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University Finnerty Garden Friends

July 2011 Newsletter

Tour of Finnerty Gardens

Carmen Varcoe

On a spring smile day on the last day of May, Finnerty Gardens was visited by the University of Victoria's Board of Governors. Accompanying them were Tom Smith, Bentley Sly, Rhonda Rose and Carmen Varcoe.

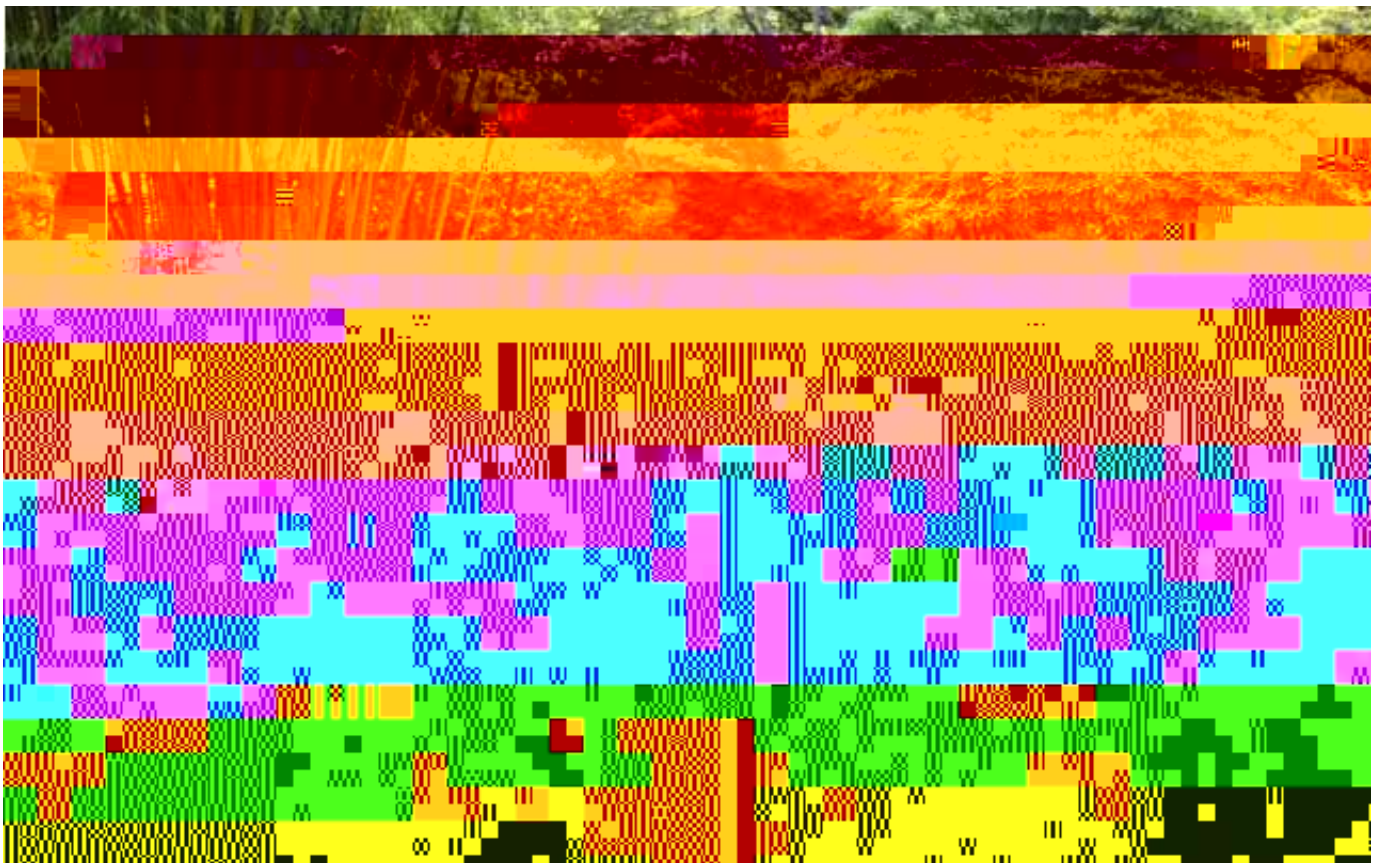
Upon arriving at the Chapel, all remarked on the spicy scent—what was it? *Magnolia sieboldii* was in full bloom to the right of the entrance gate. On the other side of the entrance was the magnificent *Davidia involucrata* (the Handkerchief Tree) in all its glory. This is just one of the trees that was donated to the gardens by David Lam, the former Lieutenant Governor.

Tom mentioned the collaborative process of the garden staff with the Advisory Board, Bentley outlined to the Board the history of the Finnerty Gardens and how it goes back to its origins in India, Lake Cowichan and Royston.

Rhonda showed the Board some of the eye catching specimens in the garden. To begin with, *Rhododendron* Mrs. Josephine Firth was still looking quite lovely. Across the path, they all remarked on the great stand of Timber Bamboo that continues to draw attention.

Rhonda and Carmen showed them the latest developments in the Alpine Bed and mentioned the upcoming dedication ceremony in Ian McTaggart-Cowan's memory. This bed has just recently been overhauled and was looking most attractive with dwarf conifers, rhododendrons and ground covers all very suitable for the theme of the bed.

Some of the plant collections were also shown to the group to demonstrate how donations have been placed in the gardens. They understood the need for acknowledgement of such donations but not necessarily all having plaques or signs.





The Lazy Gardener—4

Perennials and Conclusions

M.J. Harvey

The aim of the lazy gardener is to have a stable mixture of plants and hardscaping that does not change dramatically from year to year. at much is obvious but in practice it is a hard state to achieve. I was intending to

the hands. They were a specialty along now long abandoned British seaside promenades—swept away by the blast from jet planes.

Locally we have many municipalities planting command gardens along roads and at intersections for reasons of civic pride and for traffic calming. Bulbs and hardy annuals are used for the spring display and a bizarre mixture of species including banana plants, angels’ trumpets, cannas, *Tibouchina*, salvias and snapdragons for summer. These are of course unstable associations but since they only have to last a few months that is not a consideration.

Don’t get me wrong—I love seeing brilliant displays along our roads; they cheer everyone up and a great deal of creative thought goes into their design. But they take a lot of work or, in other words, they are expensive, and just about the opposite of our desired lazy garden.

Plantless and Few Plant Garden

In the first of this series of articles, I mentioned the over 600-year-old Zen garden Ryoan ji at Kyoto. Ryoan ji has managed to maintain its serenity all that time, but only at the expense of eliminating plants. This does not sit entirely well with me or most of my friends—admired but not copied. Other Zen gardens of course have some plants and one local Zen type garden may be seen at the lower part of Glendale Gardens and Woodland in Saanich.

Islamic gardens represent paradise, which of course is a garden, and rely on usually geometric paved pathways, streams and canals with usually clipped trees as the plant component. Historic examples extend from Moorish Spain to Mughal India. China has peng jing gardens of carefully clipped trees together with rocks representing mountain landscapes—a few contain only carefully chosen rocks. Then of course Europe evolved the topiary garden of shaped yew and box trees either with or without flower beds. Levens in the north of England is my favorite.

The Plantsperson’s Garden

There is something in the psychology of certain gardeners in which the hunt for and acquisition of rare plants satisfies some deep craving. Psychologists would probably hypothesize that it is the sublimation of the primitive urge to find food. This spring Ian Back organized a bus tour for members of the Victoria Horticultural Society to visit mainland nurseries purveying unusual plants. These are jolly trips and for the real nutters among us the mere sight of a

name on a label releases sufficient serotonin, or whichever neurotransmitter gardeners have, to reduce us to automatons or zombies: “Must have! Must have!” (For me it was *Pseudocystonia sinensis* which will go to Abkhazi Garden).

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slowgrowing plant for many years its requirements come first. Gardening books are vague in the extreme about what these requirements are. The rule is: "Ask the plant." The trouble is they don't talk much and one has to deduce their answer when they thrive or die. Friends can help in this. For instance I mentioned that I had a nice sunny southfacing wall for a Zone 9 *Lapageria*. "No! No!" Judith said, "The leaves burn in the sun, they need some shade." Many of the more delightful herbs have particular requirements for humus, soil pH (no lime for some), shade, wind and summer moisture. Getting these just so is the secret to success—but tricky.

Final Words

Certain plants are pretty sure fire for our purpose of not seeding or spreading and, importantly, surviving. Early in the year are spring bulbs and hellebores. Most hellebores set seed too efficiently except for the *H. xhybridus* doubles, but the modern hybrids involving the Christmas rose are both sterile and vigorous. To obtain mine in the '90s, I had to resort to hand pollination but once commerce caught up with tissue propagation every supermarket and hardware store began selling them. Freely available are the *H. xericsmithii* hybrids with white and pinkyred tinted flowers but my money goes on the *H. xnigercors* crosses (*niger* x *arguti oius*) which look like Christmas roses on steroids with taller, multi flowered racemes. One I noticed in spring was named 'White Beauty.'

The genus *Trillium* has almost no faults. The first to flower and topnotch is our local *T. ovatum* but for longerlasting blooms go for the subgenus with the sessile flowers. As I write the deep red *T. kurabayashii* is showing well in Abkhazi Garden; it was not named until 1972 and honours the Japanese researcher who recognized that it was different. (Do Californians only go into the woods to smoke pot?)

Peonies are among my favorite early summer plants and I could not exist without the wild tree peony *P. rockii* with its black blotched white flowers. However, I scorn the monstrous yellow tree peony, *P. ludlowii* (lutea) and its deep red relative *P. delavayi*. These get sold cheaply at plant sales because the seed is easy to germinate but honestly, go for

quality. Of the delavayi group only *P. potaninii* of modest size and orange flowers is worth garden space. I'molaCr@nt. pace. I f me

