



University
of Victoria

University Finnerty Garden Friends October 2010 Newsletter

DEAR FRIENDS, summer is drawing to a close — and by the time you read this, it will have closed. It has been quite a year — two very hot spells, and lots of below average temperatures. And it has been very dry, at least on the Gulf Islands. Because we had imm in July and 15mm in August, I am very grateful for the amount of stored rain water I am able to collect and keep. The garden is not happy with the dry weather, but at least it survives!

The last few weeks have been exciting for whale watchers. As you are aware, there is a large sockeye run in the Fraser this year and the resident orcas have been feeding heavily. They spread all over my end of the Pass and feed for about one half hour. Then they move on, probably because they have broken up the salmon school and the remaining fish are too scattered for easy catching. The department of fisheries ran a test seine in Village Bay, for several weeks, and while many of their early sets were empty, once the run started it was fascinating to watch them hauling in dozens of fish.

The hummingbird banding program is once again over. The numbers were down this year, although I mixed up almost the same amount of syrup as in previous years. When I started feeding them, I was the only person in this area doing it, but now all of my neighbors have feeders up, so when the birds see the traps I suspect they just go visiting! There are still very few Anna's hummingbirds around, and perhaps this is a good thing. They are larger than the Rufous and are quite aggressive. Observers are wondering if, since they are already established

when the Rufous arrive, they might be driving the Rufous off. Some sites in the Greater Victoria area which have been used for banding for some time have been abandoned since there are so few Rufous around.

In the Finnerty Gardens, the fern garden is virtually complete. Of course the plants take some time to settle in, so it will look more natural in coming years. The rhododendrons were wonderful in the Victoria area this year, and those in the garden were magnificent. The committee is now planning a memorial garden and bench for Ian McTaggart Cowan. Ian's daughter Ann has been consulted regularly and is proving very helpful in the choice of plants. She knew his enthusiasms.

Carmen and Rhonda have been checking out the supply of garden plants for the next plant sale and report that there will be an excellent selection. This is very exciting since we have long hoped that the garden could provide many of the sale plants.

It is impossible to know what the winter will bring in the way of weather, but it is a La Nina year, so the meteorologists expect more extreme weather. Perhaps it is just as well that we do not know what lies ahead.

I hope all of you have a great fall. If you have not renewed your membership in the Garden Friends, will you please do so — the newsletter costs are substantial. The fees are still \$10 per year, and donations in addition are very welcome!

— *Betty Kennedy, Editor*



The Lazy Gardener — part 1: The Basics

by M. J. Harvey

I AM A BUSY GUY, NO TIME FOR WEEDING, planting annuals or cutting grass. But I love having a torrent of flowers all year round. Note I said “busy” but it could equally be “lazy” — both are four-letter words, occasionally synonymous. Okay, you think, so just pay a gardener to plant, prune, weed, mow and rake. Uh-uh — I’m also a cheapskate. So the question arises, can I have it all at no expense and little effort? I try, I try. Where is Mephistopheles when you need him? Here is my desultory life story so far.

I shall go into plant choices in later newsletters but many gardens already have plants in them, the result of decisions made by previous owners, possibly even yourself. Most often these choices, in retrospect, could have been better, in fact may have been quite disastrous. The famous redwoods on Moss Street for instance.

Owners of a new house, faced with a skinned barren lot, tend reflexively to run to the nurseries with the plea: “Give me

anything that grows fast, really fast.” These rushed decisions tend to persist in gardens for twenty, fifty or more years and yet later gardeners are reluctant to alter the situation.

For instance we moved a couple of years ago into an older property which had been planted many years back with screening shrubs. The purpose of these is to isolate the owners from the neighbours. Actually we get on very well with the neighbours so the screen is not now important but these shrubs were taking up an inordinately large amount of square footage in a small urban garden.

My first target and favourite hate was an old cherry laurel. This species is frequently the first planted on new properties. Nursery catalogues read something like: “Easy care shrub makes an excellent hedge, has shiny evergreen leaves that are resistant to diseases and insects.” Our whole neighbourhood is infested with old cherry laurels. Those trees can grow over four foot in a year. Hedges of them provide excellent exercise for

owners, either to the muscles or to the wallet.

Fortunately we only had a single cherry laurel but one neighbor has a neighbor with an old neglected cherry laurel hedge. He was trying to trim back his side and top, got on a ladder and reported to me that it must be twelve feet wide.

Do you know why cherry laurel leaves never, or seldom, get chewed? They are loaded with cyanide! Now many in my community want to ban toxic chemicals from the municipality, little realizing we already have enough cyanide to eliminate the population of Oak Bay. I have heard that if something is “natural”, it is okay but if it is “synthetic” it isn’t. Last time I took chemistry, “natural” cyanide was as deadly as the “synthetic” form. Anyway, I ended up also taking out ivy, holly, cedar, a very rampant Rhododendron (“Anna Rose Whitney”), Cotoneaster, Pieris, Euonymus, a creeping bamboo and a non-flowering Camellia. This freed up space for the smaller shrubs and herbs that I wanted to substitute.

So, having obtained some extra space the next consideration is things guaranteed not to spread, creep or multiply. I shall go into the plant side of this in subsequent newsletters but the first consideration is the hardscaping: the paving, stonework, statues. The property already had good stone walls and brick pavers so we only had to site what we brought with us. This consisted of a couple of granite Japanese lanterns obtained from Better Gnomes and Gardens (which I was sorry to see that Laurie had to close a couple of years ago — I loved the punning name).

The lanterns have been a joy to us over the years and deciding exactly where to site them took several months of decisions — actually several months of indecision. The last thing you want to do with a Japanese lantern is to stick it in the middle of a flower bed. They were originally meant to illuminate bends in paths, corners or niches, so getting it exactly right was important.

One problem with statuary is that it sometimes takes a walk — as in the back of a truck — after dark. In the case of our smaller pillar-shaped lantern at the front, I embedded the base in a sack of ready-mix concrete.

One friend told me that if we wanted to grow moss on the lanterns a few dabs of rubber cement would attach starter tufts. My lazy philosophy is to let nature do the job, it takes less effort and the final result is completely natural.

Rocks are another important asset. The previous owners had had the peripheral drains replaced seven years ago. During the excavation the backhoe had unearthed a large stone and they decided to use it as a feature, bedding it in on the street

boundary. It looks as if it has been there for a century and has started to grow moss on it spontaneously. Very satisfactory.

A new house is being built near us and to maximize space the owner decided to put in a deep basement. A large backhoe dug out the soil and clay, coming across several boulders of various sizes in the process. These stones originated further up Vancouver Island, carried here by the former ice sheet. Most of the stones were saved and I pointed out to one of the owners that good stones were worth \$1 per pound — a figure I produced out of my head, but I was trying to make the point that quality stones are a valuable commodity. The owners are not experienced gardeners and are probably thinking of building a wall. It has nothing to do with me but my own preference would be to have the stones incorporated into the landscaping, although many people see stones as a disposal problem not an asset.

The above certainly seemed to apply to the backhoe operator because as the machine was being readied for return he had an empty truck and a very large stone slab maybe over six feet long, it looked like a smaller version of a Stonehenge upright. With some difficulty and great skill, this enormous stone was loaded into the truck and driven away, presumably to the dump. I was left thinking what a wonderful feature it would have made in the future garden but all I could do was sigh.

So the basic bones of an easy-care garden consist of stones, statues, bricks, walls, fine gravel, etc. There is, of course, no lawn in my plans. I never “got” grass, possibly because I had to mow it with a hand mower as a child. I notice that people fertilize and water their lawn—this makes it grow—so it needs mowing. Something in my brain says, if you don’t fertilize and water it, it will grow slower and not need cutting so often. But I get no resonance on this point from lawn owners.

Then there is moss. Moss is an absolute delight—soft, green, limited growth, never needs watering or mowing, easy on the eye and the feet. I can’t praise it enough. I love it. I always say, if the Emperor of Japan can have a moss garden, so can I. But I gather that here again my logic is at fault. Apparently moss is a major disaster to be eliminated before the neighbours ostracize you. The stores are full of de-mossing sprays, ferrous sulphate crystals, lime, dethatching rakes and aeration plug machines. Do I detect that the business of eliminating moss has become what economists refer to as a “profit centre”?

In later newsletters I shall deal with shrubs and perennials but I should point out that annuals do have a place in my garden. They grow in pots placed on the hardscaping or in hanging baskets. 🌱

Stumpery

by Jeremy Quin, UVic Groundsworker

WHEN RHONDA ROSE TOLD KAREN GROSE and me that we were going to build a stumpery in the Finnerty Gardens, I knew that this was a fantastic opportunity to be creative. I enjoy creating and landscaping gardens; therefore, I jumped at the opportunity.

A stumpery is a collection of stumps and logs put together for the purpose of growing ferns, mosses and lichens on them. They provide a home for wildlife and host beetles, bugs, toads and other small mammals and birds. The location of the stumpery was debated. Initially we thought it would go into the Indian Plum bed but we decided that access to the bed for maneuvering the stumps would be difficult. So it was decided to make it part of the Salix bed with some of the unused bush line to be cleared.

I stepped aside for Peter Roberts and Paul Gillies to start with the clearing of the bush line. This exposed a large sweeping Garry Oak branch and we decided to uncover more of this unique branch. Many passersby commented on the significance of the branch, but when you look at all the Garry Oaks on that south side of the garden you see that they all lean out reaching for the sun. I expanded the irrigation by adding some sprinkler heads to the new part of the bed.

With irrigation complete, we laid out the path and began

loading in the soil and mulch. Once a base of soil was in the bed, the next part was to find the stumps and weathered logs. For years, stumps from construction sites and fallen trees on campus had found their way into the bush lines and ravines. We just had to figure out where they were. After scouring the campus, we were able to collect a good selection of stumps and logs and began placing them into the bed.

Since many of the stumps weigh a few hundred pounds, tractors and a mini excavator were used to put this giant jigsaw puzzle together. Peter and I spent many hours moving the stumps along a winding path, placing them in such a way that there were pockets to plant material in, taking advantage of the unique architectural structure of the stumps. We also moved three large rhododendrons from other parts of the garden into the new bed. In the meantime, members of the Advisory Board were collecting unique plant material which arrived on May 13th. We began planting the ferns and other plants into the stumps and were pleased to see the stumpery coming together quite nicely.

Many people are curious to see our creation and really enjoy the new addition to the Finnerty Gardens. I am looking forward to watching it grow! 🌱



The Beneficial Effects of Campus Beautification

by Lynn Morton



The following is an extract from a speech given by Lynn Morton, husband and business partner of Finnerty Gardens Advisory Board member, Eryl Morton, at the Annual Conference of the US National Association of College Auxiliary Services, hosted by the University of Victoria in 1999. Its relevance today remains unchanged.

WHAT IS A UNIVERSITY CAMPUS? I believe a campus is an environment that provides the opportunity and equipment whereby students can feel that life can become more meaningful — an environment that enhances knowledge and inspires individuals to apply it. I have selected these words very carefully so that I can outline to you the relative importance outdoor campus environments can have on making life more meaningful for students and others in the university and local communities.

A number of years ago the then British Minister for Education and Science, Angela Rumbold, stated: “There is a groundswell among young people of concern for the natural world. This is the foundation on which we build a wider understanding of the issues. It is important that we capture this enthusiasm and that no opportunity is lost to develop knowledge and understanding of the natural world through education.” I believe the university campus grounds can embrace the natural world in a wide variety of ways. The grounds provide opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills. They are a source for inspiration and interest stimulation. They can arouse student awareness and curiosity about the environment and nature as well as encouraging active participation for protecting and improving it. Students can be encouraged to utilize the campus grounds to examine and interpret the environment from a variety of perspectives — physical, geographical, biological, sociological, economic, political, technological, historical, aesthetic, ethical and spiritual. All these are aspects

of the academic curriculum found in a university.

Plants and gardens have had a significant influence on human culture since the earliest civilizations. They linked plants and plant parts with beauty. Art and symbolic associations developed from them. As aesthetic cultures evolved in civilizations so garden designs developed to reflect the beauty of plant groupings, as well as art and architecture.

The natural world and plant life found in campus grounds can also be beneficial to our general health and feeling of wellbeing. People like a normal and familiar environment.

They feel comfortable in it. They feel better when viewing a garden. A few years ago *Time Magazine* published an article entitled “Science, God and Man” by Robert Wright. In that article he quoted the eminent biologist, John Maynard Smith (who made many fundamental contributions to evolutionary theory) that he had never understood why living organisms have feelings. And the writer goes on to say that “after all, orthodox biologists believe that behaviour is governed by biochemistry, and that the attendant sensations — fear, pain, wonder and love are just shadows of that biochemistry, and are not themselves vital to the organism’s behaviour. They are affected by the material world but don’t affect it. Well, if that’s the case and feelings don’t do anything, then why do they exist at all? This is no trivial question. Feelings — the fact that we experience the world as well as respond to it — are what make life meaningful. Who or whatever created the universe seems to have geared it to create not just intelligent life, but intelligent meaningful life.” Robert Wright’s conclusions are, I believe, fundamental to understanding why a garden or landscape can have such a beneficial influence on our health and wellbeing.

Diane Ackerman, in her book *The Natural History of the Senses* writes that “we need to return to feeling the textures of life. The five senses — sight, sound, touch, taste and smell — don’t just make sense of life in bold and subtle acts of clarity. They tear them apart into vibrant morsels and reassemble them in a meaningful pattern.” In the civilized world our pattern of life is one of order rather than chaos. These are the ingredients and sensations to be found in a well-designed garden or landscape for stimulating feelings or emotions.

Medical scientists have established that intelligence is in



every cell of our bodies and that in effect the mind and body are inseparable. It is the emotions stored in the cells that can influence the process of health as the biochemicals running the body are precisely the same as those running the mind. These emotions (or feelings) are triggered when we view a beautiful garden or work in it. But it is our interaction with the natural environment and plant life found in a garden or landscape that helps make life more meaningful. Frederick Law Olmstead, the landscape architect who created Central Park in New York, once wrote that “a garden employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it, tranquilizes it yet enlivens it, and gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system.” Gardens are therapeutic precisely because the effects of viewing a beautiful garden are beneficial to both the body and the mind.

Occupational therapists will tell you that a person’s quality of life relies on three factors — environment, plus opportunity, plus the individual’s own personal contribution to his or her situation. The whole of human behaviour can be viewed as a process of input, throughput and output, whereby the human system and the environment continually influence and modify each other. The significant role environment plays in shaping behaviour has been described under the title “environmental press” (or pressure) by the American psychologist Barris. His concept is that any environment is composed of five basic elements: physical features, people, cultural features, tools and materials. All these elements are to be found in varying degrees in an outdoor campus environment. They can provide the motivation and stimulation that students appreciate for gaining and applying knowledge, for making life more

meaningful and the natural world a more meaningful place in which to live.

So how should campus gardens and landscapes benefit people? Well, it can help to develop a rapport with the changing scenes of nature, and the beauty and interest found in a contrived and managed landscape. It stimulates the senses. It can motivate people to participate in creating its beauty. By engaging in healthy work or leisure activities outdoors, they will learn how the outdoor environment can be shaped, be reciprocally shaped by it, gain knowledge of it and perhaps master personal skills. But most importantly, I think, they develop their own identity in relation to it. Through knowledge and awareness of the natural world and gardens, life becomes more meaningful — and it helps keep body, mind and soul together.

Well, what are some of the practical implications for creating and improving grounds?

Firstly, and most obviously, you need to have a general long-term plan with a prioritizing of objectives. The creation of that plan should draw on a wide spectrum of professional expertise. I emphasize the word “practical” because some of the more vociferous opinions that are given are often not so. After all, 80% of all North American households are gardeners, making gardening by far and away the most popular leisure activity. As a result, a significant percentage of those offering advice and opinions will consider themselves to be specialist garden designers, plants persons or environmental experts. The reality is that their knowledge and experience is often limited to managing their own small spaces in their own spare time or from occasional visits to wilderness areas. This knowledge may have little practical relevance to the design and maintenance considerations of a large-scale campus requiring the efficient use of both human and financial resources. I do not wish to denigrate the enthusiasm and good work undertaken by many generous volunteers which can be invaluable. However, the long-term plan requires a consistent application of its priorities in order to maximize cost effectiveness and achieve the long term desired effect. Plants can take a long time to reach maturity.

The university’s most valuable and knowledgeable asset is its grounds manager. The Manager — or the associate with whom he or she is reliant for horticultural input — will undoubtedly be a trained horticulturist with many years of practical experience — essential when dealing with living things like plants. He or she knows the grounds and any inherent problems appertaining to soil, drainage, climate,

shade and sun. By drawing on other outside professional expertise for design and plant selection, risks from inappropriate designs or losses from unsuitable choices of plant materials will be reduced.

I would like to add a few words of caution that reflect my personal experience and opinions. Beware of the specialist plant enthusiasts! They will wish to cover the whole of the campus with the varieties of plants in which they have a specialist interest, irrespective of their suitability. Plant collectors often only see the plants. They do not always see the picture. A beautifully contrived garden requires creative use of plant combinations to maximize effect and draws from the widest available range of suitable plant and hard landscaping materials. This caution also includes native plant enthusiasts. They may not have any detailed knowledge of the actual species that might be suitable for an urban university location. Nor may they have knowledge of which species are hosts to exotic pests, the introduction of which could endanger the health of other species commonly found in urban garden environments. In British Columbia, for instance, many natives emanate from the rainforest, so by definition, require high levels of water and are primarily shade tolerant only. Also, some natives have little to commend them in terms of floral or foliage interest. There are those who will advocate the use of xeriscaping techniques in the misconception that it involves using drought tolerant plants originating mainly from different climatic regions. This technique in fact requires the sorting of herbaceous perennials and shrubs with regard to their ecological requirements — in other words, the right plant in the right place for the right conditions and drought tolerance may not even be a consideration. It requires effective soil analysis and improvement as well as efficient irrigation and use of mulches. Most skilled gardeners have implemented these principles for a hundred years or more without the need for a fashionable title. Perennial plantings usually involve higher maintenance costs particularly in the early years as they take time to become established. They also provide no winter months interest which is when most students are attending university.

What are some of the basic guidelines we apply when designing gardens for customers that are applicable to campus grounds?

- 1 Go (blend) with the site and surrounding landscape.
- 2 Don't let obtrusive features dictate.
- 3 Think spatially — design your spaces first.
- 4 Think three dimensionally — different levels and heights.
- 5 Use hard landscaping and structures to create the framework or infrastructure.
- 6 Get your scale and proportions right.
- 7 Create focal points to draw the eye.
- 8 Design the layout and use plants to create illusions e.g. depth.
- 9 Create mystery to entice — for surprises.
- 10 Frame a view.
- 11 Plant for year round interest.
- 12 Plant boldly.
- 13 Consider sweeps and repeat plantings for the eye to follow.
- 14 Either colour co-ordinate or contrast leaf and flower — remember the leaf is more important than the flower.
- 15 Remember the senses — sight, sound, touch, taste and smell.
- 16 Plant practically — for soil, sun, shade etc.
- 17 Remember drainage and irrigation.

I also believe that a university (particularly when in part financially supported by local governments, i.e. taxpayers) benefits from a closer integration with the local community. There are times and places when facilities can be shared and by so doing encourage greater support from corporations, service clubs and individuals. American universities are probably the best in the world for encouraging this kind of association. There are those people and organizations which will willingly provide financial support or make donations of materials, particularly if their names are recognized and a tax credit is given. This applies as much to campus grounds as it does to research grants and financing building facilities. Facilities managers can involve the ornamental horticultural industry, equipment and materials manufacturers and suppliers, as well as affluent individuals and alumni in funding the beautification of campus grounds. Organize your fund raising committees, use plant sales to raise revenues, search out homes and other areas that are being demolished or that contain valuable plant materials or collections.

The beneficial effects of a beautiful garden environment are, after all, recognized consciously or subconsciously by many people. For a beautiful garden gladdens the heart, stimulates the body and brings joy to the mind. ☺

Submit Articles

All Friends of Finnerty Gardens — including present and past Members of the Advisory Board — are invited to submit articles of interest to horticulturists for publication in the Newsletter. The purpose is to maintain the eclectic range of horticultural interests that the Newsletter has espoused in recent years.

Ideally, articles should be of 500–1000 words in length, and should be emailed to the editor as soon as they are ready. When articles are accepted, they will be published as quickly as space becomes available. Since the editor is an English professor rather than a horticulturist, authors must hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the horticultural content.

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Membership

Membership in the Friends of Finnerty Gardens is \$10 per year (single or couple). Membership includes an informative newsletter published four times a year. Funds raised through membership support enhancements within the Gardens which would not be possible otherwise.

This newsletter is also available on the University of Victoria's website at www.external.uvic.ca/gardens/. If you would prefer to view it electronically rather than in hard copy, please let us know and we'll update our mailing list accordingly.

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The information presented and the opinions expressed by the authors in this newsletter are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the University of Victoria or any employee thereof.

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