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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. On this self-guided tour you will encounter a few of these. 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.

Begin the tour from the Plaza and walk towards the wooden bridge to your left as you face Livingstone Lake. By the bridge you will see on the right side of the path some **1 - salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*)**. Salmonberry is common in west coast forests, usually growing in disturbed areas. Salmonberries are the first forest berry to ripen, usually in June. They are an important traditional food for northwest coast aboriginal people. The sweet juicy sprouts are peeled and eaten raw and the yellow to reddish berries are used in preparing salmon. Salmonberries should be eaten soon after picking as they turn to mush very quickly.

Stay right and continue along the edge of Livingstone Lake, where you will see a **2 - Bollwiller pear (× *Sorbopyrus auricularis*)** on your left. This fruit is a botanical curiosity. It is an intergeneric hybrid, or a cross between two species in different genera, *Sorbus aria* (common whitebeam) and *Pyrus communis* (European pear). Bollwiller pears were introduced in Europe in the 17th century but were not planted in North America until the 1950s. They produce yellow-orange, rounded fruits that resemble apples more than pears. A Bollwiller pear tree can take up to ten years to produce fruit, so are rarely grown commercially.

Proceeding along the shore of the lake you will soon come to **3 - medlar (*Mespilus germanica*)**. These trees are native to southwest Asia and southeast Europe. The apricot-sized fruit resembles a rose hip. They have been eaten in Europe since Greek and Roman times. Shakespeare has numerous references to medlar, none of them favourable, so he may not have been fond of them. Medlar fruits have to be “blotted”, or allowed to rot slightly, before they are soft enough to be eaten. The flesh is quite delicious, with a custard-like texture and a taste described as “apple butter with notes of cinnamon and vanilla.” Medlar is rarely sold in stores due to the short window of edibility. Growing just above and behind the medlar is a large quince tree (*Cydonia oblonga*). Quince make an excellent preserve.

At the end of the lake side path is a collection of **4 - yucca (*Yucca filamentosa* complex)**. Yucca is a succulent of the Asparagus Family (Asparagaceae), 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 was to treat arthritis and joint pain. Yucca’s medical properties are in its saponins, which have a bitter taste and make suds when agitated in water. Today yucca extract is used in root beer, alcoholic beer and 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.

Now take the path going right down to the zig zag bridge. Cross the bridge and at the top of the rise go left. You will soon see a **5 - western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*)**. This tree is over 100 years old and was likely planted during the construction of the golf course that preceded VanDusen in this location. Considering that western redcedars can live for 1000 years, this tree is barely a teenager. To the Coast Salish people, on whose traditional land you are standing, the redcedar is “mother” and “life giver”. For the Coast Salish the tree has many uses. They cut the wood into large beams to construct long houses, strip and soften the inner bark to weave into hats and capes, and dig large ocean-going canoes from the huge trunks. They also brew the boughs into medicinal teas and made poultices for healing wounds.

Go right at the next intersection. You are now in the Mediterranean Garden. On your left is a **6 - strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*)**, native to southern Europe but grown here on the west coast as a garden plant that can withstand cold down to -10 C. The fruit ripens bright red and contrasts beautifully with 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 in preserves, syrup and fruit wine. Unripe fruit can cause nausea while overripe fruit ferments on branches and can cause intoxication. Facing the strawberry tree, immediately to your left is a mulch path leading down the slope toward the pond. Go down this path a few paces. On the right, leaning towards the water, is an **7- Italian stone pine (*Pinus pinea*)**. Native to the Mediterranean, it has been cultivated for its edible seeds, or “pine nuts”, for over 6,000 years. The cones are harvested and placed in burlap sacks for 20 days, then smashed. The nuts are then separated by hand, a labour-intensive activity that

explains why these nuts are quite expensive. They are very nutritious, containing essential fatty acids, minerals and vitamins

Go down the slope along the edge of Cypress Pond to the floating bridge and cross it. At the end of the bridge to the left is a bark mulch path, Go along this path and you will soon come upon

8 - mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*). This plant is also called American mandrake or ground lemon. This is a useful plant contains podophyllotoxin, which is used in medical creams that treat genital warts. The plant blooms in May and sometimes produces a lemon-shaped fruit later in summer. It is edible as a ripe fruit but is slightly poisonous if not fully ripe, and the seeds are also poisonous, so be extremely cautious if you choose to taste a mayapple.

Return to the path off the bridge and go left. Looking to your left as you proceed, on the other side of an expanse of lawn, you will see a **9 - Kentucky coffee tree (*Gymnocladus dioica*)**. A member of the Pea Family (Fabaceae), the seed pods of the Kentucky coffee tree were used by early settlers as a coffee substitute. Caution was required as the seeds are poisonous if not well roasted. Enter the pathway beside it and look for a large deciduous tree on your left. This is a **10 - butternut (*Juglans cinerea*)**. Also known as white walnut, butternut is the only nut tree native to Canada. Unfortunately, it is a species at risk and rarely found in the wild, mainly due to butternut canker disease. The tree has many uses, including a brown dye extracted from the bark and nut rinds. This dye was used to colour the uniforms of soldiers in the Confederate army during the US Civil War. They were sometimes referred to as the “butternut army”. The tree will also produce a syrup similar to maple syrup.

Proceed to the main path ahead, turn right and return to the Visitor Centre. Cross the Plaza in front of the building to return to where the tour began at the salmonberry plants. Instead of going right along the lake side as you did then, go up to the left. You will see a bark mulch path that goes through the Ornamental Grasses. Take this path to the **11- Washington hawthorn (*Crataegus phaenopyrum*)**. Hawthorn belongs to the Rose Family (Rosaceae) and is known as the “heart herb” in European traditional medicine. It has been used medicinally for heart and stomach complaints for centuries. Leaf buds are called “pepper and salt” and are used to flavour salads. The berries which appear in late summer to early fall contain a lot of pectin and are used to make jelly. They can also be milled into flour.

Take the first path to the left to join the paved walk and go right towards the stone wall. Now turn left and continue to go straight ahead, past the Formal Rose Garden and bedding plant display to the start of the Rhododendron Walk. The walk curves to the right and after a few paces you will see on the right **12 - sweet olive (*Osmanthus decorus*)**. It is native to the Mediterranean, Turkey and western Asia. The flowers are used to make tea, sometimes mixed with green or black teas. The flower’s scent is reminiscent of plum, apricot and prune. The flower is also used in making perfumes. Try freezing some flowers in ice cubes and add to water.

Stay on the Rhododendron Walk and go straight ahead past the many rhododendrons, some of which may still be in bloom. A ground cover, **13 - redwood sorrel (*Oxalis oregana*)** often reminds people of shamrocks. The leaves of redwood sorrel are used in salads, as edible decoration or to make a drink similar to lemonade. The green seed capsules can be eaten raw and have a taste similar to rhubarb. The plant is also used in alternative medicines as a diuretic and to treat fever and scurvy. A short distance further along the Rhododendron Walk is a grouping of **14 - ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*)**. This fern produces fiddleheads, the coiled tips of the emerging fronds. The fiddleheads of some fern species are toxic, but ostrich fern fiddleheads are a delicacy. They are best when tightly closed and cooked much like you would asparagus.

This is the last stop on the Edibles Tour but you are encouraged to carry on up to the maze, next to which you will see the Vegetable Garden. The theme this year is “Eat a Rainbow”. The vegetables are organized by colour and have signs explaining how the plant pigments are created by phytonutrients and have different nutritional benefits.

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