



NEWSLETTER

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Thank you volunteers

With the wrap up of weekly work parties in the Park, it is time to thank our group of loyal volunteers who spent hours raking, weeding, pulling blackberry canes and doing other cleanup jobs in the Park. Your time working in the Park makes a huge difference and we hear often from Park users how much they appreciate what you do.

We started two and a half months late, due to protective COVID 19 restrictions put in place by the BC health authority. We returned to the Park on June 3. Most weeks, six or seven volunteers came ready for whatever tasks were assigned. Two new volunteers joined us who have proven diligent and knowledgeable. In total, 321.5 hours were invested.

We also want to thank District staff who support our work each week, as well as doing most of the heavy lifting. They carted away the debris that volunteers collected. In August, the District extended the water pipes giving us two additional hose bibs on the south side of the ravine. This area had previously been watered by hand so the extension was very much appreciated by both the workers and the plants. The District also installed water bags on 16 specimens which reduced the time spent hand watering.

We look forward to what spring 2021 will bring.



New Plants in the Park

One of the goals of the Friends of Dominion Brook Park Society is preserving and enhancing the existing gardens. New plantings are an important part of meeting that goal. Sometimes we need to replace dying or diseased plants; or we may be restoring reclaimed areas, such as the Rhododendron Ravine.

The Society selects trees and shrubs to align with the horticultural heritage of the Park and to suit the growing conditions in specific areas. Plants are purchased from recognised nurseries. District staff help put most of the plants in the ground.

This partnership was put into action in October when 16 new specimens were planted.

- A new monkey puzzle tree
(See related articles below)
- *Quercus dentata pinnatifida* (a type of oak) planted in place of a diseased birch
- Three Royal Burgundy Cherries to replace shrubs that had been damaged by snow
- *Sorbus pseudohupehensis* (a mountain ash)
- A Robinia and 9 viburnums in one of the zones on the Ravine planting plan.



The Tale of the Monkey Puzzle Tree



Dominion Brook Park has a wonderful collection of conifers from all over the world. Among them was an *Araucaria araucana*, also known as a monkey puzzle tree, growing near the fence on the eastern boundary.

In the past year this tree exhibited a sharp decline. In an effort to understand the problem, we had a soil analysis performed and we got assistance from the District, to dig test holes to assess drainage. Sure enough the tree had wet feet and was dying, so we decided to look for a replacement.

This tree had joined our collection in 2011 as a donation from a local family in memory of their son. The family were understandably upset by the loss of the tree but were pleased to be included in the selection of the new tree and in choosing a new location to plant.

We were very fortunate to find a beautiful specimen at Kimoff Wholesale Nursery, a local supplier that has been the source of many of the trees planted in Dominion Brook Park in the last 20 years. We chose a potential new location. The District dug some test holes to assess the soil conditions and found deep, well-drained soil.



The new tree is much larger than the one it replaced. Working together, Steve from Kimoff Nursery and staff from the District coordinated the loading, delivery, and planting of this 8 metre (26') tree weighing nearly 1,750 kg (3,800 lbs).

On Wednesday, October 21, the District arrived with a full crew and equipment including a Gradall needed to unload and place the tree until backfilling and anchoring could be completed. Steve arrived with the tree mid-morning and by noon the planting was complete. You can now view this grand specimen in the southeast corner of the Park.

We are very grateful to the District of North Saanich Parks staff, and to Juliana Kimoff and Steve Bennet from Kimoff Nursery. We could not have accomplished what we did without them.



Featured Plant: ARAUCARIA ARAUCANA



Araucaria are found in various places in the southern hemisphere, but the genus that is familiar to people living in the Victoria area is *Araucaria araucana*, also known as the Chilean Pine, monkey puzzle tree or monkey tree.

It is named after the Araucano, the Spanish name for the Mapuche of central Chile and south-west Argentina, whose territory incorporates large stands of this genus. The Mapuche people consider it sacred, as they traditionally harvested the seeds extensively for food, and in fact it was a staple in their diet.

Along with the Wollemi and Ginko, the *Araucaria* is a living fossil from the age of the dinosaurs, when it was found almost everywhere in the world. It died out in the northern hemisphere during the various ice ages, but survived in parts of the world that were not covered in ice.

Seeds were brought from Chile to England by Archibald Menzies (there's a familiar name!) who planted them in Kew Gardens (where else?) and they became the talk of the town, and a status symbol for wealthy Victorians.

From there they spread all around the world, or at least anywhere there is a Zone 7 to 10 climate. They can tolerate freezing temperatures, but only down to about -15 C. They grow well in Victoria, but they are a bit fussy: they don't like to be disturbed (which is why the Monkey Tree pub no longer has one) and they don't like wet feet (which is why we no longer have the first one we planted.)

The name Chilean Pine is a good example of the British custom of naming any exotic species after something with which they are familiar, including many evergreens called 'pines', although they have no relationship with true pines, which are *Pinus*. Another example of this chauvinism is the Wollemi pine, which also grows in the Park.

They are endangered in Chile, partly due to logging (nice, close-grained wood with few knots) and because Chile is flooding the valleys where they grow for hydro-electric dams.



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