

# University Finnerty Garden Friends

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NEWSLETTER ● JANUARY 2005



Dear Friends,

As I rake leaves and do garden cleanup at Galiano, it doesn't seem possible that Christmas is only 9 days away. There has, as yet, been no frost and an amazing number of plants are in bloom. The combination of the August rain and the very warm fall has thrown the plants into a state of confusion. The rhododendrons have been blooming off and on for several months, the daphne odora is coming into bloom and will shortly be filling the back garden with its scent. The sasanqua camellias are in full bloom and the daffodils are up about 4 inches. I picked a bouquet of roses on Tuesday, and the lavender is trying to bloom again! The rain has filled all the tanks to capacity and the pond is full of muddy water. I hope the fish and various pond dwellers will survive. The pond was dug in clay and a heavy rain brings small waterfalls which wash the bank into the pond. The pond

The Garden Sale this year will be held on the second Sunday in May—the American Rhododendron Society's meeting in Victoria makes the usual date impossible. So—save Sunday, May 8, 2005 for your visit to the gymnasium. I look forward to seeing many of

also is fed by a spring in the bottom rock. Carmen and the Advisory Committee have been planning and working for a superb showing in late April and early May when the American Rhododendron Society holds its annual meeting here. The Gardens have a good bit of interest now with the grasses showing their fall colours. The early cyclamens are over but a number of rhododendrons are coming into bloom. The Oak Tree restoration area has caused quite a bit of interest and it is fascinating to try to figure out what they are doing.

The Finnerty Gardens calendar is available at the Bookstore. Do buy some for your friends. Daphne has done an especially fine job this year. Her photographs are superb. She loves the Gardens and certainly knows them well—catching them in all their moods. It was difficult choosing which of her excellent photographs should be selected for this year's calendar. you there.

Best wishes for a happy New Year to you all—and may your gardens prosper and give you great joy!

Betty Kennedy



## Montbretia

**Alec McCarter**

It seems that each garden that my wife and I have had changes colour a few times through the season. In the spring it is multicoloured as yellow daffodils and yellow, blue, mauve, purple and white crocuses predominate for a time. Then the blues of Ipheion, Chionodoxa and Muscarii take over. Pinks of Prunus, Rhododendron, williamsianum, tree peony, and whites of Magnolia and Cornus come next. White Hoherias bloom through July into August and now in August is the time for the garden to be mostly red or orange. The most prominent of these is produced by Montbretia (or is it Crocosmia) masonorum.

The several plants that we have are both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because of the colour, either a deep red ('Lucifer'?) or orange, is the beautiful spray of bloom, very attractive to Rufous and Anna's hummingbirds.

These in turn, attract my cat, Sabena, who with miraculous speed and agility can pluck these darting, or hovering gems from the air. Proudly, she brings them into the house and lays them on the carpet for me to see. Of the four that she has captured this summer, three were uninjured. I was able to pick them up in my hand, so tiny, so light, to admire their magnificent feathers, prismatic green and rufous. The birds lay perfectly still in my hand and then I noticed a wink of an eye—once, twice, surely the bird was alive?

These observations being set aside, Montbretias are a wonderfully colourful addition to the garden. After they bloom, you can cut them to the ground. The heavy foliage makes good compost—but make sure that no corms are inadvertently included for they will take advantage of the opportunity to spread and you may later find them where they are

The breathing resumed, rapid but shallow. The bird would right itself if rolled on its side, then hold up its head and long beak. then with a whirr of its tiny wings—it would take off into the sky and fly away.

Cat was satisfied with its prowess—I was satisfied to see the gorgeous creature close-up and especially satisfied that I had rescued it and helped it to live. The cat is only being a cat—the bird, only a bird (what a bird!)—but both brought excitement and wonder to me—reasons for growing Montbretia (AKA Crocosmia) in addition to its inherent beauty.

There is a down-side to this plant; If left until the clumps mature, it is almost impossible to destroy. Pulling on the sword-like leaves just tears them off with the corms still remaining in the ground. I tried once to dig out a clump that had grown in the same place for five years or more and had spread so far that it was seriously overgrowing and crowding some of the yakushmanum rhododendrons.. As I dug to remove the corms, there appeared to be layer upon layer of them going down quite deeply into the soil. and some had spread into the root-balls of the rhododendrons—one quandary led to another.

A different problem is that the weight of all the leaves and flowers in a large clump may cause the plant to collapse outward—I believe the term, if it were grain that we were talking about, would be that the plant had “lodged”. The cure is to tie up the clump using a rope strung around the outside and held in place by a strong stake. It is a problem, but the plant flowers profusely only if crowded. They also flourish only if the soil is moist—but not wet.

not wanted. By the way they make good cut-flowers—and even after the brilliant petals have fallen, the stalk and its spreading truss is a wonderful adjunct to a vase of other flowers.



**Victoria in 2005—a Silver Salute:  
A Guide to the American Rhododendron  
Society’s Annual Convention Coming Here  
April 28 to May 1, 2005**

**Norman Todd**

The rubric chosen for the 2005 convention is “A Silver Salute”. This has been chosen to mark the 25th year of the existence of the Victoria Rhododendron Society as a chapter of the ARS. We hope it also conveys the message that this will be a sterling affair. 2005 is also notable as it marks the 60th birthday of the ARS.

Victoria hosted the ARS convention in 1989 when 1100 attended: “the largest participation for a conference on record.” The 2005 convention will be held in the Victoria Conference Centre, which connects to the Fairmont Empress Hotel. Mornings will be devoted to talks. Speakers are coming from all over the world: “from Australia and New Zealand, England and Sikkim, Seattle, Vancouver B.C. and, of course, the Island.” The topics to be discussed vary from the historical to the scientific, from exploration to expressions of prejudice on what are good plants. Our final session on Sunday will be the traditional Breeders’ Round Table.

We are planning to have a “convention quality” plant sale, which will be open from morning to evening except when talks are in progress. The last weekend in April is the traditional time for the Victoria rhododendron truss and plant show, and 2005 will be no exception. However, instead of the various entries being rated by a panel of appointed judges, all registrants will decide the ranking. Ballot forms will be distributed and all are encouraged to participate. The complicated protocols for scrutinizing political elections will not be followed and no subsequent litigation

Everyone will want to hear Dr. Ben Hall, of the University of Washington, lead off Friday at 0830 with his significant presentation of his latest research on the DNA of rhododendrons and how this may lead to revising the way we

will be permitted.

The conference will be officially opened on Thursday morning by the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, the Honourable Iona Campagnolo. After coffee, Dr. Quentin Cronk of the University of British Columbia will examine some of the reasons why so many of us, from all parts of the temperate world, will be avidly assembled to discuss a single genus of plants. Dr Cronk’s dissertation will be followed by John Hammond of the Scottish Chapter speaking on “The Campbell Gardens of Argyll”.

Delegates will board the tour buses at the Convention Centre at 12:30 each day. A boxed lunch will be provided to all tour goers. On Thursday, the tours will focus on five City public gardens. There is, however, sufficient time to visit only three. All buses will go to the two largest gardens: The Finnerty Garden at the University of Victoria and the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific. Each bus will go to one of the other three gardens. To this extent, the Thursday tours are “Mystery Tours”. Some will go to the Abkhazi Garden, some to Playfair Park and some to Government House. For the passengers, who gets to go where, is a matter of chance.

On the Thursday evening, we have arranged for all delegates to visit The Royal British Columbia Museum—a major tourist attraction. We have reserved the entire third floor for our enjoyment. This contains many interesting exhibits and provides an appropriate environment for delegates to mingle and to meet the executive and the directors of our Society. Desert and coffee will be served., and there will be a no-host bar. Museum curators have a phobia, despite its coronary benefits, about the damaging effects of spilled red wine and it will not, therefore, be available. There is no additional cost for this event.

classify the genus. Being present at the start of each talk will pay dividends, as we will be having a Roaming Raffle. To win, the holders of the tickets drawn must be in the conference hall. The second talk will be by a charming

couple from Tasmania, Joy Stones and Ted Cutlan. Having traveled halfway around the world to be present, they will be eager to tell us of the "Tasmanian Experience". The third morning talk will be by Judy Walker, an Island resident, on the history of the pioneering rhododendron nurseries of Vancouver Island.

There will be two tours on Friday afternoon for which a choice must be made. They range a little further afield than the Thursday tours. One heads west; the other north and both pass through and over some fine scenery. The western tour will visit three of four gardens on display. The Blackmore garden is a carefully planned hillside jewel, enthusiastically cultivated by Lois and Roy. The Hopper Garden was featured in the spring 2204 edition of the *Journal*. Robin Hopper is a world famous potter, whose artistic talents extend to many areas, including horticulture. Dora Kreiss's garden features many species, particularly the big leaf ones. Dora had an article on her garden in the summer 2004 *Journal*. The fourth garden by Moe and Hanna Massa is eclectic, whimsical and labour-intensive with well-grown specimens.

The second choice for Friday heads up to the Malahat. Again only three gardens can be visited. Dave and Laurana Dougan's garden commands a spectacular view of Saanich Inlet.. The Murray garden has one of the largest collections of magnolias in BC. Liz and Alan have developed an organic fertilizer for their rhododendrons. The luxuriance and abundance of bloom demonstrates its effectiveness. The Cooks' garden, tended by mother and daughter, Etta and Ruth, is a pastoral gem. The Campbell garden contains

Tour goers will have to make another choice on Saturday afternoon. The world famous Butchart Gardens will be the destination for some of the buses. The other group will go to three famous Saanich Peninsula gardens. The Weesjes' garden, Towner Crest, is nine acres of mature specimens of the rarest and best rhododendrons, under-planted with great swathes of primula, erythronium, ferns and many other native and exotic plants. The

a fine collection of daphne. Alan and Sandy have taken a special interest in Vancouver Island hybrids..

We are to be truly honoured in having Keshab Pradan from Sikkim as a speaker. This gentleman, who formerly was the principal public servant in his country, has taken a special interest in its native flora. In recognition of his work with rhododendrons he was awarded the Society's Gold Medal in 2003. Keshab will do double duty. He will give a talk on Friday night on "Trees of the Himalayas". He will also be the Saturday after-banquet speaker, when his topic will be "Sustaining Sikkim's Rhodo Legacy for the World's Temperate Gardens."

Saturday's first talk will be by Dr. Eric Allen. Eric is a plant pathologist with the federal Forestry Department; his topic is "Alien Invasion: The Threat to Global Forests and Gardens". Eric possesses the wonderful skill of talking about morbid matters in a manner that captivates his audience. He will include a discussion on the contemporary thinking on Sudden Oak Death. Peter Wharton of the University of British Columbia, will enthrall us with accounts of his travels and discoveries in southern China. Many of Peter's introductions are proving to be very fine additions to our gardens and are quickly becoming highly sought-after plants.. The third talk will be by another antipodean, Lynn Bublitz, from New Plymouth, New Zealand. Lynn is a man of great experience in the study of the habitat and culture of rhododendrons—particularly the *Maddenia*, on which he will talk.

Trelawny garden sweeps down to Saanich Inlet and is packed with the choicest plant material. John is known for never having harboured a dislike for any plant. The third garden has been featured in many gardening publications and television productions. The Whitehead garden is the epitome of knowledgeable, sensitive and artistic design.

The Saturday night banquet will be held in the Convention Hall. This will be emceed by Wilson Grahame. Wilson, a

retired doctor, is guaranteed to defeat any post-prandial drowsiness with his keen Celtic humour and he will also ensure that the Society's business matters are dealt with efficiently and expeditiously. As previously noted, the feature talk will be by Keshab Pradhan.

We will have an extra half hour's sleep on Sunday as the first session will not start until 0900. For many who attended the 1989 Victoria convention, the most memorable talk was Ted Irving's and Richard Hebda's "On the Origin and Distribution of Rhododendrons". This paper was subsequently published in the *Journal*, and has received acclaim worldwide by botanists, climatologists, ecologists and many other scientific authorities. Ted and Richard have brought their combined skills to extend that study to magnolias. Their talk will add the next chapter in their research into plant evolution and distribution.

The final session for the 2005 convention will be the traditional Breeders' Round Table. This is an open forum led by a group of experts from all over the world. You are encouraged to bring your questions and observations to this session—a session that always provides encouragement and stimulation to all rhododendron growers.

The Victoria Rhododendron Society is confident that we have devised a good program; indeed, we hope, a sterling one. Come and join us in the Silver Salute to our 25 years of rewarding growth—a growth of friendships and of plants.

The creamy white paper is in sheets of about eight feet square and beautiful to behold. I read that the Mitsumata paper in Japan is made from *Edgeworthia gardenieri*.

I also read on the internet that "Japanese paper money (bank notes issued by the Bank of Japan) contains a material made from the mitsumata tree. The paper is thin, strong and durable, smooth and pleasant to the touch. Mitsumata fibers are stronger than cotton, which is the main material used in the paper money of other countries. The

Please visit our website  
<http://Victoria.tc.ca/Recreation/Ars2005/> .  
There, you will find many more details particularly on other local gardens of interest



### **Mitsumata**

### **Margaret deWeese**

When I was in Kyushu, I was driven to a tiny village in the mountains where fine paper making from plant bast fibres has been carried out since the sixteenth century. The traditional houses were homes to an extended family; and the paper making mainly took place outside. There were bundles of woody stems about 5-6 feet in length and about an inch in diameter, which were debarked by a woman wearing white gloves. She used an adze-like tool to remove the bark, and the shavings were placed in vats of water in order to soak. The bark was then collected as it became fibrous and placed in small stone basins and treated to make the fibres white. The porridge-like mixture was gathered into round vats and beaten by a mechanized wooden beater.

The press was made of heavy timbers. This mixture was then placed on a flat surface with a large screw press of three heavy flat timbers and allowed to dry. watermarks with their sharp outlines and gradations of shading, attain the world's highest standards. To guard against counterfeiting, details of the manufacturing process are kept secret, but apparently the process uses washi (wa=Japan shi=paper) manufacturing techniques, which make it possible to impregnate paper with delicate patterns. Produced through a combination of centuries-old washi manufacturing traditions and today's advanced technology, Japanese paper money is the finest in the world. "

I write of this because when I was at the Home and Garden Show in Vancouver this

Spring, an attractive tree caught my eye. It was a tree I believed I had not seen before. The tiny flowerets were a deep orange and yellow and the leaves had not yet emerged. On questioning the daughter of Art vanderZalm, I learned it was Edgeworthia chrysantha “Ruby Glow.”

Edgeworthia chrysantha is a golden yellow daphne relative with small fragrant flowers. In summer the plant looks tropical with its large, dark green leaves. And I was told it is used in Japan for making quality paper. I learned there was another variety available called “Gold Rush” whose flowerets were yellow. I thought to have them both although these two deciduous trees have branches which



### **Figs as Companions?—Go figure!**

**Alec McCarter**

When I first came to Victoria, in 1980, I was stunned to learn from one of the ladies at the lab, that she had a fig tree that actually produced ripe figs. She brought me a few and I thought I had never before tasted anything so good. Later, she introduced me to her preserved unripe figs, done in a spiced, sugary syrup. They were also delicious.

In my wanderings through the Finnerty Gardens, while walking our little dog (on a leash, of course), I found a large fig tree that had big green, ripe fruits which I sampled (in order not to let the birds peck holes in and waste them). The figs were soft and sweet with crunchy bits inside..

So, when John Trelawny kindly offered my wife a cutting from his tree, we were only too happy to plant it immediately behind a rock wall where its roots would be confined and it would receive some warmth from the sun-heated rock. This was not long before the severe frost of November 11, 1985. The small tree, for that is what it was then, suffered damage that required hard pruning, but it survived and the next year produced a few

fork into three branches so I believe they will grow to be rather large specimens! Burns and Karen Morrison have Edgeworthia chrysantha 'Gold Rush' growing in their lovely garden. A Japanese friend tells me they are called Mitsumata.

Now in October the leaves are exotic and the Ruby Glow is covered in floweret heads again but this time the tree sports long shiny leaves.

One of the great joys of gardening is to have plants which have their own stories and are reminders of exciting and educational events.

latent swellings to overwinter and provide fruit in the following summer. Then, we had our first fig from that small tree. What a delight! We waited until the fruit had drooped and was squishy to the touch, then shared it between the two of us. What a treat!

From that time on, the fig grew into a large tree, much larger than we had anticipated, but very decorative with its large multi-lobed leaves. From their shape (and size), we could see why the fig leaf was used by Adam—as well as nearly every sculptor of the male nude since his time with the exception of Michelangelo's David—as a prudish shield to cover parts not normally depicted.

The tree readily put up shoots, one of which we moved to the sunny side of a high wall between us and our neighbour to the north. It outgrew the space that we had allotted, and its roots threatened to break the concrete patio on its north side. Once established, the fig was determined to grow again, despite repeatedly being cut to the ground. At last, a spray of “Roundup” completed its removal.

In the meantime, a “Brown Turkey” was acquired. It was placed close to a brick wall lining our own patio and it prospered. Not so large as the white-fig, it has required only the removal of dead-wood that occurs through the winters.

In the very severe cold weather that struck on February 1, 1989, both it and the white fig suffered the loss of some branches, but these were replaced by vigorous growth the next summer. Since then, we have had no severe frost damage.

The fig is twice-bearing. A small first crop is produced on last-year's wood from over-wintering fruit-buds. A second crop occurs after the first, when, as summer goes along, hundreds of new figs grow and swell. The figs we grow here do not require the fig insect to fertilize them.

Over the winter, both trees carry over small nubs along a foot or so of the last-years' wood. When summer comes again, these increase in size until, about the end of July to mid-August, they are fully formed and begin to droop. As mentioned before, the fruit is picked when it is soft and the skin is easily bruised. The ripe fig may even begin to burst its skin with its goodness, and wasps may find it a tasty source of sugar fit for gorging themselves. Birds too may discover the sweetness so that the gardener should be vigilant at the time of harvest to prevent loss to other predators.

Pruning must be done to keep the size of the trees under control. Whole branches may be removed. But it is also important to prune in a way that maximizes the chances of getting a good crop of fruit. Clearly, one should prune so as to increase the number of embryonic figs and not cut them off. The way to do this is to wait until about mid June and cut back the tips of new growth, not so far that last year's fruit-buds are removed (for that would eliminate any chance of getting the first crop) but so that the formation of more branches can occur during the remainder of the summer. An increased number of branches should ensure that more immature buds will develop to carry over until the following summer. The production of the second crop will not be much affected by pruning in this manner.

Only a few dozen figs of the first crop may ripen on an individual tree in a good year. More often than not in Victoria, none of the second crop comes to ripeness before the cool weather and rains of autumn begin. It is said to

be a good idea to remove these unripened fruits before they rot on the tree. It is easy to knock them off, leaving the incipient fruit buds untouched. This past fall, however, most of the summer-borne crop ripened. We had from these two trees more figs than we could manage to eat. Large bowlfuls were emptied and replaced until we could eat no more. The white fig tree had huge fruits weighing as much as 300 grams each. When cut open, their flesh is pale-green-white, and it is very sweet. The Brown turkey has brown skin and the flesh is rose in colour. It also is very sweet and the tiny seeds are crunchy. Delicious! Of the two, I prefer the white.

Now, why do I think that fig trees are useful as companions for rhododendrons? Firstly, they do not become too large to be out of scale. Their green foliage is attractive as background against which the foliage and flowers of Rhododendrons can be displayed, at a distance, perhaps because their cultural requirements are different. In the autumn, the foliage of the figs blazes bright yellow —again an attractive counter-balance to the greens of the rhododendrons, and in the winter, the structures created by the leafless branches are interesting and beautiful in their own way.

Of course, it is for the delicious fruits that we grow them, but they do have these additional attributes that make them valuable in the garden.



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