



University of Victoria

University Finnerty Garden Friends

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Dear Friends,

Has Spring arrived? It certainly seems so—and aren't we lucky here in Victoria? I have just been watching the weather news and once again am glad that I do not live in the east. Perhaps this will bring another flood of new residents from there!

I am sure you will be as relieved as I am to see that the damage to Finnerty Gardens was not as severe as we had originally expected. Later in this newsletter you will read more detailed reports from Rhonda. However, the effect of the snow and wind on Douglas firs makes us realize that they really are not suited to be a garden tree. They have very shallow root systems, and as a result topple over quite easily—not to mention that they will use every bit of water put on beds anywhere near them.

My Galiano garden escaped relatively unscathed. I lost innumerable fir branches, an oak tree which was growing directly on rock and a big old arbutus, whose days were definitely numbered. There was a certain amount of breakage in shrubs, but not nearly as much as I had anticipated. By last weekend, the garden was delightful with a surprising amount of bloom. I had crocus, snowdrops, daffodils, iris, witch hazel, hellebores, English primroses, cornus

mas, daphne odora, and a surprising number of rhododendrons in full bloom. And the scent from the daphne and the witch hazels greeted me every time I went out of doors. I suspect the early tulips will be in bloom when I return this weekend. I might add, that the weeds are flourishing also!

The heavy snow flattened the raspberry cage completely, so now we have to rebuild it. The bird population at my place is so large that a cage is necessary as they think I planted the raspberries especially for them. They all love the fruit, and so do the raccoons. I think this comes under the heading of the joys of gardening in the wild! The unusual weather brought many unexpected visitors to the deck and garden—we had mink

and a very fine river otter come to see what was new. The resident red squirrels have been very glad that I feed the birds who are somewhat sloppy eaters. Happily the fence survived the weather, so we were spared the inroads of the deer.

I hope you will visit Finnerty Gardens in the near future—they are looking particularly lovely. And don't forget the annual Garden Sale which will be held on the first Sunday in May. I hope to see you there—it is also a great chance to renew your membership in the Friends.

Happy gardening to you all,

Betty Kennedy

University of Victoria Finnerty Garden Friends





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Pot Gardening

Margaret deWeese

Some people grow pot and I am not advocating for them. What I am thinking of is gardening in pots. Have you noticed how spectacular a plant at a nursery is in a pot but upon planting it out in the ground, it goes from a diet of



Pot gardening on a float home deck

Osmacote and fluffy black potting soil with regular watering, into tough dry conditions? Often, the plant in shock, sulks.

A few years ago some members of the Victoria Rhododendron Society visited the daughter of the late Dr. Robert Senn, who had developed a special interest in rhododendrons. When failing health caused him to give up his garden the rhododendrons were transplanted to the Finnerty Gardens. Norma Senn has a small yard on the mainland where she is a keen and knowledgeable gardener. Her garden has variety, colour, texture, height, form and each plant is in a pot. I asked her what she does when the plant outgrows its pot and she said she happily gives it to a friend who has admired it and replaces it with a smaller one.

I have a friend who lives at a nearby marina in a charming float house. As I walk along the docks, I see astonishing little gardens in flower boxes, and on the float house verandas. Tied up to my friend's float house is a deck on floats under which the otters dive and splash about the myriad pots edging the deck.

Some of you may remember the story of the Witch Finger Tree in an earlier edition of the newsletter. On p. 8, you will see one of the seedlings, adorning the deck in its pot, amidst friends, each looking healthy and obviously enjoying a balanced diet with adequate water consumption.

I have taken up pot gardening. Most of my garden plants are shrubs and trees which have roots deep into the ground and they are growing tall and wide. These are difficult to move, so to fulfill my sense of variety, pots are moved instead. In these pots are tender

plants such as the Clerodendron trichotomum "var. fargesii"—which blooms in the Fall, with plum-coloured buds that open to fragrant white flowers and has seeds of blue and rose pink resembling flowers, the Oleander with its rhododendron-type leaves and its pretty scented pink flowers, tree ferns, a mauve and white Japanese jasmine whose perfume befuddles the mind and transports one to the Orient.

The pots one can buy today, with their rich glazes and their artful shapes, need practically nothing in them to look beautiful, but with a special plant placed in a spot which just needs that space filled, pot gardening is very satisfactory!

The Damage to Finnerty Garden

Rhonda Rose

I wrote this for the Rhododendron Society Newsletter after the first storm. The Finnerty Garden has since weathered a few more storms with high winds and many more branches broken and plants lost. I have learnt a few things from this winter, first you can't fight mother nature and as a gardener you have to look at the changes as an opportunity for the future.

What a storm!

I was surprised on Sunday, November 26 to see the amount of snow accumulating when the

forecast was only for a few cm. I woke up early Monday knowing that I would have to walk the few kilometers into work, and arrived at the office only to see many of my coworkers already there, busy keeping the fire roads and main arteries to the campus open. We spent more than 15 hours on Monday opening paths to allow entry into all the buildings on campus and access for all the residences.

On Tuesday I had my first opportunity to walk through the Finnerty Garden, and was devastated, since I had never witnessed that amount of damage to the garden in the 16 years I have worked there. I felt overwhelmed while still knowing that I would have to go back out into the campus to help clear the way for the university community and the many events scheduled on the campus. I also knew there was not much that could be done until the snow started to melt.

On Monday, December 5 we were able to get the resources we needed to start the garden clean-up. The firs had snapped with the weight of the snow, falling and crushing the plants beneath them, and littering many if not all the paths. Starting with the paths for safe passage, we began cutting the large limbs and hauling them to the storage yard. Running out of space in no time, we then moved to lot 6.

We have lost many of the tops of the Magnolia grandiflora, a Magnolia denudata and large limbs of a few other magnolias. The timber bamboo was bent into the pond, leaving us to remove about half the canes because they split under the pressure of the snow. The Garry Oaks shed some huge limbs as well causing



collateral damage to the rhododendrons below.

We have lost some of the specimen trees, and others of the remaining ones have had the broken branches removed so we will have to determine what can and should be saved. The rhododendron damage is still to be uncovered as we go from bed to bed removing the large fir limbs but leaving any remnant of a plant hoping the propagating group may have a cutting or be able to take one.

Despite everything, I write this feeling very optimistic seeing the spring bulbs poking through as we clear the ground with the hellebores starting to push their flowers up to the opened canopy. I look forward to the opportunity to work with the rhododendron community and the Friends to replace and repair what we have established over the many years.

A Progress Report

R. Bentley Sly, Curator

Once again, I want to thank Sam Macey for inviting me to share with you what is “growing on” in Finnerty Garden and around the UVic campus, as we head into spring.

Here it is March already, and spring-like weather is almost upon us. I say almost because the weather is no longer as predictable as it once was. However, we can be somewhat assured when the buzz of organizing for the annual plant sale in the Archie MacKinnon gymnasium appears on the Ground’s radar screen. Rhonda and the Friends of the Garden are currently gathering together all the necessary resources in preparation for the home stretch that leads up to sale day. This is my first one and already I have sensed the urgency to get everything prepared

and into place. There are considerable details and all of those involved are beginning to dig in, roll up sleeves and work hard to ensure that a successful event takes place. A big thank you to all the organizers, volunteers and customers for the continued interest and support that is given to this event.

In the garden, most of the final clean up from the winter weather has been completed by Grounds staff. We now look forward to the natural recovery processes of the plants to kick in as the sun slowly moves northward again. The Finnerty Garden Advisory Committee along with Rhonda have reviewed plant losses and developed a list of replacement materials. This work will be commencing shortly. Also, I should mention that interest in the placement of memorial stones and benches in the garden remains strong as evidenced by the number of telephone calls I have been receiving lately.

As well, I should mention a couple of new initiatives that we will be working on this year. They include the computerized recording of our plant inventory lists and the tracking of various plant bed locations within the garden. I am currently looking at using Facilities Management’s new FAMIS inventory system to keep the garden plant inventory up to date and the Project Section’s computerized geographical positioning system to track individual plant and plant bed location changes on line. Both functions are currently undertaken by hand and are quite time consuming. This work will be carried out by Grounds staff. Garden Advisory Committee



A sweet-scented *Maddenia rhododendron*. *R. lyi* whose pot is well hidden by the salal

member Dave Whitehead has also volunteered to assist with the data collection and entry work. Thank you to Dave for offering to help with this. More in the future on our exciting new “high tech” direction.

Other news on campus includes the construction and commissioning of five new buildings over the next two years. They include the Science Building, the Mearns Learning Centre, the Social Science and Mathematics Building, the Support Services Building and the First Peoples House. I should also mention that the Social Science and Mathematics Building will be constructed with a “green roof” and that it is already attracting positive interest from architects and the building industry. More on this in the future.

Meadow Garden

Margaret deWeese

Running along my property line on one side is the fifty year old BC Hydro easement which carries the defunct ground line from the mainland to the substation north of Duncan. Over the years the clearing has been populated by scotch broom, wild briar and grouse, rabbits, deer and the occasional cougar. It was an area which was neglected as the other garden priorities took place.

Last fall I had a great need to see the mountain and the prickly wild briar was blocking that view. My most helpful garden tool is a Green Machine with a circular

blade on the end where normally the weedeater line whips and cuts. The blade slices through broom trunks and briar, though one is faced with scratched arms and legs from the task.

What kept me at it was the longing of a one-time city child to run and play in the alpine meadows of the alps like Heidi and Grandfather. Now, I am a little old to do this, but my grandchildren can, so the clearing continued through the winter.

In late March I went to Buckerfields and asked for a pound of their wildflower mix. Though I was somewhat taken aback by the price at \$56 a pound, there was a big area in which to scatter the seed.

And as our latitude slowly turned to face the sun, I watched for germination. First to appear were the Baby Blue Eyes, *Nemophila menziesii*, and now there are poppies, pastel and colours of fire, deep blue and red cornflowers, wild antirrhinums and lupins. And for next year

the ripened seeds of *Dodecatheon hendersonii* and the White Camas have been scattered.

Now that the full sun is here, the meadow beckons me early each morning and evening to sit and make long shadows and be Grandmother in my own alpine meadow.



Meadow before



Meadow after



My Visit to Tasmania

Carol Dancer

I once read that the world is a book and those who have not travelled have read only one chapter of the book. This past October and November, I read several chapters of the book as I travelled through Australia and New Zealand.

The impetus for my trip was to attend a rhododendron conference in Burnie, Tasmania.

Tasmania is a relatively small island of slightly more than 64,000 square kilometres, and is separated from mainland Australia by the 240 kilometre-wide Bass Strait. It lies south of the 40th line of latitude. Tasmania has a mild climate not much different from our own

in Victoria. Though our winters would be somewhat colder and longer, Tasmania lies in the path of the Roaring Forties which sweep up from the Antarctic, and I can attest to the fact that those winds can be very cold and very strong. The day we visited Hobart, the capital of Tasmania, it snowed. The local children had a wonderful time but I was looking for flowers.

The vegetation in Tasmania has two components: the Southern Oceanic flora and the eastern-mainland Australian flora characterized by Acacias, Eucalyptus, and the many shrubs with pea-like flowers. The Southern Oceanic flora dates back to the time when Tasmania was connected to South America, New Zealand, and the Antarctic. This flora is characterized by the Southern Beech, both evergreen and deciduous, Eucryphias,

Olearias, Podocarpus, and the amazing tree ferns. More than 200 species of plants are endemic only to Tasmania.

Tasmania is very mountainous with over sixty peaks. The highlight of my trip was a visit to Cradle Mountain, which is a world heritage site. We hiked along the base of the mountain at an elevation of about 900 metres walking across boggy areas covered with sedges and ferns. Mire communities of mosses, herbs, and grasses formed spongy, quaking mats of vegetation. Prickly heaths dominated the hummocks. On the higher slopes grew the Tasmanian Pines: King Billy, Pencil Pine, Celery-top Pine, and Huon Pine. Although they are called pines they do not belong to the family of Pinaceae. As we descended the slopes we entered a remnant of the ancient Gondwana forest. To walk through an area where the vegetation is still much the same as it was sixty million years ago was enough to send shivers up and down my spine. The only thing missing was for a platypus to emerge from the pool of water. I never did see one as they are very shy creatures.

The rhododendron convention was held at the Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden, just outside of Burnie. It is a public garden but is under the control of the Burnie branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society and most of the work is carried out by volunteers from that society.

In size the garden consists of about 20 hectares of land surrounding a natural amphitheater. This forms a beautiful natural site containing stunning exam-



Tasmania

ples of *Dicksonia antarctica*, the tree fern and *Nothofagus*, the southern beech trees.

Tasmania is the one state in Australia where a wide array of rhododendrons can be successfully grown. Most of Australia is much too warm or too dry for the cultivation of rhododendrons. I did see some beautiful *R. vireyas* growing in the Brisbane area of Queensland and *R. maddenii* are successful in Melbourne with irrigation and shade. However, in Tasmania I saw all sections of the genus rhododendron growing happily, since the climate is sufficiently moderate in terms of heat, cold, and moisture. The coldest temperature recorded in Tasmania was -14°C . and the warmest was $+40^{\circ}\text{C}$.

As Tasmania now has very strict controls for the importation of any plant material, growing from seed or local hybridizing is the source of most new plant material. I met some marvelous growers and saw some beautiful and interesting gardens. Pigeon Hill, part of one of Tasmania's oldest farms, stands out in my memory. It is a large garden containing innumerable rhododendrons, maples, dogwoods, magnolias and native trees. There are many eucalyptus trees on the property but one in particular is king of the area, measuring over 16 metres in diameter. Bronze-winged pigeons inhabit the property and explain the reason for its name.

I wouldn't want you to think that I travelled all of those kilometres only to look at plants. Tasmania has a fascinating if a somewhat violent history as a penal colony. Also, I was enthralled by the beautiful

Victorian architecture preserved and protected throughout the island. In Launceston, the second largest town in Tasmania, the entire center of the city has been preserved. It is the most intact early cityscape in Australia.

The seafood was wonderful and the local wines were also very good. Tasmania, if only you were a little closer!

The Taro

Margaret deWeese

When Ketty handed me a bag, I became even more curious as soon as I peeked in and saw a very large looking turnip. When I looked at her quizzically, she said: "It is a *Colocasia esculenta*!"



Taro plant



None the wiser, I showed it to Joe Harvey who immediately smiled and said: "Wild Taro!"

Now Ketty has given me exotics before, a white *Lysichiton camtschatcense*, the white flowered species of skunk cabbage from Japan which she had grown from seed, and I cannot find it anywhere on the verge of the pond—maybe the muskrat enjoyed a rare delicacy. So, I was a little apprehensive about this heavy solid bowling ball doing anything.

I thought: "I will grow this wild taro in a twenty-five gallon pot in the rich compost/manure mix from Providence Farm, and give it murky drinks from a bucket filled with pond."

I placed the pot at the edge of the pond in May. A month went by but nothing happened, so I dug up the tuber to inspect it and I saw one fine long white thread coming from the bottom. On the top of the taro nothing but tiny round circles. I replanted it closer to the top of the pot so that now when I bucket water it shows those little circles erupting into little bumps (shoots!). The water bubbles and gurgles as the pot is filled three times and the black soil has that primeval ooze look.

The leaves of elephant ear proportions are showy as the whole plant can grow to seven or eight feet. I live in hopes that I can supply anyone who fancies some taro to make into poi or the new shoots for a vegetable. It comes with a warning though, as it reproduces vigorously and has become invasive in Florida so I'm counting on those muskrats to develop a taste for taro should it escape the pot.

Events

The Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary presents the 12th annual **Gardening for Wildlife: A native plant garden sale and demonstration** on Saturday and Sunday, April 21 and 22, 2007 from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm. Admission: \$3/day, \$5 weekend pass (price includes admission to all workshops and presentations)

University of Victoria Annual Plant Sale

Where: McKinnon Gym
When: Sunday, May 6, 2007
Time: 10:00 am to 1:00 pm

University of Victoria Finnerty Garden Tour

Where: Finnerty Garden beginning at the Chapel
When: Sunday May 13, 2007
Time: 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm
What: Guided tours of Finnerty Garden, coffee, tea, light refreshments



Witch Finger Tree seedling, adorning the deck in its pot.