

# Darts Hill Garden Update

A newsletter from the Darts Hill Garden Conservancy Trust Society

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May 24, 2003

## HELLO

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

Plants of Darts Hill – *Chimonanthus praecox* (wintersweet)

In winter, *Chimonanthus praecox* presents itself as a gangly, big teenager of a shrub. It constantly pushes the limits in most gardens, because the expected shape – that is, any recognizable shape – never actually appears. Its main stems are stiff, sometimes arching, with secondary branches arising at nearly right angles from the primary stems. It could be described as somewhat loose in the shade, and denser in full sun, but “twiggy” pretty much sums it up. In summer, its leaves are clean and handsome, but even then, the shrub has a tendency to look gaunt

In spite of it all, *Chimonanthus* is a much beloved shrub in temperate gardens and, as one might expect, its popularity has nothing to do with habit or leaf; the appeal is due entirely to spicy sweet fragrance of its winter-borne flowers.

At Darts Hill these are produced in abundance and can scent the air from late November to early spring, depending on the weather.

The flowers themselves are little, waxy, fringed yellow bells, stained purple at the base, and, like so many other winter flowers, exceedingly fragrant (a single bloom will fill a moderate sized room with scent).

The name *Chimonanthus praecox* comes from the Greek and means early snow-flower, but I think the common name wintersweet is equally evocative. Whatever it's called, *Chimonanthus* is a testament to the patience and foresight of Francisca Darts. The Darts Hill specimen was grown by Francisca from seed received from Erna Mason in 1979, and at just over 20 years, is now really coming into its own.

## NAME THE NEWSLETTER CONTEST

The Society are looking for a name for this newsletter. Please submit your idea by February 14, 2003.

Mail to:  
Name the Newsletter  
c/o 909 – 164A Street  
Surrey, B.C. V4A 8N1  
Or email:  
[ParksRecCulture@city.surrey.bc.ca](mailto:ParksRecCulture@city.surrey.bc.ca)

The new name will be announced at the AGM on February 18.

## WINTER UPDATE

By Graham Laine: Vice Chair Darts Hill Garden Society and Francisca's Assistant at the Garden

As I walk around Darts Hill Garden at the end of December – with most of the fall clean-up done – and reflect on the long colourful autumn season we have enjoyed this year, I wonder when and if the winter weather will start. We have not yet had a killing frost and many plants are continuing to flower.

For example, *Veronica Reduncularis* 'Georgia Blue', *Schizostylis Coccinea* (Kaffir Lilly) and *Convolvulus Cneorum* continue to produce flowers that barely open in the short cool days. There are a few hardy *Cyclamen Coum* in flower or bud, and the purple blue flowers of the small perennial *Hepatica Nobilis* are showing early and should be in full flower when the surrounding snowdrops are out

Regardless of the weather, some old favourites can be relied upon to provide colour through the winter season. *Mahonia* 'Charity' continues to flower after getting an early start in November, *Viburnum Fragrans* and *Viburnum x bodantense* 'Dawn' give some welcome fragrance from the masses of deep pink flowers on bare branches.

*Jasminum Nudiflorum* is in full flower on the driveway wall opposite the mature *Hamamelis Mollis* starting its long fragrant flowering season. Other *Hamamelis* to follow include *H. Jelena*', *H. 'Pallida'*, *H 'Diane'*, and *H. 'Sunburst'* in the intermedia group; and a large *H. Japonica* 'Arboreum' in bed #17 in the lower garden which holds onto its dead leaves through the flowering season.

An interesting *Hamamelis* garden seedling is in bed #7 besides the entrance road. It too holds onto its dead leaves, and flowers similar to, but a little later than, the *Hamamelis Mollis* beneath which it was found growing about six years ago.



The hollies are a picture this winter with masses of berries, as are many other berried trees and shrubs, particularly the *Sorbus* and *Cotoneaster*.

There should be plenty of *helebores* in flower for our January 'Member Day' and a couple of shrubs to look for would be *Chimonanthus Praecox* (wintersweet), in bed #27, and *Abeliophyllum Distichum* (White Forsythia) which was transplanted to bed #23 and is loaded with buds for the first time. This shrub has benefited from the move to a well-protected site that gets the early morning sun. January is a great month to take time and study the diversity of the bark on many trees and shrubs, and if there is a little snow around... well that's a bonus.

Over the past few years, many of the pathways in the east and center garden have been converted from grass to an all-weather gravel base surface.

Plans are now underway to add onto these upgrades with the construction of a new all-weather loop path starting at the Gunnera Walk and heading west below the house, curving below the orchard, skirting the field, and continuing onto the tractor road at the lower service gate.

When complete, this new path will allow better access to the west of the garden in all weathers

New beds are also planned for the west side of the garden, one of which, in the area of the Magnolia Walk, will create space for transplanting rhododendrons from crowded areas in older parts of the garden.

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## Half the interest of a garden is the constant exercise of the imagination.

Alice Morse Earle, 1897,

### WELCOME TO 2003

By Gerry Gibbens: Director, Darts Hill Garden Society  
Gardener Extraordinaire – VanDusen Botanical Garden

There are few things that excite the senses at this time of year more than plants that announce themselves with sweet scents that drift through the winter air. Primary among these are the daphnes. *Daphne odora*, whose sweetly scented flowers are borne in terminal clusters, flowers from December to early spring. Its small flowers are usually white with a red-purple exterior, but sometimes flushed red-purple throughout. Red fruits are sometimes produced and these remain until summer. *Daphne odora* f. *marginata* has yellow, cream or white variegated leaves and *D. odora* f. *alba* has white or cream-white flowers. These are small evergreen shrubs growing to three feet.

*Daphne bholua* is a rare plant in gardens on the west coast. There are two forms: evergreen and semi-deciduous. They are upright plants that can reach eight feet or more, and both flower in December with scented, white to purple-pink flowers. The fruits are black and attract birds. The deciduous cultivar 'Gurkha' is said to be exceptionally hardy.

The appearance of early rhododendrons is a sure sign that the season has changed. *Rhododendron dauricum*, with its small purple flowers clustered at the tips of deciduous branches, has been known to flower from early November through until March and then hold its remaining flower buds until the following winter. This is a delightful shrubby plant that grows to five feet tall. *Rhododendron ririei* is a large shrub or small tree with broad green leaves that are an ideal backdrop for its pink flowers. These can open as early as December, but are usually held back until January or later. Freezing harms the flowers, but not the buds.



*Mahonia* 'Arthur Menzies' is a highlight in any garden. Growing to 10 or 12 feet, this multi-branched, upright shrub produces clusters of racemes densely covered in brilliant yellow fragrant flowers from November to February. It is the only known hybrid of *M. Bealei* '*M. lomariifolia*' and is an exceptional plant. Another mahonia, *M. gracilipes*, was introduced from China by Roy Lancaster. It flowers in late summer and fall with small white and purple-blue flowers on lax terminal racemes. Small, deep blue fruit follows flowering. The most stunning feature of this plant is the brilliant white waxy undersides of the leaves. This plant will eventually reach five feet, a height better to show off the backs of the leaves.

There are many more plants that make our winters enjoyable with their colourful flowers and drifting scents. Investigate, for example the Christmas box species, *Sarcococca hookeriana* and *S. confusa* at Darts Hill. With the tremendous selection of plants we can make use of, there is little to stop us enjoying our gardens all year 'round.

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## 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, and 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, and have a desire to share their 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, as well as meet new gardening friends.

For more information, please contact Mary Dunn at 604-536-7966.

**MEMBERSHIP**

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

Of utmost importance are the dates for our members visit to Darts Hill for 2003. Please make sure you take advantage of these days!

The garden will be open to members only the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month except for May, when it's the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday and August and December, when the garden is closed. Garden opens at 11:00 am, garden gates are closed at 2:30 pm and garden closes at 3:00 pm.

As part of your membership, you're entitled to two guest passes per year for open member days. We are enclosing those passes for your 2003 garden guests. Invite your guests to take full advantage of a Darts Hill membership and become one of our members.

Here is the 2003 dates: January 19<sup>th</sup>, February 16<sup>th</sup>, March 16<sup>th</sup>, April 20<sup>th</sup>, May 25<sup>th</sup>, June 15<sup>th</sup>, July 20<sup>th</sup>, September 21<sup>st</sup>, October 19<sup>th</sup> and November 16<sup>th</sup>.

If you would like to help out on member's day, please call Marlene at 604-535-1302 or e-mail: [gurvichs@shaw.ca](mailto:gurvichs@shaw.ca).



**Special Note:**

Saturday May 24<sup>th</sup> – Public Open House. Invite your friends and family to visit this special garden in its prime!

Darts Hill is a wonderful place to truly appreciate a multitude of plant material. Here are a few more suggestions to be on the lookout for during the upcoming months.

- January: Of special interest – the bark of trees. Look for Chinese Stewartia, *Acer griseum*, *Eucalyptus gunnii*. Look for many of the pines and of course birches, to exhibit attractive, distinctive bark.
- February: Hellebores are in their prime – especially *H. orientalis*, *H. foetidus* and *H. argutifolius*. A colourful swath of *Cyclamen coum*, emerging *Leucojum aestivum* and our native Trillium are all harbingers of Spring
- March: The garden is finally awakening. Francisca has a wonderful collection of primulas and euphorbias – both striking in their own way. Bulbs are making their appearance.... There is the sweetest patch of *Erythronium revolutum* – Francisca's "special babies". Also be on the look out for *Trillium sessile* – a large clump resides close to the *Erythronium*. On a larger scale look for corylopsis, pieris, early blooming magnolias and camellias to provide early spring blooms.

**Special Helpers**

Newsletter crafted by Kathy Piccott Assisted by: Marg Chappell, Anne Mahy and Marlene Gurvich  
Edited by: Doug Justice

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

