

(Inspired by 20 months of working with native plants and harvesting native seeds)

Contained in VanDusen's 55 acres are not only imported exotic plants but notable native varieties of shrubs, grasses, annuals and trees as well as the animals (insects, birds, mammals, reptiles and fish) that rely on them to survive.

What is a native plant in British Columbia's Lower Mainland region? The simplest definition is any plant that evolved in the post-Ice Age conditions of Western Canada. You will find plants that have been around for 10,000 years spread across the garden in three notable collections. As you approached the Visitor Centre from the parking lot, you passed the first of these collections, the Cascadia collection, a rain-forest understory of plants that we share with Alaska, Washington State, Oregon and California:

Oregon grape (*Mahonia nervosa*)

Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*)

Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*)

Trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*)

You can look at those on the way out or on your return to the garden at a later date.

Begin your tour on the plaza of the Visitor Centre. Bear to your left to the first stop

#1 Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*) on a small rise at the edge of the paving tiles. Here, among a diverse collection of plants, you find a few plants native to the understory of a Garry oak meadow. These are some of the plants that sustain British Columbia's 32 species of bumblebees (*Bombus* spp.). Bumblebees move huge volumes of pollen on any given day. One of our native bumblebees, the western bumblebee (*Bombus occidentalis*) is struggling for habitat that has been lost to an invasive species, the eastern bumblebee *Bombus impatiens*, brought here by greenhouse operators 40 years ago. In addition to bumblebees, there are some 500 varieties of smaller bees (hover bees, mason bees and other solitary bees) that all pollinate above their weight. Look around. The native-insect-feeding plants on this hillock include:

Kinnikinnick or bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*)

Bleeding heart (*Dicentra* 'King of Hearts')

Camas (*Camassia* spp.), which also grows on the green roof of the Visitor Centre.

Trillium (*Trillium* spp.)

We are now going to stroll off the plaza to the right and follow the signs. This stroll will take you onto the floating bridge across Roy Forster Pond, through **#2 the redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens* and *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*)**. These trees don't self-seed in our region, but they were once native before the last Ice Age and they will probably naturalize over time given the common plantings of them around our region. Seed scatter is inevitable. The *Metasequoia*, in particular, are long gone (millions of years) from this region but evidence of their presence appears in fossil records.

Native plants are important to our future, they are not an afterthought, not a quaint connection to the old days or old ways of gardening. Native plants should be front and centre in every garden.

Follow the signs to **#3 The BC Habitat Garden**. You can't miss it, these beds are located just before the large wooden owl at the fork in the paved walk.

The BC Habitat Garden is contains plants that are important to our biodiversity. These plants are threatened in the Lower Mainland by paving, landfill, invasive ivy and other non-native plants that have escaped the bonds of home gardens.

Native plants are excellent food-sources and habitats for native bird species. Bird populations are in decline worldwide, parallel to a measured decline in native insect populations and native plants. These are just a few of the many reasons to make your home garden friendly to native insect species. Give native plants a single square meter. It is a start.

Here are some of the plants you will find in the BC Habitat Garden:

Big leaf lupine (*Lupinus polyphyllus*)

Bridalwreath (*Spirea densiflora*)

Bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*)

Common woolly sunflower (*Eriophyllum ignatum*)

False Solomon seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*)

Hyacinth brodiaea (*Triteleia hyacinthina*)

Menzies' larkspur (*Delphinium menziesii*)

Pacific bleeding heart (*Dicentra formosa*)

Red flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*)

Red huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*)

Salmonberry (*Rubus spectabilis*)

Saskatoon service berry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)

Sitka columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*)

Western wakerobin (*Trillium ovatum*)

Wild bee balm (*Monarda fistulosa*)

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Come back to visit our native plant collection during the year. Familiarize yourself with their blossoms and leaves.

Download a citizen science app to your phone and add your observations to ongoing research.

Identify plants in the wild or along your street or lane ... these are the plants that sustain your native bumblebees and butterflies.

Become aware of the eastern bumblebees, Japanese Beetles and invasive plants in your neighbourhood.

That English ivy along the trails is not a native wonder, but chokes out native plants.

Devote a single square meter of your garden to a mass planting of a single native plant seed and watch who shows up for dinner.