



University of Victoria

University Finnerty Garden Friends

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January 2008

Dear Friends,

When I had a phone call from Sam asking me for my contribution to the January 2008 newsletter, it did not seem possible that Christmas was approaching. However, I started to think and realized that a year ago, I wrote about the storm damage. And this year, guess what? We have just had some torrential rains and subsequent flooding. On Galiano, we had four inches of water, some in the form of snow and some as rain. Every ditch is full to overflowing and many streams that have, over the past few years, almost dried up are torrents. Regardless of whether you accept global warming as a fact, certainly wildly fluctuating weather patterns do seem to be the norm.

There have been a number of changes to my Galiano garden. I have had two more 6,000 gallon tanks installed, and will be filling them with rain water for use in the garden. These are from gas stations. They have been steam cleaned and used for storing excess water on construction sites. I would not use them for drinking water, even though I have never detected any hydrocarbon residue, but the plants seem happy enough with the water. I now store 56,000 gallons of rain and pond water for garden use. My well produces superlative water, but not really enough to use for anything but the house. There is much to be learned about water use in the country,

especially in the Gulf Islands which are very dry in the summer.

The garden itself has been very productive this year. I had a huge crop of raspberries and scarlet runner beans, and I have just finished the last of my tomatoes. The warm weather in November brought out many flowers, including a number of rhododendrons.

I have planted several hundred more bulbs—the catalogues are so enticing—and then I was faced with the problem of finding suitable places for them. All are now in their new homes. I was able to attend the last meeting of the Finnerty Gardens Advisory Committee which is so ably led by Carmen Varcoe. As

part of our ongoing campaign to extend the blooming period in the Gardens, we located homes for a large number of most interesting hydrangeas which will add colour in the late summer and fall. The next meeting will be devoted to assessing the health of the rhododendrons. Some have suffered from the weather or advanced years and need to be replaced.

The propagation group of the Victoria Rhododendron Society will attempt to provide replacement plants for those looking sickly. We welcome their help, since it is very difficult to find species rhododendrons and, in fact, many are not available for purchase.

The fence is doing a fairly good job of keeping the deer out, but the rabbits still

get in regularly. I do wish that people had not started letting loose their unwanted pets on the campus. People using the paths are still leaving the gates open, and that appears to be how the deer get in. New gates are in the planning stage and we hope the plans will be approved for installation in the spring. They will have automatic closure devices.

At this time I would like to wish every one of you a happy holiday season and hope that 2008 will be a good year for you all.

Betty Kennedy
University of Victoria
Finnerty Garden Friends



Rhodo puralbum. Photo: Beth Doman



Oscar Wilde's Portrait

Margaret deWeese

I have reached the age that when I look in the mirror I am beginning to see a lined and older version of my face and I have the feeling I am looking at my "Oscar Wilde" portrait. But, with each passing year, when I see what is happening in the garden with the growth and maturing shrubs and trees, I feel like my young self, miraculously seeing that it is the trees which are aging beautifully.

Today it was a Magnolia I bought so many years ago. Since it had never bloomed I have had to do a pruning job on its multitrunk. Now it is about fifteen feet tall and for the first time there are thirteen wine goblet buds wrapped in their crinkly grey brown silky furred wrapping looking



Magnolia

like pink Easter rabbits hanging possum like, upside down from the grey brown mottled branches. And I watch, ever hopeful, for the *Davidia involucrata* to wave a handkerchief at me. This is now going into its eleventh year without so much as a tissue to be seen, but when it does, I shall feel quite young.

I know life is fleeting, and that before many of the species rhododendrons and magnolias which I have planted bloom, I will

not be here to see them. It doesn't really bother me for they will be here for me and hopefully, will give pleasure to others. I have planted a special tree in the meadow, a tall *Stewartia monadelphica*, and I caged it to provide protection from the deer. The tree has small leaves, and white flower cups with violet anthers and its trunk and branches are a rusty non-peeling bark.

I took my family up to the spot and informed them that I wish to be scattered beneath the shade of this tree. They agreed it is a fine place to rest from garden labours. The view of the mountain will not be obstructed or changed as it is a regional park, no matter how much building will take place on southern Vancouver Island. In the fall, my Dorian Gray visage will be a deep maroon red and strikingly beautiful!

Meconopsis

Margaret deWeese

Who doesn't love the bright blues of the poppy, *Meconopsis*, a genus within the family *Papaveraceae*? Seeing clumps of *M. sheldoni* (a cross between *M. betonicifolia* and *M. grandis*) in Scotland on a pouring wet day made one dispel the rain and think of a bright blue sky. What better flower for a rainy B.C.?

A friend sent me a picture of his *Meconopsis Pratti* (*horridula*), a contradiction in terms if you ask me! I suppose it is for the spines which are a mixture of an alpine and cacti!

I have managed to grow *Meconopsis betonicifolia* for the occasional two or three year stint. I'm not sure if the Providence Farm horse manure is strong enough to feed this greedy plant. Some of these

plants are tricky because of their monocarpic nature. They bear fruit once and then die, so the trick is to pick off the buds in the first year—a hard discipline to follow. But, once done, they become perennials if given enough rich soil and moisture. Staff at Thimble Farms say they give their *Meconopsis* a liquid feed practically every time they walk by!

But the *Meconopsis* I like—as a foil to other shades of the oranges, yellows and reds in the garden, especially with azaleas, and which generate brightness amongst the greens of the ferns and rhododendrons—is the *Meconopsis cambrica*, which is a yellow, self sowing perennial and which practically becomes a ground cover in a few years! There are other colours in this family: white, pink, lavender, mauve and a pale yellow of *M. pseudointegrifolia* from



Meconopsis Pratti (horridula)

S.E. Tibet, which I have only seen on slide shows given by our intrepid plant explorers to these fascinating botanical regions.

It is also interesting to find that cousins to this beautiful family are other special plants which also command my affection: *Sanguinaria canadensis* (Bloodroot) and *Romneya coulteri*. Now, if only I could grow them too?!

The Winter Garden at Government House

Carol Dancer, Garden Advisor
Government House Gardens

Gardener, if you listen, listen well.
Plant for your winter pleasure
When the months dishearten
from "The Garden" by Vita
Sackville West

On entering the grounds of Government House through the Tradesmen's Entrance, there are two beautiful coral bark maples (*Acer palmatum*). The bark of these Japanese maples glow a warm coral-red during the dreary months of December, January and February. They are a fitting start to the Winter Garden. Beneath one is a small sign which reads that the Winter Garden is a gift of Victoria nurseryman Tony Wallner of Cedar Hill Nursery.

This little gem is a true Winter Garden filled with plants that flower or fruit from late October through to early April. The quiet beauty of winter flowering plants with their display of flowers, berries and bark give enormous pleasure and allow us to think of the garden as a twelve-month continuum.

One could say that the Winter Garden sleeps through the summer when you won't experience any bright flashes of colour or elusive perfumes. By late October, the Winter Garden slowly comes to life when a remarkable little shrub sheds leaves to reveal its fruits and starts another season of pleasure for the many visitors who come to the

Government House Gardens. The shrub is *Callicarpa bodinieri*, sometimes called Beautyberry, and is native to central and western China. It is notable for its conspicuous rich violet berries which make a dramatic display of colour and last for several months. For most of the year one would pass the shrub without a second glance, but when the berries are revealed the plant becomes a gem for the weather weary winter gardener. It is also a favorite of flower arrangers.

In November the flowering season starts when the mahonias begin to bloom. These are the Asian relatives of our native mahonias, and are much larger in both stature and flower. Like our native they have evergreen compound leaves and racemes of elegant, yellow flowers held stiffly erect. It is a beautiful addition to the Winter Garden and is relatively easy to grow.

In late November the dainty single pink flowers of the sasanqua camellias begin to bloom. The sasanquas

are slightly more tender than the more common *C. japonica*. We are blessed with two hardy cultivars that bloom for many weeks and seem able to withstand anything that winter throws at them. Unlike the *C. japonica*, the sasanquas also have the good manners to drop their spent flowers. By Christmas the hellebores, iris and primulas are in full bloom and more shrubs are beginning to flower: rhododendrons, the witch-hazels, daphnes, viburnums, and honeysuckle.

A couple of the plants deserve special mention. Two species of Azaras (*lanceolata* and *microphylla*) grow in the Winter Garden. They are evergreen shrubs with tiny, fragrant yellow flowers and are native to Chile and Argentina. If you walk along the Winter Garden and think that you smell vanilla, it is the perfume of the azaras.

Another South American native is *Drimys winteri*, a small evergreen

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Camellia sasanqua 'Yuletide' photo: Daphne Donaldson



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tree with loose umbels of ivory-white flowers. The Winter Garden is the only place I have seen this lovely plant growing in local gardens.

And then there is one of my favorite shrubs in the Winter Garden. This is *Edgeworthia chrysantha*, another native of China. It is a deciduous shrub with nodding terminal clusters of creamy-yellow flowers which have a light sweet perfume. Though not the easiest of shrubs to grow, it has found a home in our garden. In Asia it is used to make special paper for banknotes.

Mr. Wallner passed away this year but what a wonderful gift to leave behind. Few people would ever think to create a Winter Garden.

I only met Mr. Wallner as an elderly man but I loved to visit with him at his nursery out on the Saanich Peninsula, and to hear some of his stories. He once told me that when he had his nursery at Cedar Hill he had his regular customers but he also had his “back-door customers”. The back-door customers were the gardeners who appreciated the

rare, the beautiful and the unusual, and only to these select customers would he sell his best plants. I have since carried about a mental image of certain members of the gardening community slipping out of the back-door after dark with some rare gem tucked up, perhaps a magnolia which was Mr. Wallner’s favorite genus. When I knew him he still loved gardens and plants and he continued to be very generous to Government House Gardens.

Heavenly Hydrangeas

Carmen Varcoe

No garden can sustain all year interest without a broad range of plants. Rhododendrons are wonderful in the landscape both for their blooms and their rich foliage. Long after the flush of spring with bulbs and rhododendrons, however, come the most welcome genera of plants, the hydrangeas. No other shrub can extend the season like these beauties. Some years ago, the Advisory Board considered adding a hydrangea collection to Finnerty Gardens. Primarily this collection was to be in the area west of the Chapel. Growing conditions seemed ideal—ample water and high shade from the hottest part of the day. We gathered some of the available cultivars and began to interplant these in a semicircle, best viewed from the Chapel. It was a start. Many of the newer hybrids, however, were not yet

available locally. Like all good things, sometimes it’s worth the wait.

Fortunately, this fall we were able to locate some wonderful new hybrids not only from the lower mainland but also from a leading nursery in Oregon. Since the border couldn’t accommodate all of the newer plants, we have placed many of these hydrangeas throughout the gardens. Hydrangeas fall into two categories—the mopheads and the lacecaps. The mopheads or hortensias are the old fashioned hydrangeas of our grandmother’s era. Often, they can be seen all around Victoria in old gardens. Their pale blue and pale pink blooms are an integral part of our summers here. Now, thanks to the hybridizers, we have a wide range of colours to choose from. There’s the pristine white of “Mme Emile Mouilliere”, always white with a hint of pink or blue in the central “eye”. For colour intensity, “Enziandom” is reputed to be the deepest of all the blues. For the largest, “Paris” apparently will steal the show with colours ranging

from deep pink to purple. One of the newest mopheads out is “Blushing Bride”, a compact delicately shaded pink. “Blushing Bride” is very long blooming and will bloom on the current year’s wood. This hydrangea brought to my mind a lazy summer’s afternoon while sipping tea, or even something stronger, relaxing in the shade dressed appropriately, not in my usual dirty gardening attire!

Another category of hydrangeas are the lacecaps. These provide some of the most interesting colours and shapes. Many new lacecap cultivars have been bred in Germany and Switzerland, often having German bird names. One such hydrangea is “Taube”—Pigeon, a glorious deep purplish blue, large and really impressive. For the show stopping reds there’s, “Rotdrossel”—Redwing which when grown well is truly red not pink. These hydrangeas are often grouped under the term “Teller” which translates to plate as the blooms are flattened with showy large infertile petals surrounding a dense cluster of fertile petals. Not only are the hybridizers creating great



Hydrangea photo: Daphne Donaldson

intensity of colours, but also they are creating a wider range of sizes. Now any small garden can accommodate these lovely plants. Especially notable for smaller stature are the newer cultivars coming from Japan. These are grouped under the term “serratas.” They are all lacecaps and truly delicate in appearance. Many have names such as “Miyama yae Murasaki”– many layers purple or “Izu No Hana”– flowers from the Izu peninsula. All the smaller hydrangeas whether they are lacecaps or mopheads can be happily grown in planters, making these plants just as valuable on a patio as any rhododendron. The serratas often have loose double infertile flowers surrounding the tight fertile clusters,

making them unusual and at first hard to recognize as a hydrangea. One of these serratas that always gets inquiries is “Kiyosumi” a medium growing plant with exquisite pale pink flowers edged in deeper red. Kiyosumi has the added feature of foliage that is often edged in burgundy. Jumping from small to much larger are two more categories of hydrangeas. The paniculata hybrids are really spectacular in late August to October. Some of these have been planted in the Henderson Border area. One is “Limelight” with large conical creamy blossoms which turn to shades of green and pink. Another tree-like hydrangea is the arborescens “Annabelle” with large globes of clear white changing

to green. Look for “Annabelle” in the Chapel west area next August. Last, but certainly not least, are the tree-like species hydrangeas called asperas. These are the very tall aristocrats requiring high shade and ample water to thrive. Their leaves are quite a distinctive apple green and almost fuzzy to touch. These lacecaps’ blooms can often exceed dinner plate size in shades of deep pink to deep mauve, making them a perfect complement to rhododendrons. In the years ahead, we hope that Finnerty Gardens will not only be known for its wonderful collection of rhododendrons but also for having one of the most extensive plantings of hydrangeas in Victoria.



Illumination

Margaret deWeese

By far the most beautiful light in a garden is natural. Early morning sunrise and late evening sunset give the garden lighting most stage light technicians envy. And during the day, as Shakespeare put it in *As You Like It*,

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women
merely players:
They have their exits and their
entrances

A garden is similar. As the sun seems to traverse the sky—highlighting points in the garden, changing light from low to high as the months progress—the viewer in a dappled garden benefits from having plants variously lit.

In a geographic area where we get a lot of rain we can create our own sunshine or moonlight by using white lights to show off a particularly beautiful plant specimen. I have done this with the

result of practically suffering from insomnia because of the stunning visual effect.

In Europe there are spectacular historical shows called *Son et lumière*. Stated by Wikipedia: *Son et lumière* (French, lit. “sound and light”), or a sound and light show is a form of nighttime entertainment that is usually presented in an outdoor venue of historic significance. Special lighting effects are projected onto the façade of a building or ruin and synchronized with recorded or live narration and music to dramatize the history of the place. The invention of the concept is credited to Paul Robert-Houdin, who was the curator of the Château de Chambord in France, which hosted the world's first *Son et lumière* in 1952.

My *Son et lumière* is that of a lusty frog chorus and three white spotlights by the pond. Whatever the season there are particular plants which deserve our attention and seen against the violet skies of late evening, these trees or plants will glow in the spotlight. However,



Cornus kousa

I must admit to a great dislike of artificial colours—too much like the amusement park of Tivoli and seen too often in our tourist gardens. This is too garish, too unnatural, but white light accentuates the beauty of the leaves, the flowers and the trunks. Try it and you, too, will be breathless!

Remembering Tony Wallner, a Friend of the Gardens

Agnes Lynn

Most of you who have been familiar with the Finnerty Gardens for any number of years will recall Tony Wallner of Cedar Hill and Valleyview Nurseries. He passed away recently at the age of 82. It

was only in this last year or so since he broke his hip that you could say that he actually retired as we almost always could find him at “the farm”, his name for Valleyview Nursery.

I first got to know of Tony when I purchased my home in Gordon Head in the late 70s. His selection of plants at Cedar Hill Nursery was superb. Even after several years of buying plants for my current garden, I couldn't get in the front door of the nursery without finding something new that Tony had sourced out for us “plantaholics”. He would line

up those new selections along the walkway to tempt us. The number of nurserymen who travelled from out-of-town for his service showed how well respected he was in the horticultural community.

Tony was a member of the UVic Finnerty Gardens Advisory Committee in the formative years. People such as Evelyn Weesjes and the late Herman Vaartnou were busily installing the magnificent selection of rhododendrons, but Tony concentrated on what he knew best and contributed many intriguing

“companion” plants. These included excellent small trees and shrubs which enjoy growing in the same conditions as the rhododendrons. You will see his name in the donor column next to many plants on the Plant List as he supplied these plants free of charge. When I was on the Advisory Committee, I spent a lot of time updating the plant inventory and noticed the Wallner name on many of these interesting specimens. If there was a plant I didn’t know, I chatted to Tony about it and he usually managed to find one for my garden even if it wasn’t commonly available. I still have the odd-ball mallow that I lusted after. He just took that ever-present shovel and dug me up a piece from the edge of his clump. He was lucky to always have a favourite dog close by to keep the deer from this luscious morsel that I have to barricade behind a fence at my house.

It was always a delight to visit Tony at Valleyview when we were getting plants for a new bed or for a redesigned area at UVic. I remember trips out to the nursery with the late Hamish Robertson. Hamish and Tony would discuss many fascinating plants and I would soak up every morsel that passed between them. The discussions on hardiness were most interesting as Hamish had spent time at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens with a similar climate. Tony had his way of showing great respect for the erudite members of the committee such as Hamish and Herman, yet still could be a good friend at the same time. I remember he referred to Dr. Ian McTaggart-Cowan as “Dr. Ian”. That’s just the way Tony was.

Tony also supplied plants to the UVic Plant Sale each year that I was on the Advisory Committee. I would go out and get a whole truck load of plants and all he normally asked in return was a tax receipt. I also enjoyed a wonderful visit with him as we chose the plants and discussed so many fascinating topics. He often wanted to give me large numbers of one type of plant but I had to convince him that we only wanted five of each. That way they appeared to be in short supply and so increased the interest in the plant. If people didn’t get one at the sale, they could either go down to Cedar Hill Nursery and buy one or wait till the sale in the next year. The sale was always one of my favourite days of the year.

Another happy event that I was privileged to be part of was a visit that Tony made to Herman Vaartnou’s garden. As some of you know, Herman raised a number of hybrid rhododendrons over the years and eventually selected several to be registered with the American Rhododendron Society. Herman named them after his favourite people or allowed these people to choose a special name. Between myself and Herman, we arranged for one of these rhododendrons to be called “Tony Wallner” and, one afternoon, we had the pleasure of introducing Tony to his rhododendron. You can’t imagine how proud Tony was when he saw his plant. It was a beautiful rhododendron in full bloom that day. There is a photograph that we took but I wasn’t able to track it down. However, Ross, Tony’s son, has propagated this plant and it is available at Valleyview. We must get one for the Finnerty Gardens so he can live along with so many

others of Herman’s hybrids that are already there.

Our condolences go out to Tony’s wife, Iris. Even though most of us didn’t see much of her, Tony always made it clear how supportive she had been to him throughout his many years in the nursery business.

Some of you will also remember his daughter, Elaine, who operated Cedar Hill Nursery in the years after Tony “retired”. She has had her hands full looking after him in the last year or so when he resided at Broadmead Lodge. At his service, she smiled as she related his naughtiness. The residents were not allowed to feed the birds but Tony just ignored the rules because he loved his birds. However, one day he got “busted” when they found a bunch of bird seed in his bed.

Tony was a wonderful mentor to many of us in the horticulture circles and will be sadly missed. Ross, his son will continue with the nursery at Valleyview. Fortunately, as Ross is an excellent propagator, we can still hope for the supply of great plants to continue.

Editor’s Note

Carmen Varcoe has sent in the following relevant announcement: “The present Advisory Board is planning for the next year a way to commemorate Tony Wallner’s many contributions to the Finnerty Gardens.”



Daphne Donaldson



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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.

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.