is Ryoan ji (Soami, 1473) in Kyoto. The name may not roll off the tip of everyone's tongue but it is the Zen garden which consists of fifteen stones set in a flat bed of raked gravel. There are no plants except for traces of moss which have settled on the stones.

The purpose of a Zen garden is to free the mind of all desires and worldly thoughts and achieve inner peace.

Certainly thoughts of mowing the grass will not enter the contemplative brain although the thought of having to rake the pebbles may raise any remaining hair on the head. The modern equivalent for us in the West is to restrict the amount of soil present by means of pavers, concrete or gravel and confine soil to raised beds. This is a popular approach in public plazas and can be very successful. So, assuming that most gardeners actually want plants, the following is a brief sampling of some of the possible approaches with the smaller trees and shrubs.

Hedges I will not say much about but slow growing shrubs such as box, yew or 'Smaragd' cedar are choice. Their advantage is that they have a fine texture, can be clipped closely and will re-grow after damage. Be warned that the latter two may be grazed by our increasingly urban deer. These species also provide excellent subjects for topiary although this art is rare in British Columbia (excellent topiary in golden and green yew is visible at the east end of Hastings in Saanich).

Our new property has a remarkable hedge left by the previous owners. It is six feet high by six inches wide—amazing dimensions. The plant is a pendulous form of cedar of Lebanon and was trained by tying the main branches horizontally to bamboo poles and allowing the secondary branches to hang down.

For trees choose slow growing cultivars. Among the flowering cherries only 'Okame' really fits. I love the Japanese maples, but advise avoiding the more vigorous forms such as 'Bloodgood', 'Emperor I' and 'Osakazuki'. Neighbours across the street have recently planted the latter in front of their main window. One of them was unpleasantly surprised to see our 20 ft specimen that I have cut a tunnel through to provide access to the side of the house.

More desirable, slower growing maples include the linear leaved 'Red Pygmy' (which is much slower growing than its green relative 'Villa Taranto'), 'Shin deshojo' has scarlet leaves both spring and fall, and 'Shaina' is a red compact dwarf derived from a witch's broom. Mine is two feet high after about ten years, but I keep moving it which sets it back.

The weeping cut leaved (*dissectum*) maples have either red

or green leaves and are at their best planted on a high point and allowed to cascade. Get to see the 'Crimson Queen' at the back of Oak Bay municipal hall, it weeps down beautifully from a high concrete planter.

The alternative for *dissectums* is to train them up by determined staking and tightly tying up the shoots. I am currently doing this with 'Filigree', one of the better green forms. All Japanese maples make excellent subjects for pots or tubs and this is possibly the only way of growing the exquisitely fine 'Red Filigree Lace' if someone ever manages the skill to graft the sub millimetre diameter twigs and makes it available.

Among the rhododendrons most grow too big, apart from 'Golfer' and in the azaleas the evergreen 'Hino Crimson' and its relatives which can be clipped to low mounds as the Japanese commonly do. Of the hundreds of indumented rhododendron hybrids I have produced most have hybrid vigour and are too big. Some of the makinoi hybrids have spikey, white young leaves providing valuable foliage contrast and *proteoides x roxieanum* is a true compact dwarf less finicky than its proteoides parent.

I value the witch hazels for their winter/spring flowers but they get a bit spread with age. In his book *Witch Hazels*, Chris Lane recommends cutting back the new shoots each year by about two thirds. Of the seven forms I have grown only 'Jelena' and 'Pallida' are fully satisfactory: 'Jelena' with orange flowers starting at Christmas and scented like bruised tangerine skin, and 'Pallida' soon after with yellow flowers. Avoid the deep red 'Diane' (named for Jelena de Belder's daughter), the flowers are small and do not have much presence.

Most Camellias are too big, although they take to being severely espaliered on a wall. Only some of the smaller flowered species such as *C. transnokiensis* would fit, and if that gets too big it clips well.

Among the Magnolias only the species *M. stellata* and its hybrids in the Little Girl group ('Susan', 'Ann', 'Betty', etc.) are compact enough and even the Girls need some pruning control. I hesitate to mention my own foray in this group since I have not yet registered it with the Magnolia Society International but it has performed well in Victoria and can be seen by the lower lawn at Abkhazi Garden.

The conifer literature is full of 'swarf' forms the great majority of which do not deserve the sobriquet. I shall mention only one, the golden upright (fastigiated) yew 'Standishii'. This is slow growing because of its shortage of

chlorophyll and the leaves turn a brighter gold on the sunny side so site it with that in mind. My 'Standishii' in Sooke grew to about four feet in 19 years under exposed conditions. I have been playing around with its genetics and among hundreds of fastigiated seedlings in golden, variegated and green a single plant grew into a spreading shape. Its older leaves are deep green but the young shoots contrast in a bright yellow. This could be a valuable addition to the garden scene and I shall propagate and distribute it.

All the above mentioned plants were found in Victoria but most are difficult to obtain and require assiduous searching. The alternative to choosing genetically dwarf plants is to take vigorous i.e. normal, trees and shrubs and deliberately restrict their growth in a regular manner. Restriction should be not quite to the extent practiced by the bonsai enthusiasts, but by carrying out a planned training regime yearly as opposed to just cutting back something that is overgrown every few years.

The studied training of trees and shrubs is little practiced in Victoria with the exception of bush roses which are pruned every spring. In fruit production apple and pear trees are pruned and grape vines are reduced to a pair of stubs every winter. I would like to introduce the notion of annual or more frequent pruning to our local gardening community.

So let me go over regimes for three shrubs or vines as examples: Chilean bells (*Crinodendron*), Forsythia and Wisteria, untidy brutes all. A rigid plan is required to control them. Gardening needs sociopaths. We need a new word for a personality that excessively controls plants, perhaps phytosociopath. Each plant needs its own pruning plan in place.

Crinodendron puts up strong basal shoots once established. My aim is to maintain a single standard trunk kept to a limited height, removing all basal shoots as required, possibly several times a year.

Forsythia has a different growth cycle. My plant came with the property and my first instinct was to remove it, but the exuberant sunshine of the spring flowers melted even my heart. Since Forsythia has a regular two year cycle of branch production, go along with this. In the first year a basal shoot produces an unbranched cane possibly up to 2m high. In the second year the canes produce side branches with flower buds on them and these flower in the third spring. The secret of control is to remove the whole flowering shoot at the

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Winter Need Not be Dreary

Carmen Varcoe

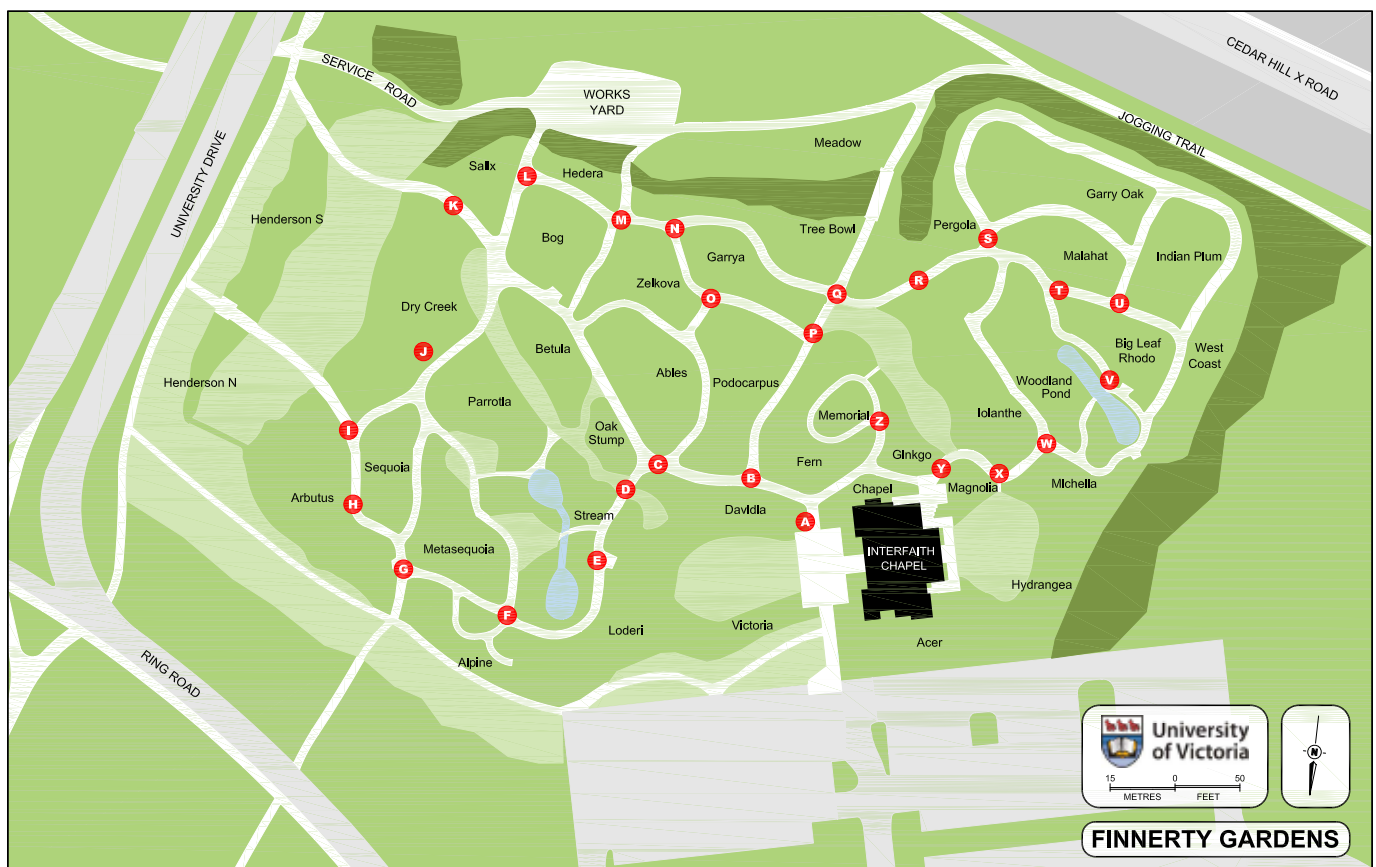
Out here on the west coast we tend to see winter as a season of endless cloudy days punctuated with mists and rain. Often this is the case, but compared to places back east in our wonderful country we are blessed.

For me, winter is a time to look at the quieter plants in the garden and sometimes relish this “down” time to relax a little bit preparing the old body for the busy seasons ahead.

If you walk through Finnerty Gardens anytime between December and early March there’s lots to feast the eyes and entice the nose.

The current up-to-date self-guided map of the gardens is included below for you to use while on your winter walk. If you begin at the Chapel, turn left and you will be rewarded immediately with wonderful mottled foliage

under the Davidia tree—this is probably one of the best foliage plants for a winter garden. It’s called Arum or the old common name Lords and Ladies. The beauty of this plant is that it looks good all through the winter and goes to sleep for the summer. In the early fall it sends up marvelous spathes of dense orange fruits. Nearby is one of the several treasured Mahonia ‘Charity’ in Finnerty Gardens. These prickly looking tall shrubs are notable for their perfumed rich yellow racemes of blooms throughout the winter. Mahonia ‘Charity’ is also an invaluable source of nectar for our winter visiting Ana’s hummingbirds. If you continue on this path you will encounter a large rhododendron (Area B) with the most amazing indumentum the colour of bright cinnamon. This is Rhododendron ‘Sir Charles Lemon’ and although its blooms are a lovely creamy yellow, you have



the foliage to enjoy for the rest of the year. A few yards along the path (Area C) you will encounter a substantial oak stump completely covered now with the very lovely golden variegated ivy called *Hedera 'Goldheart'*. Ivy has become a real pest in its green form throughout Victoria, but this one is a reason for lighting up the winter days. On the ground near here and across the path (Abies Bed) you will find a shiny deep green low growing shrub. In winter this plant earns more than its keep. The reason is for its heady scent. The common name Xmas Box is a very forgiving plant as it will grow just about anywhere even in deep shade. The name really doesn't do it any good as most can't pronounce it let alone spell it—*Sarcococca ruscifolia*. A good reason to stay with Xmas Box?

Continuing along the path by the Timber Bamboo and the Loderi Bed, you will eventually arrive at (Area J) where, if you are there during early February, you may be fortunate to see one of the earliest rhododendrons to come into bloom. *Rhododendron ririei* sports reddish purple trusses with deep violet nectar pouches, simply stunning at this time of year. Another tree worthy of note in this area is the *Chimonanthus praecox*, otherwise known as Wintersweet. This tree has got to be one of the most fragrant of winter plants. Yet, when first seen, it is rather quiet in its demeanor. *Chimonanthus* produces waxy pale yellow bracts with brownish purple calyxes somewhat similar to a small drab witch hazel flower. I always remember the first time I smelled its exotic perfume in the garden of Doris Page. I have never forgotten that experience! It's a tree that takes some maturing before blooming, hence not often seen around Victoria. Walk further along to the outer Henderson North & South Beds and the recent addition of the Stumpery (Areas K & L). Here you will see the clump of white barked *Betula jacquemontii*s. On a clear day they stand out, but even on a rainy misty day the bark is startling. In the Salix bed (Area

L), you will find the contorted *Salix* and the *Corylus avellana* 'Contorta' otherwise known as Harry Lauder's Walking Stick. Both these shrubs look quite lovely if each limb is lined with a light snowfall. Also in this area the *Ilex* 'Sparkleberry' should still have wonderful bright red berries on bare branches. There's another *Rhododendron* 'Sir Charles Lemon' in this area to enjoy.

Continuing along the outer path past the *Hedera* Bed you will arrive at one of the most recent additions to the garden at Area M this is the stunning *Acer conspiciuum* 'Phoenix'. The bark is a bright orangey pink with vertical white stripes, definitely a beautiful sight to enjoy on a winter day. By now, you may be getting chilly, so hurry along to Area W between the *Iolanthe* and *Michelia* Beds. Here the fragrant spidery golden blossoms of *Hamamelis mollis*, otherwise known as witch hazel will greet you. To end your walk, continue to Area Y—almost back to the Chapel entrance. Here you will be rewarded with wonderful scents. *Daphne odora*, an evergreen low growing shrub has one of the most lovely of perfumes. Also in this area you will see a rather unobtrusive bare branched shrub with small flared whitish flowers. *Lonicera fragrantissima* is a great "nose" plant for the winter and another source of nectar for the hummingbirds. All along this area and in several spots in the garden, you can see the lovely mottled leaves of *Cyclamen hederifolium*. Blooming in the fall, this little plant then produces a myriad of patterned leaves for the rest of the winter and well into the spring. The leaves can range from solid silver to ones with a perfect "Xmas tree" in the centre of each leaf. Back at the Chapel entrance you will find another witch hazel—*Hamamelis pallida*. This plant will have very fragrant golden yellow blossoms from mid to late winter.

Hopefully, these sights and scents will entice you to get out to Finnerty Gardens even in the dead of winter!

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base as soon as the flowers fade. This stimulates more basal shoots from the stool (i.e., a clump of shoots) and the cycle continues. The bush never exceeds about 2m in total height.

Wisterias may be trained on a pergola, a wall or as a standard. I am attempting the latter on a seedling of 'Texas Purple'. These vines are extremely unruly plants that need pruning several times a year. They like to sneak an end run

past you by sending out ground hugging shoots from the base which can grow 2 cm per day. Never trust a Wisteria.

Examples could be multiplied but the philosophy is what matters. This is the start of a "slow plant" movement parallel to the slow food movement. Later articles will deal with bulbs and non creeping herbs.

Heart Meltingly Adorable, Supremely Graceful, Undeniably Prolific, Exceedingly Voracious

Rob DeGros

You probably thought this referred to an extended visit by family over Christmas holiday, didn't you? Granted you might have got hung up on "graceful."

No, we're talking four legged visitors here. If anyone hasn't noticed, the population of deer in Victoria has been exploding like a rumour in a small town. Hide your hydrangeas and hostas, protect your petunias and fence off your aucbas—your garden has just become a smorgasbord. And in surprisingly short order. Always a scourge to gardeners in more outlying areas of Victoria—particularly Gordon Head for some reason—these nocturnal nibblers have now moved into Oak Bay, Fairfield and even James Bay, and are not at all shy about moving in and helping themselves—nighttime, daytime, anytime.

In my day to day job of designing and installing gardens for people, the "deer issue" has become very pronounced. Few want to see their lovely new investment turned into the latest hot spot dining experience for the local deer population. So. What to do?

File this first response under "It's only a problem if it's a problem." Working on a design for a garden in Maplewood recently, and being asked to include lots of hydrangeas, I pointed out that they are favorite deer food. "Not a problem" replied the client, "We love deer...we want them to come into our garden."

So this, then, is the simplest solution—requiring no effort at all. Learn to love them. And I'm not being facetious here—only realistic. For some people, even those who love plants and beautiful gardens, it is simply not a problem. Plant what you will, let the deer devour what they will. Make love, not war. I suspect that this solution will be a stretch for most. It would be for me, but I live in Deep Cove and for some strange reason we have no deer here. Why, I don't know.

Next solution is the Berlin wall. Partial or total. Fence them out. A friend of mine built a very nice, eight

foot high lattice fence around a large garden in Ten Mile Point. Full one inch by two inch cedar strips at twelve inches on centre. A fair bit of work and expense. But effective. And attractive—especially with a few ups and downs and arbours thrown in here and there. Great for climbers, too. Another fencing solution is plastic deer fence. Benner's in Parksville sells a nice sturdy two inch black plastic mesh and black coated steel posts and rails and gates. It tends to disappear in the landscape once plantings are added. Also has to be quite firmly secured at the bottom as those wiley deer will try to slither in beneath it if the high approach is blocked. My sister and brother-in-law in Gibsons enclosed their half acre garden with this product and it was very effective once they followed through with trouble shooting the weak points. However, it didn't provide much of a deterrent when the local black bears decided to harvest their prolific fig crop, but that is a different story.

Still on the fencing idea, I once saw a vegetable garden—free of interloping deer—that only had a four to five foot fence around it. Why? They had used a sun ray pattern of cedar stakes to fashion the fence and apparently the deer dislike jumping over pointy things. Makes sense to me. So, I've tried this out and can say that it works.

Somewhere in between total blockade or no blockade at all, there exist many other solutions. For example, often one's garden may be on a well beaten deer migration route—a daily route—their feast of the fields tour—and simply filling in a gap in a fence or hedge can deflect them into taking another route and thereby reducing unwanted chomping to

a tolerable level. Also there are things you can spray on plants that make them unpalatable to deer. Plantskydd is a slaughterhouse/blood product that repels rain and in my experience is quite effective for about a month. Surprisingly it doesn't stink but is kind of disgusting and therefore may not be the first choice for protecting the salad veggies. Homemade recipes



abound—often including garlic and eggs—certainly this is fertile ground for creative exploration. Another deterrent is the motion activated sprinkler which is certainly effective at giving human visitors to the garden a good, strong, unexpected spray in the face (I speak from experience) and I think will have some success in repelling deer, as well.

And, at last, there is the solution of filling the garden with things that the deer don't like to eat. And so perhaps will move on—to someone else's garden. There is no end of folklore and no shortage of lists in this department. It is a bit of a "How to grow tomatoes" kind of topic, and, as with lots of advice, often conflicting. The best teacher is, as always, experience. And observation. And ask neighbours, and friends, and gather lists. And then distill it all down, as you will, and put it to the test. As is often noted, deer will at some point eat anything, anytime, anywhere—toxic, not tasty or otherwise. So all the information is only a guide. But a useful guide nonetheless if you aren't into erecting fences and blockades.

Even in the most deer ravaged areas one can usually create a pretty attractive garden that remains relatively unmunched if good planting choices are made. I kind of had to get up to speed quickly on this when I moved my business from Vancouver to Victoria fifteen years ago and I now carry around a file with me—full of "deer resistant plant" lists. I also revisit gardens that we've planted and make notes of what has been munched, nibbled or left entirely alone. My favorite published list was passed along to me by clients who live in Lands End. It is titled: "Landscape Plants Rated by Deer Resistance" and is to be found on the good old internet at www.rce.rutgers.edu

And now, in no particularly useful order, my advice on creating a de-appetizing garden for deer or "Hospital Food For Deer in the Home Garden" (my apologies to good hospital dieticians of which I'm sure many must exist) (somewhere).

Choisya—universally eschewed. And a good looking plant. Strong oils in leaves keep deer at bay.

Bay—as in Bay tree. Like for soup. Tall, drought tolerant evergreen tree.

Lavenders, Rosemary, Nepeta, Thyme.....plants with a strong aroma to the foliage.

Rhodod—usually ignored. Same with Pieris. Same with Skimmia. Same with Viburnum davidii

Carex and Grasses—why deer—grazing ungulates—don't eat these, is beyond me. Too familiar?



Magnolias, Japanese Maples (tall ones are usually safe),
Styrax, Albizia.

Monkey Puzzle tree. Well, no kidding.

Perennial Geraniums, Alchemilla, Peonies. Euphorbias, Pachysandra, fuchsias, helianthemum, Bamboo, Heather, Berberis, Hellebores, Daphne, Astilbe, Lithodora, Ceanothus, Portugese Laurel.

This list could of course go on but, the point is, the deer issue is annoying but solvable. With effort. Which, at times, frees you to move on to the next issue, as in a garden we worked on in Uplands a few years ago.....where despite having planted a fairly large garden (AKA recently opened restaurant to the local deer), we were enjoying luck/success and then a few things started to get devoured. Unlikely things. The answer: rabbits. But not the end of the story unfortunately. For no sooner had we changed some plants and befuddled the bunnies than the next uninvited guests arrived. Squirrels. We knew there were lots, and had wanted a nice display of spring bulbs, so we chose narcissus. A lot of narcissus. Not on anyone's diet, certainly not the squirrels. Yet, as explained by the dejected client one morning, over the phone: "There are hundreds of daffodil bulbs—all over our garden—everywhere. The squirrels are digging them up!" And indeed, despite having been planted at a considerable depth, the bulbs were being dug up but not eaten by the little beasts. For the same reason that men climb mountains. Because they're there. Go figure.

And finally, if you think the deer problem is bad, consider this: Friends at Cowichan Lake. They have a bit of a garden there. "Deer? Deer? we have Elk...."

Chancellor's Reception

Anne Mace

The Chancellor's Reception for the June 2010 Convocation was held for the first time at the Finnerty Gardens entrance to the Interfaith Chapel. It was a beautiful location and we all enjoyed a welcome improvement in the spring weather. The sun warmed the guests mingling on the lawn to the background music of Wendell Clayton and his saxophone quartet of the UVic Music Faculty. The venue set the tone for a comfortable and friendly gathering of the university élite. Chancellor Murray Farmer honoured this year's worthy Degree Recipients in a short and informative ceremony. An elegant white tent on the Chapel lawn held an amazing array of appetizers highlighted by an enormous and stunning flower arrangement.

Finnerty Board members were on hand to give tours of

PHOTO: UVIC PHOTO SERVICES



the garden—looking its finest thanks to Karen and her staff. At the pond near the timber bamboo, in that special light just before the sun goes down, artist Leanne Cadden was plein air painting and nearby Kyle Schreider softly played the guitar to the visitors' delight. What a brilliant idea! Wouldn't it be wonderful to see future events staged in this lush and inviting atmosphere?

Submit Articles

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 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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