

A FOCUS ON B.C. Native Plants

By Jill Cherry

As part of VanDusen's commitment to environmental responsibility, we have embarked on an exciting new initiative focusing on B.C. native plants and their habitat niches. This initiative has been funded in part through a grant programme jointly administered by *Investing in Nature – A Partnership for Plants in Canada*, *Canadian Botanical Conservation Network* (CBCN) and *Botanical Gardens Conservation International* (BGCI). VanDusen received funding for additional plant material, as well as for conservation-oriented informational brochures that will interpret the Garden's native plant collection.

Plant research and educational programmes at botanical gardens advance conservation science, promote public awareness of the importance of plants and advocate the need for their conservation. *Investing in Nature* is a global conservation programme which recognizes that over 200 million visits are made to botanical gardens annually. As a consequence, collectively, botanical gardens are important scientific and educational facilities, providing leadership in plant conservation and public education. *Investing in Nature* is funding education programmes in Canada, China, Japan, the U.K. and the U.S.; revitalizing conservation in 16 botanical gardens in Argentina, Brazil, India, Indonesia and the Middle East; and creating living gene banks in botanical gardens worldwide.

At VanDusen, we have several opportunities to showcase native plants. Under the Douglas firs at our entrance we will be featuring native ground covers and low growing shrubs. The Western North America section presents our main collection of B.C. natives, as well as the B.C. section of the Canadian Heritage Garden.

The additional plant material will enhance the Western North America section in particular. New VanDusen gardener Egan Davis has been renovating this section recently and describes how the garden will take shape (see next page).

Two informational brochures will shortly be available, one for adults and the other for children. They will present the collection from a conservation point of view, guiding the visitor to plant locations in the garden while presenting information on the critical issues relating to native plants. Loss of biodiversity, for example, as a result of encroaching development, invasive exotic species and habitat loss, is just one issue that will be covered. Sometimes we gardeners tend to concentrate on plants as individuals and forget that these specimens are part of complex ecosystems in nature. This interpretive tool will encourage visitors to reflect on the fragility of these various habitats and to become more aware of conservation issues in general.

Being explicit about our conservation message, whether it is responsible water usage (see March 2004 Bulletin), the 'green' aspects of our proposed capital project or this native plant initiative, makes the critical link between our collections and their larger context regionally and globally.

Jill Cherry is Director of VanDusen Garden.



Photo: Michael LeGeyt



Photo: Michael LeGeyt



Photo: Egan Davis

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Clockwise from above: *Trillium ovatum*; *Trillium chloropetalum*; *Erythronium tuolumnense* (trout lily) makes a stunning display each spring; *Olsynium douglasii* (purple satin bells) and *Lysichiton americanum* (skunk cabbage) thrives in the 'critter' stream.

Western North America Garden IMPROVEMENTS

By Egan Davis

Exciting changes are taking place in the Western North America collection this year. Although this section of the Garden is well structured and boasts a strong foundation of geographically appropriate plant species, there is a huge opportunity to further develop its educational value.

Several existing features of the Western North America section really stand out as highlights in the Garden. The impressive display of naturalized *Erythronium tuolumnense* (trout lily) is breathtaking in spring. With pride of place, the *Quercus garryana* (Garry oak) enjoys enough space to develop in perfect form. By venturing onto the garden trails, visitors can enjoy finding hidden treasures, such as *Trillium chloropetalum* (sessile trillium). The stream running through the centre of the collection attracts School Program tours so that children can count how many critters are present in the water.

However, there is still potential for improvement. To enhance the educational experience, the collection will be grouped into regionalized theme areas to demonstrate plant associations that occur in nature. For example, the attractive coastal plant species *Potentilla villosa* (villous cinquefoil) and *Lupinus littoralis*

(seashore lupine) associate well with the ubiquitous *Fragaria chiloensis* (coastal strawberry). All three species can be found growing together along the rocky shores of the Pacific Ocean. These plants are halophytes, meaning that they are especially adapted to the saline conditions created by ocean spray. This important plant association is displayed in the newly created coastal rockery.

The *Investing in Nature* grant has given us the opportunity to introduce new material not currently represented in the collection. Since we already have a good representation of native trees and shrubs, many of the new acquisitions are herbaceous perennials. This new material is quite exciting because most of it is grown from seed that is wild collected according to ecological standards set out by the Native Plant Society of B.C. Plants such as *Romanzoffia tracyi* (Sitka mist- maiden) and the white-berried form of *Actaea rubra* (baneberry) are two particularly interesting examples added this spring.

In addition to the new acquisitions much of the existing material is being relocated. Even though it is rewarding to find hidden treasures in a garden, many interesting plants have been hiding in slightly too secretive locations. Consequently, this material has been consolidated and displayed in more conspicuous settings. In order to expand the regionalized theme concept, many more plants will have to move, including for example *Olsynium douglasii* (purple satin bells).

So, do come and explore the rejuvenated Western North America garden. I hope you will enjoy the product of our efforts.

Egan Davis is the gardener responsible for the Pacific Northwest Garden collection.



Photo: Egan Davis