

The Darts Hill Oracle

A newsletter from the Darts Hill Garden Conservancy Trust Society

Darts Hill Garden Park is located on 16th Avenue, at 170th Street, Surrey, B.C. Accessible by pre-booked tours only. Call 604-501-5050 for your tour.

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Francisca Darts with a very young

WHAT'S BLOOMING AT DARTS HILL?

By Doug Justice: Chair of Darts Hill Garden Society, Curator of Collections & Research Scientist, UBC Botanical Garden

Empress tree, *Paulownia tomentosa*, never fails to draw attention. One of the fastest growing temperate zone deciduous trees, Empress tree is usually grown from seed (as Francisca has done) and often reaches a meter (3 feet) or more in its first year. Subsequent growth is even more spectacular, as trees will easily grow a further 2 or 3 meters (6 to 10 feet) in their second year. The accompanying velvety, 3-lobed leaves are also epic in proportion, provided there is sufficient moisture for the agile growth.

Plants are somewhat tender in youth, and the thick, fleshy shoots may die back considerably during cold winters or in periods of untimely frost. Once trees are a few years old and producing woodier tissues, they are better able to handle the cold.

As the Empress tree begins to mature at around 6 m (20 feet), leaf size decreases to a respectable 40 cm (15 inches) across and the growth rate slows to around a meter per year.

Perhaps to compensate for this reduction in exuberance, the Empress tree begins to flower. Emerging from exposed, fuzzy, brown buds on leafless branches, the flowers are truly impressive. Like cones of giant purple-blue foxgloves, flowering usually peaks around Mother's Day. Long-lasting in cooler weather, the flowers are deliciously fragrant to most people, but only faintly so to others (if you can smell freesias, you should be able to smell *Paulownia*).

Paulownias are all native to eastern Asia, forming large, open trees up to 30 m (100 feet) tall or more. The wood is highly prized for its workability when freshly cut and its hardness and resilience when dry. It is variously used for a cabinetry and the manufacture of musical instruments and dowry boxes, and in Japan for making clogs. At Darts Hill, conditions for the Empress tree are ideal, and they produce copious seed, which regularly germinates

NAME THE NEWSLETTER CONTEST
The Society would like to thank all of the people who submitted suggestions for our newsletter. Winning submission was received from Sunny Phillips

SPRING AHEAD

By Graham Laine: Francisca's
Assistant at the Garden

We enjoyed a very mild winter at Darts Hill and the few dry weeks in February allowed us to get the new **west loop pathway** built. The wet weather since has slowed any work on regrading and repairing the grass edges to the path and on some larger grass areas that need to be completely redone.

That cold week in early March was a little scary since so many rhododendrons and magnolias were in full bud. Last year at that time many of the buds were frozen off with a couple of very cold nights. We managed to keep the blooms of *Rhododendron ririei* from freezing off by placing a large patio umbrella over it each night, and those efforts paid off by the best display of purple coloured flowers in years.



R. ririei

Many of the late winter flowering plants were exceptional this year, including the three varieties of flowering currant planted at the "meet and greet" area. These are the red *Ribes sanguineum* 'Pulborough Scarlet', a pink seedling *R. sanguineum* and the white *Ribes sanguineum* 'Alba'. Our earliest magnolia this year was the mature, 30-foot tall *Magnolia* 'Royal Crown' (Bed #2) with its masses of mid-purple flowers. Close by in bed #1 West, is one of my favourite rhododendrons, *R. arboreum*, with its striking red flowers set against dark green leaves.



west loop pathway

Also in this area, another species, *R. eximium*, was, for the first time, in full flower with its pinkish-white blooms. All the andromeda shrubs (*Pieris*)—some the size of small trees—have been spectacular, with masses of flowers lasting week after week.



R. eximium

There are many different daphnes in the garden, including several clumps of *Daphne caucasica*, which fill the surrounding air with a pleasant scent. Perhaps the most fragrant variety is *Daphne odora* (bed #39) with its long-lasting purple and white. For many years *Edgeworthia papyrifera* continues to bloom in a shady, protected site below the house. This Chinese paper bush may be more correctly named *E. chrysantha*, as its flowers are more yellow than white in colour. Towering overhead is the early flowering cherry, *Prunus subhirtella* 'Whitcombei', always a first in the garden, and a very welcome sight in the late winter.

VOLUNTEERING AT DARTS HILL GARDEN

The Darts Hill Garden Guides are a group of keen volunteers who conduct tours for visitors to the garden. At present we have about 40 members. We would encourage anyone with an interest in and knowledge of gardening to join us. Guides must be committed to learning about the history of the garden and about the plants within it. If involved you should have a desire to share your knowledge and enthusiasm with visitors to the garden. As a guide you will have a great opportunity to learn more about the tremendous range of plant material in this wonderful garden. The big bonus - meet new garden friends! For more information please contact Mary Dunn at 604.536.7966.



Tree Paeonia hybrid

MEMBERSHIP CORNER

By Marlene Gurvich: Membership Co-ordinator, Darts Hill Garden Society; Garden Time – Shaw TV

May is the absolute primo month to see Darts Hill in a glorious symphony of colour. The rhododendrons and azaleas carry masses of glowing flowers. Many of Francisca's collection of flowering trees and shrubs provide their blooms in late May through to June and beyond. Be on the lookout for varieties of Stryax, Kalmia, Viburnum and Cornus. Make sure you check out the yellow flowering *Paeonia lutea*. It is spectacular!



Romneya coulteri

Perennials weave their bloom and leaf through the beds. Two of my particular favourites include the fragrant white flowering *Romneya coulteri* (located on the hillside by the house) and the graceful *Dierama pulcherrimum* (Lower bed close to Tractor Road). This is truly the time to experience our West Coast growing season in its prime.

One of the most striking specimens in the garden is the tree Paulownia tomentosa (commonly called The Empress Tree of China). This is a magnificent ornamental flowering tree.

The flowers are of the softest lilac and resemble a foxglove-like panicle of flowers. The smell is what is most striking; sweet as candy and with a colour reminiscent of violets. "It smells like its colour" comments Francisca. She absolutely loves this tree and now has many different aged specimens located throughout the garden. It is an absolute car stopping sight (as attested by those driving along 16th Ave). The Paulownia is definitely worth the visit alone!

That brings me to the upcoming Member's Days and our next open Public Day. If you are looking for an opportunity to bring the family and friends then you need to reserve Saturday May 24th for just that reason. Darts Hill Garden will be open to the public (free admission) from 10am to 4pm. There will be knowledgeable tour guides throughout the garden and they can answer your questions on plant material and general garden history.



Dierama pulcherrimum



Dierama (Angels Fishing Rod) & Alliums

Every month has its own special plant show. Please note the next upcoming garden dates and plan a visit.

Saturday May 24th - Public Open House 10am to 4pm

Sunday **May 25th** - Member Open House 11am to 3pm

Sunday **June 15th** - Member Open House 11am to 3pm

Sunday **July 20th** - Member Open House 11am to 3pm

The garden is closed in August.

We certainly encourage our members to visit the garden on the Member Open House days. Use your guest passes and entice others to join Darts Hill Garden Park Society. If you can spare some extra time and would like to help out on our Members Days, please call Marlene at 604.535.1302 or e-mail gurvichs@shaw.ca.



Primula francisca

Rhododendron: *from the Greek – rhodon – rose + dendron – tree*

GENUS: RHODODENDRON

FAMILY: ERICACEAE

ORIGINS

By Joan Rich
Circulated to Master Gardeners
Vancouver, April 2001

Rhododendrons are found in the fossil record dating back 50 millions years; many of these ancient fossils found in North America are very similar to rhododendrons growing in Central Asia today. They grow mainly on the wetter mountain slopes of the northern hemisphere, and the majority are to be found in the Himalays and the lands stretching through Tibet, Burma, west and central China and south to the Malay States and Indonesia. More than 1,000 species have been found to date; there are 31 species in Japan, a few in western Canada and the northwestern States, 20 species in eastern North America between Labrador and Florida and 10 species found in Europe and Asia Minor.

They grow from sea level to 18,000 ft (5,500 metres) and live in conditions of fog, mist, snow, monsoon rains, high humidity, desiccating winds and freezing temperatures to mild and warm conditions. The alpine rhododendrons have snow cover for six months of the year, and some are tiny plants a few centimetres high with leaves 1 centimetre long; whereas those rhododendrons growing in the shelter of the forests at low elevations may grow 80 ft (25 metres) tall and have leaves as long as 30 inches (75 cm).

Rhododendrons are divided into two groups, according to their leaf structure: they are either *lepidote* or *elepidote*.

Lepidotes are those with microscopic structures known as scales on their leaves, mostly on the underside of the leaf.

Elepidotes have no scales.

Scales and hairs on the leaves function to control the water balance in the plant.

Azaleas are rhododendrons and they are all *elepidotes* (no scales). All azaleas have 5 lobes to the flower and usually 5 stamens. Most other rhododendrons have 10 or more stamens.



Francisca Darts with
Rhododendron "The Rogue"

Special thanks to Doug Justice, James Good and Kathy Piccott for their help in putting this newsletter together.

Membership application:

Individual Rate/Senior/Youth	\$20.00
Couple (2 people at the same address)	\$25.00
Family (2 adults, 2 children under 18)	\$35.00

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Prov. _____

Postal code: _____

Please make cheque payable to: Darts Hill Society

Mail cheque to: 909 – 164A Street, Surrey, B.C. V4A 8N1



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