

# University Finnerty Garden Friends



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**APRIL 2006**

*Dear Friends,*

Weather! Weather! Weather! When I last wrote to you it was shortly before Christmas and I was worried about the lack of rain. My tanks were not full and the ground was very dry. People with wells were worried about the level of the water table. Then, toward the end of December, the rains came. And how! January was one of the wettest we have ever had.

The ground was soaked, ponds were overflowing and the water table was at the surface in many places. Next, came the winds. We had four severe gales here with masses of debris out of the fir trees all over the ground, branches down and many power outages. Then came the last storm with winds from the north east that roared down Active Pass. Again, the mess was incredible: trees snapped off, huge branches broke off, roofs were covered with debris and, since the ground was still so wet, trees were blown down, their roots unable to get sufficient grip to keep them upright. I am now awaiting one of the local loggers who will fell the damaged trees.

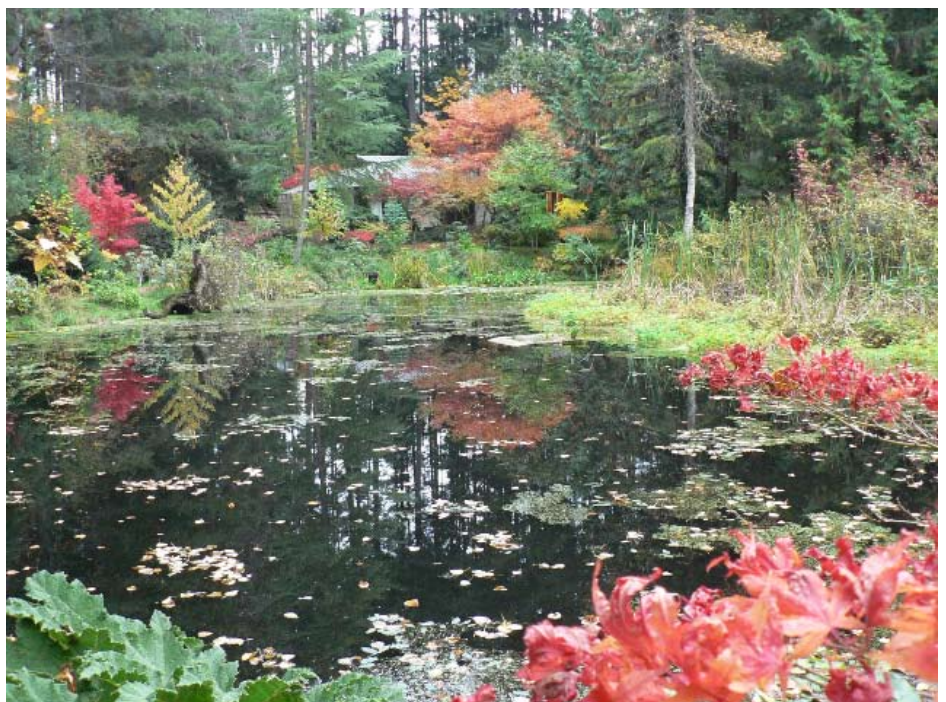
Finnerty had the same problem with a large fir uprooted and a tall oak which had begun to pull its roots. They will have to be removed too since they pose a threat to safety. The large fir landed on

a magnolia tree, and removing the fir will undoubtedly cause further damage to the magnolia.

And the temperatures were just as unusual. The garden was misled by the warmth of January and many shrubs and flowers came into bloom. The daffodils were out by January 18, and it has been so chilly since then that the same daffodils are still in bloom! The April blooming camellias are already in full bloom, and their blossoms are suffering. The rhododendrons appear to have been a little more sensible, and are maintaining

their usual bloom time. At least no one can accuse the weather of being staid and proper.

Enough about the woes of Gulf Island living. We are meeting this week about the Finnerty Calendar. If it all works out, we will be able to produce a calendar for next year. Many people have asked about the progress we are making, but it has been difficult to find a person who has the necessary contacts and is willing to undertake the selling and distribution of them. We are now hopeful that we have found someone.



*Margaret de Weese's Boggy Pond Garden*



The annual Plant Sale will be held on May 7, the first Sunday in May. There will be the usual collection of annuals, shrubs, trees, perennials, hanging baskets and other delights. Do visit the Sale. Bill Cross and Judith Terry (477-0747) are putting their volunteer staff together, so if you would like to help, please get in touch with them. I missed last year, but will be back this year wielding a broom on Saturday. I look forward to seeing many of you again.

The Gardens are looking wonderful. Carmen and her committee have done a spectacular job of advising Tony and his crew. New signage will shortly be in place identifying the beds and naming the major plants. People complain that they get lost in the Gardens and keep going around in circles! Maps and the new signs should help. Many of the species rhododendrons are in bloom, and are looking at their best. A good number bloom ahead of the hybrids, so an early visit will let you see them. Some work on re-routing paths is being done, and one of the oldest ponds is getting a face-lift with some new plantings.

Over the years, many people have given regularly and generously to the Gardens. We thank you all—you have indeed made a difference. This year, there were some surplus funds left after all our expenses were met, and we have been able to add to the endowment fund. We have also received some gifts to be used to make specific collections of plants, and Carmen and her committee have enriched our holdings. The acers that were planted a couple of years ago are thriving and make a great addi-

tion to the area near Henderson road. Do visit soon and watch the new developments.

I wish you all a great spring and summer—and good gardening.

*Betty Kennedy*

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*Keiko Alkire's Woodland Garden*

## Who Are We?

*Carmen Varcoe*

Perhaps many of you don't know what the Advisory Board is and its role in the Finnerty Gardens at UVic. Well, it is a group of nine to ten people who volunteer their time to come out through the growing season to meet with Tony James, the curator, and discuss and critique what needs to be improved or developed in the gardens. This crew is a very talented group of garden enthusiasts from the Victoria area. Most, if not all, have been involved with gardening for the greater part of their lives. Some still manage to help, even though they are still very busy with their own employment.

Robin Dening is the owner of Brentwood Nurseries, so he brings a good deal of his expertise with sourcing out plants that are difficult to find. Eryl Morton is a garden designer and brings many good ideas for new planting schemes for the gardens. Valerie Murray is the curator of

Abkhazi Gardens and also brings great design ideas for Finnerty. Hector Bussiere has been a long-time employee of Beacon Hill Gardens and is the current president of the Victoria Horticultural Society. Anne Mace is a Master gardener with excellent ideas for design and maintenance. Carol Dancer, a long-time volunteer and coordinator of Government House Gardens, also brings lots of good suggestions for future plans. John Gordon, although not a gardener is to be cherished for his expertise with handling of all the financial details. Betty Kennedy, our former chairperson and for many years the prime organizer of the yearly plant sale continues to be a stalwart volunteer on this board.

For 2006 we are fortunate in having two new members join the Advisory Board. David Whitehead, a long time gardener in Victoria will bring his knowledge to the group even though he is still busy with working at

the Blenkinsop Garden Works. Paul Turmel, will bring his expertise to the board after many years involvement with Buchart's Gardens. So I think we have a pretty impressive group of like-minded people working together in the future to make Finnerty Gardens even better. Oh, in case you don't know, I am Carmen Varcoe, the chairperson, a complete garden and plant junkie. ♻️



## Anticipation and Reflection

*Margaret deWeese*

It seems to me that gardening is about anticipation and reflection. That is why photo albums or photo libraries on the computer are such fun. “Did the garden really look like that?” “I’ve forgotten I grew that!”... “If I only hadn’t planted that tree!” They have captured something you or someone else thought spectacular at the time, and it is captured for you to reflect upon whenever there is a down time in the gar-

den—like a rainy January! Then there is the anticipation of what that small shrub will look like in ten years, and the related anticipation of glory. Of course, it doesn’t always happen as plants do tend to be tricky or tasty, and that is the end of them.

Whether one plans for a garden as an extension of fine art with statuary, formal beds, clipped standard roses or your preferences are for a cottage garden spilling over with colour and birds, or a quiet shady place to sit or a damp boggy pond garden, you are challenged to create.

A friend to Finnerty Gardens, John Trelawny wrote: “May 2006

be amongst the happiest of your life and that you will continue to enjoy the contentment of one who is blessed with a garden which you have created and from which you obviously obtain ultimate satisfaction. We know what this is.”

I cannot think of a better New Year’s greeting to a gardener or one who hopes to deserve the title. Whether you garden on a balcony, or on a farm, a city lot or by a roadside, you have the happiness of reflecting and anticipating and that is one of the secrets to feeling young. 🌿



*Glen Patterson’s Balcony Garden*

# Winter Aftermath & Project Update

*Tony James,  
Curator, Finnerty Gardens*

This has been another strange winter with the plants unable to decide whether they have had a period of dormancy and have blossomed well ahead of time, or are waiting for a late winter to finish before leafing out. We are experiencing a very similar situation to last year when the trees were confused, especially when some leafed out early and others were very late. One wonders how much of this variation they can take and if it will affect their long term viability. It was noticeable last year how much dead wood appeared in some trees and many looked stressed during the warmer weather. It also seems to be affecting the native firs and oaks.

Very strong winds from the south west in late February caused some problems with large native trees. One 80' high fir in the dry creek bed with a 24" diameter girth, lifted out of the ground and ended up leaning against another group of tall firs. This was very difficult to take down as it was too dangerous to climb and had to be dealt with by climbing the firs that it was leaning against and removing small sections at a time. It also damaged a mature Magnolia breaking off the top as well as uprooting a Chitalpa. The latter can be anchored back to the remains of this stump and the trunk disguised with a climber.

Another tree with its roots lift-

ing was one of the larger Garry oaks about 24" diameter girth in the big leaf rhododendron bed. Luckily this one was still fairly upright so it was climbable, which was just as well as there were no large trees adjacent to scale. This was removed to leave 30' of trunk standing and with an existing Schizophragma already growing up that high, it should look acceptable.

A third tree to keel over in the wind was a 25' Picea orientalis in the stream bed that was planted in 1977. Although the smallest of the trees that were uprooted, it made the biggest visual impact. It damaged the remains of the Magnolia wilsonii which was under stress in any case, but once the Picea was removed it left a very large gap which now opened up a vista across the stream. We will take advantage of this and construct a small path to the lawn opposite using stepping stones where it crosses the pebble creek. Once the path is in, the planting in the area will be reassessed and invigorated with the intention of making this a focal point.

We have also removed some of the birch that had deteriorated during the last few years and had their dead tops removed. Most of the birch on campus and in Victoria and the Lower Mainland seem to have suffered severe top die back and will probably be phased out. This is another example of the alteration of physical conditions that are changing the face of the landscape both native and ornamental. Another area that will be altered is the small lawn between podocarpus and garrya beds. This lawn is shady and generally remains wet. The gravel path will be extended to

join the main path, the bench moved forward and the remaining lawn area rototilled, soil added and turned into low planting.

Those venturing into the garden from any of the three main entrances will now see a directory sign with a map and additional information. A "you are here" marker on each one should make it easier to find one's way around. You may also notice that the beds now have names instead of numbers. Wayfinding will be further helped by having these names on larger signs on each bed and with the addition of a simple hand map that can be carried around, no one should get lost. The three entrances for the directory signs will be the Chapel, Henderson Road and Cedar Hill X Road.

With the advent of three and possibly four new buildings starting on the campus this year—resulting in a loss of green space, and especially mature ornamental trees—the oasis of the Finnerty Gardens will be a much more welcoming and contemplative place. 🌿



# Cyclamen

*Carol Dancer*

There are some flowers that can only be described as delightful and charming, and I can think of no better description for the little species cyclamen. They bloom profusely and usually at a time when the garden and the gardener can use a lift. In early September, just when the garden is looking tired, up pops *C. hederifolium* with masses of pink and white flowers. In January, when we really need something cheerful to look at in the garden, *C. coum* makes an appearance. My friend Joe Harvey refers to *C. coum* as “prozac for gardeners.”

The word “cyclamen” comes from the Greek “kyklos” meaning circular. It refers to the spiralling of the pedicels after the flowering of most species. This is a mechanism the plant has developed both to protect the seed pod from grazing animals and to provide a spring for seed dispersal.

The genus “Cyclamen” is not large, since only twenty-two species have so far been identified. Cyclamen, for the most part, is a Mediterranean genus where the climate is cool and wet in the winter and dry in the summer. Cyclamen grow and flower during the wet winter and spring months and become dormant as summer approaches.

Here in Victoria, *C. hederifolium*

and *C. coum* are most commonly cultivated. These two species give us flowers from September through March. However, by adding just a couple of extra species we can have cyclamen in flower from July (*C. purpurascens*) to April (*C. repandum*).

With our Mediterranean-type climate, Cyclamen are not difficult to grow here in Victoria. The species that I have just listed are hardy and resilient to heavy frost. During cold weather, the plants can go limp and look as if they are at death’s door. As soon as warm weather returns, however, the plants perk up and look as though they hadn’t gone through a frost at all. Other winter-flowering plants also have



*Carol Dancer’s City Garden*

this ability. On a frosty morning, hellebores, asarums, and pulmonaria, can be found laying flat on the ground, but by mid-afternoon the stems will have straightened up and the flowers look fresh again.

Cyclamen grow best in a humus-rich soil. They like a sheltered site but must have reasonably good light to bloom well. They do not need much in the way of fertilizer. In my own garden I usually give the cyclamen a scattering of bone-meal in late spring, and in mid-summer while they are dormant, a light top-dressing of compost. The most vital factor for success in growing cyclamen is well-drained soil. Any place where water puddles and sits in the garden is not going to be a successful site for cyclamen

Personally, I love to see cyclamen set in drifts along the edge of a woodland or shrub garden planted with rhododendrons, azaleas and other spring-flowering shrubs. They look their best planted with minor bulbs such as crocus, snowdrops and scilla and with small ferns or hellebores.

So how to start a collection of cyclamen. Some of our local garden centers and nurseries carry a selection of *C. hederifolium* and *C. coum*, usually when they are in bloom. So you should go looking in September and January. If you want to expand your collection of cyclamen you will probably need to start from seed, which is not difficult and is probably the best way to work up to an interesting collection. There is a cyclamen society based in England which has an excellent seed distribution. Closer to home, the Alpine

Garden Club of B.C. usually carries a selection of seed.

Cyclamen seed will always germinate better and quicker the fresher it is. Usually the seed we receive from societies is several months old, so it is best soaked in tepid water for twenty-four hours before sowing. This plumps up the seed and helps with germination. A good seed compost should be used, because the resulting seedlings will remain in the pot for at least a year. The ideal temperature for germination is about 15 degrees centigrade and placed in a darkened spot. I put my pots inside a clear plastic bag to create a self-sustaining environment for the first three to four months or until germination. Germination can happen within three weeks or take up to a year. This all depends on the age of the seed and the conditions provided for germination. It is best to grow the seedlings on for at least two years before planting out in the garden, and it usually takes three years to produce flowers.

Cyclamen are generally quite trouble-free and are seldom bothered by pests or diseases. Deer are my greatest pest as they love to graze the flowers. However, I find that if I plant the cyclamen with mini-daffodils or hellebores, which deer don't like, the cyclamen flowers escape the fate of becoming midnight salad.

*C. hederifolium* and *C. coum* are prolific seeders and soon establish naturalized colonies. One last point to make is not to underestimate cyclamen as foliage plants. Just as they say that no two snowflakes are the same, I think that one could make a case that no two *C. hederifolium*

are the same and at a time when we need foliage in the garden. 🌿

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## Garden Riches

*Margaret de Weese*

When I admired her beech hedge, a colleague once said to me that she had been left a legacy and instead of putting it into the bank had bought enough beech trees to make a hedge round her property. "I figured it is a fulfilling way of seeing my money grow", she explained.

I figure my wealth in the garden is in my library. Many gardeners, including myself, buy the latest from Timber Press and glory in the pictures while reading about the particular genus in favour at that time. I have two shelves filled with treasures. I say treasures because when they go out of print, their value often increases. Try that wonderful website for used and rare books, [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com) based in our very own Victoria and discover what your favourite gardening tome is worth!

Recently I loaned a book to a friend who liked it and wished to own a copy. I looked on [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com) where there were listed about forty copies of the said out of print book in bookstores in the English-speaking countries. Soon a book from Devon was wending its way to Victoria. The transaction was simple and it arrived in very good condition within two weeks. Though there was a slight dent in my Visa, I didn't even get my feet wet.

My most exciting literary pur-



chase was through a website of Scientific books in Holland. It is the one of the first printings of Dr. Sleumer's *Flora Malesiana* on Vireyas, January 1966 printed under the auspices of the Botanic Gardens of Indonesia, Bogor and the Rijksherbarium, Leyden. It is not a glossy coffee-table book, but a slim volume with a worn blue card cover and a small tear on the back cover. I feel that little book with its black and white photographs contains the wealth of those tender rhododendrons, *Vireya*, studied and collected in harrowing circumstances in Papua New Guinea, Sumatra, Java, Celebes and the Phillipines. Just having that book in my library makes me feel close to the intrepid explorers who risked life and limb to bring us treasures for our gardens and glasshouses.

I like my garden books because every plant in them is healthy and perfect. There is no weeding, watering, nor fertilizing to be done in those books. And during the winter months when it is too damp and chilly to garden in comfort, I can sit peacefully and renew my acquaintance with my garden treasures. 🌿

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## Donation Commemorates Pioneer

*Finnerty Family*

Thanks to the generosity of a descendant of the Finnerty family, spring has come early to Finnerty Gardens this year.

In January, the Finnerty Gardens Endowment Fund was enriched by a \$10,000 gift, made in memory of John Patrick and Hannah Finnerty, and their children: Sarsfield, Joe, Annie, Katie and John William. The Finnertys, for whom our beloved gardens are named, were one of Victoria's earliest pioneer families, and were among the first homesteaders and farmers in the Mt. Tolmie area.

In the fall of 1862, John Finnerty and his brother Michael, two Irish labourers, landed at Fort Victoria. Michael, unimpressed, was later quoted as maintaining that "there was the fort, three thousand Indians and not much else." However, the Finnertys' prospects in the colony were good. They soon found work on the Cariboo wagon road and returned to Victoria with enough money to purchase land along Richmond Road near the hospital, where they established a successful market garden. Soon after, they took up more land in Gordon Head, nearly 200 acres, and began the labourious task of clearing trees. This land now forms part of the UVic campus.

Two days after Christmas 1874, John Finnerty died at age 39, leaving his wife Hannah with four children and shortly expecting another. Hannah remarried two years later and had three more children, but tragedy struck on Christmas Day 1883 when she died at the age of 38. Her youngest child was three and the eldest, fifteen. The farms and orchards prospered under Mike Finnerty's management, the Richmond Road holdings coming under the care of Joe, Annie and Katie. (Sarsfield, the eldest son,

had left Victoria in 1885, never to be heard from again and John W. died in infancy.) Mike Finnerty, at age 43, married Mary Ann Casey and started a family of his own. He laboured on the Gordon Head property until he was well into his nineties. He died in 1930 after claiming to be 101 years old.

No where outside of Ireland is the name Finnerty more honoured than at the University of Victoria. The campus was bush land when John and Mike Finnerty uprooted stumps with their draught horses, and where Hannah rode through the wooded trails with her grey mare. Did they imagine that, a century later, a beautiful garden would bear their name; or could they envision the great university nearby; or ever simply stop and gaze at Haro Strait from high atop their hill?

Apple trees from the family orchard still stand in the quad just south-east of the Coronet building—twisted and gnarled, they reflect the spirit and tenacity of the pioneer family from county Mayo.

Donations to the Finnerty Gardens Endowment Fund are gifts that remain and grow in perpetuity, gifts that will ensure a reliable source of funds for the maintenance of this unique and beautiful garden—one of the most visited, and enjoyed places of the UVic campus. Those wishing to make a memorial gift to the Finnerty Gardens Endowment Fund are invited to contact Shirley Lyon at (250) 721-7014. 🌿