

Please follow the black and white number and arrow signs for this tour.

One of the interesting features of a botanical garden like VanDusen is the wide variety of plants which produce edible seeds, fruit or roots. Many of these are not well known. Some were popular food plants in earlier times but are no longer widely consumed. Others, for reasons such as urban development, climate change, agricultural and modern marketing trends, are not cultivated for mass consumption and have become rare or even endangered as a result. On this self-guided tour you will encounter a few of the many edible plants in the garden. You may be surprised by the variety and appearance of these plants as well as how they have been used for food and medicine over time in different parts of the world.

To begin the tour, take the ramp to your right from the Plaza and follow the gravel path straight ahead to the **1 - pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*)**. Sometimes known as poor man's banana or custard apple, this tree is native to the Carolinian forests of eastern North America. It is the largest edible tree fruit native to North America. The tree, which is rarely taller than 3 meters, produces a delicious and nutritious fruit that looks like a short fat banana. The fruit is creamy with an unusual mango-banana-citrus flavour and a slight aftertaste of unfiltered wheat beer. It is rarely cultivated so if you long for pawpaw you probably have to grow it yourself. Continue to **2 - butternut (*Juglans cinerea*)**. Also known as white walnut, butternut is the only nut tree native to Canada. Unfortunately it is a species at risk rarely found in the wild, primarily due to the effects of the butternut canker disease. The tree has many uses, including the extraction of brown dye from the bark. In the United States soldiers of the Confederate army wore brown uniforms dyed with butternut and they were sometimes called the "butternut army". A lesser known use of this tree is that its sap can be made into a syrup similar to maple syrup.

Follow the path to the end and turn right onto the lawn to find a **3 - Kentucky coffee tree (*Gymnocladus dioica*)**. A member of the pea family (Fabaceae), the Kentucky coffee tree was used by early settlers as a coffee substitute. Caution was required during preparation though, since the seeds are poisonous if not well roasted. The tree is native to the eastern deciduous forests of North America and grows as far north as Ontario. It is considered rare in the wild.

Retrace your steps and head to the dirt path and turn left. At the next crossroad, turn right and continue to the **4 - elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*)**. Elderberry has a long history as an important source of food and medicine. Its distribution is widespread in Europe, West Asia and the mid latitudes of North America. Its small dark berry has a myriad of medicinal uses, with over 5000 different remedies, most used to treat coughs and colds. The flowers have long been used in solutions to tone, soften and restore the skin, and soothe burns and rashes.

Continue along the path, following the arrows into the Mediterranean Garden. On the opposite bank of the little stream flowing into Cypress Pond, you will see an **5 - Italian stone pine (*Pinus pinea*)** leaning towards the water. It is native to the Mediterranean region and has been cultivated there and elsewhere for its edible pine nuts for at least 6,000 years. The cones can take 36 months to mature, longer than any other pine. To extract the pine nuts, the cones are dried in burlap bags for 20 days, then smashed. The nuts are separated from the cones by hand, a labour intensive activity that makes pine nuts expensive. They are a very healthy food containing essential fatty acids, essential minerals and vitamins.

Adjacent to the path is a fine example of a **6 - strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*)**. The strawberry tree is native to western Europe but is widely grown as a fairly hardy ornamental plant that will withstand cold up to -10° C. The fruit on ripening is bright red and contrasts beautifully with the dark green foliage. The leaves and fruit are used in pharmaceuticals. As an edible, its fruit replicates the flavour of apricots and guavas and is used as a substitute for berries and in preserves, syrup and fruit wine. Unripe fruits can cause nausea while overripe fruits ferment on the branches and can cause mild intoxication when eaten.

Follow the path to the next arrow and turn left. Continue on to the stone wall and steps and look for **7 - Maqui / Chilean wineberry (*Aristotelia chilensis*)** Maqui is grown in the far south of South America in the region of Patagonia. Commonly known as the Chilean wineberry it is called the “Patagonian Super Fruit” because of its high levels of antioxidant properties, the highest level of any plant on earth. The Mapuche people of Patagonia have been drinking Maqui juice for thousands of years. The berry is small and dark purple and has a taste similar to blueberries. Maqui is not a commercially grown fruit .

Turn right to find a small shrub, the **8 - pineapple guava (*Acca sellowiana*)**. Pineapple guava originated in Brazil. It is not a true guava, rather a member of the myrtle family such as eucalyptus and allspice. Its fruit, however, closely resembles the taste of guava and is an excellent substitute. It is somewhat cold hardy and is recommended for as far north as zone 7b. In Canada it will only grow on the west coast. An added feature is its edible flower petals, appearing in May, which have a sweet melt-in-your-mouth flavour. Pineapple guava has not been a successful commercial crop mainly because it is difficult to determine the ripeness of the fruit. It is however widely available as a garden plant and invites an experiment in the home garden.

Now keep right, cross over the bridge and follow the pathway as it curves upward and to the left. In the planting bed to your left you will see **9 - yucca (*Yucca filamentosa* complex)** Yucca is a succulent of the lily family, used primarily as a medicinal plant. The Navajo brewed a tea from yucca leaves to treat cuts and sunburn while traditional healers in New Mexico prepared a tea from the roots and leaves to treat colds and asthma. The most common traditional use of yucca was to treat arthritis and joint pain. Yucca’s medical properties are in its saponins which are chemical precursors of cortisone. Today yucca extract is used in root beer, alcoholic beer and in cocktail mixers as a foaming agent. Recently researchers have found that the compound resveratrol from yucca, also found in red wine, helps prevent blood clots.

Follow the path bordering Livingstone Lake. On your right you will see the Pacific Northwest native **10 - salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*)**. Salmonberry is easy to find in disturbed areas of our coastal rainforest. On the West Coast salmonberries are the first wild berry to ripen, usually in June. Northwest coast aboriginal peoples ate both the sprouts and berries. The sweet juicy sprouts were peeled and eaten raw and the yellow to reddish berries were traditionally eaten with salmon. Salmonberries get mixed reviews for their flavor, from “insipid” to “amazing”. They tend to be watery and must be eaten right after harvest or they go mushy.

A little farther along the path is a **11 - medlar (*Mespilus germanica*)**. These trees are native to southwest Asia and southeast Europe. The apricot-sized fruit resemble a large rose-hip and they have been eaten in Europe from the times of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Shakespeare has made numerous references to medlar, none of them favourable. He apparently didn’t like it. The fruit has to be “blotted” (allowed to rot slightly) to be edible. They are a fruit that must be eaten at exactly the right time, so as a result they are not a commonly found market product. At their prime they have a custard like texture and a taste described as “apple butter with notes of cinnamon and vanilla”. Medlar are still used in Europe mainly in preserves.

The last plant on this tour is at the end of the pathway at the top of the planting bed. This **12 - Bollwiller pear (× *Sorbopyrus auricularis*)** is a bit of a botanical rarity. It is an intergeneric hybrid, or a cross between two different genera, *Sorbus* (whitebeam) and *Pyrus* (common European pear). Dating back to the 17th century, it did not appear in North America until 1959. The fruit is a small flattened pear with a light brown or reddish blush, a buttery, sweet, fragrant flavour and firm texture. Bollwillers are notorious for not blooming or bearing fruit until they are at least ten years old.

The plants on this tour are only a few examples of edible plants in the Garden and we hope this tour inspires you to learn more about edible plants from throughout the world. It is important to know which plants are edible and what parts are safe to consume before eating any plant. You may return to the Garden entrance by keeping to the left and crossing the bridge or continue to explore the Garden on your own.