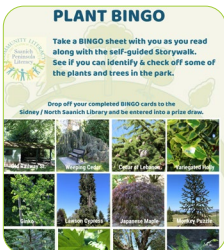


Happenings in the Park

Summer is a time for gatherings and events and this year we are seeing a return of community activities in the Park after the two-year COVID hiatus.



On Sunday, May 15 the Westie Walk returned to the Park. Accompanied by bagpipes, more than two dozen West Highland Terriers escorted their human companions down the slope of the Park for a romp in the open area.



On Tuesday, July 26, South Island Literacy organised a storywalk in the Park. Participants could follow a self-guided route to read *Planting a Rainbow* by Lois Elhert and play a bingo game by identifying trees and shrubs.



Tours of the Park are taking place, by request. You can reach our tour guide, Ian Cameron, through our website dominionbrookpark.ca or by email at contactus@dominionbrookpark.ca.



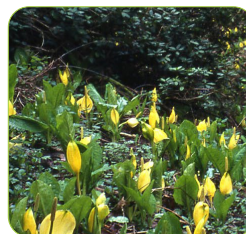
The Friends of Dominion Brook Park and the Centre for Plant Health are offering tours on Sunday morning, August 28, as part of the Flavour Trail celebration weekend. Tour times are coordinated so you can take in both tours at one stop. Details and times www.flavourtrails.com/dominion-brook-park.

A place for native plants in the Park

Since the beginning, plans for developing the property for an experimental farm included a park area for public use. And those park plans included cultivated areas showcasing ornamental horticulture and areas left in their natural state.

In 1914, Mr. J. H. Gridale, Director of the Dominion Experimental Farms, visited the new site near Sidney and commented in his report: "Paths were staked out through the woods below the East Saanich road. On a second visit to the Sidney Station on September 11, I discussed with the Superintendent the possible desirability, in view of the many picnics which would probably be held at the Station in the future, of clearing out the underbrush in, at least, part of this grove, the first plan being to leave the woods in as natural a condition as possible."

The Friends of Dominion Brook Park Society operates under a mandate to restore and preserve the horticultural heritage of the Park, which largely consists of beds of ornamental trees and shrubs that have been planted over the last 100 plus years. But we are also honouring the heritage of the Park by keeping the natural areas natural. For those who love to see native flora, we will continue to encourage and add to the native plants that grow in the Park which include Miners' Lettuce, Fawn Lily, Trillium, Skunk Cabbage, Oregon Grape, Salal, Bracken, Sword and Deer Fern as well as Western Red Cedar, Grand Fir, Arbutus, Western White Pine and Pacific Yew, Flowering Currant.



Feature Plant: Taxus – Toxic Trophies

Yews belong to the genus *Taxus* and also go by their genus name. They are unique conifers as they do not bear cones instead most bear a soft, bright red berry-like structure called an aril. The gooey sweet external part is edible and even tasty but contained inside each aril is a single large hard seed that is highly toxic if digested. Human consumption of these arils without thoroughly removing the seeds can cause serious injury or death and is never recommended. In fact, all parts of the yew besides the outer fruit of the aril contain a chemical that is extremely toxic to most mammals if digested including humans, cows and horses and many other animals. Strangely enough *Taxus* is not deer resistant. Deer, elk and moose have developed a tolerance and are able to digest the plant material with minimal harm. The yew seeds are often distributed large distances by birds that are incapable of digesting the seeds. The aril is an amazing adaptive structure that allows this small understory plant to achieve large seed dispersal while strongly deterring digestion of its seeds.

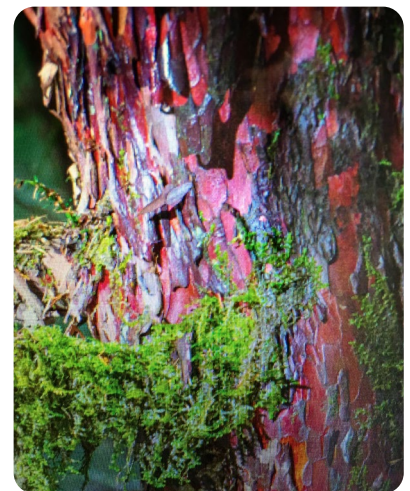
Specimens of *Taxus* can be truly ancient

with some in Scotland and England estimated to be 3-4 thousand years old. The wood was and is used for many specialty items; most famously for archery bows during the Middle Ages and was in fact protected in England in to supply bow wood for the longbowmen, the elite soldiers of their day. In folklore Robin Hood's bow was supposedly made of yew. Taxol, a chemical found in the bark, needles and branches, is a potent anti-cancer drug. Until a synthetic version of the chemical was created there was fear of this gorgeous native species being threatened due to over harvesting.

Yews are very useful in formal and informal landscapes though is often underappreciated. It is easily transplanted even in maturity and has excellent resistance to pests (besides deer) and diseases, is winter hardy and shows year-round color. It is highly adaptive to different sun exposures and soil conditions. Varieties with dark green black foliage are commonly used in the background offering unmatched contrast with almost any other plant. There are also beautiful variegated varieties that glow in

sun and shade. There is an assortment of cultivars in tree and shrub forms that can be expansive or compact, upright or pendulous, dense or dispersed. They can be sheared into almost any shape readily breaking from old wood; or left to grow naturally.

The yew, or *Taxus*, is an incredibly resilient, useful, long living, beautiful and diverse species that deserves appreciation for its greatness.



Pacific Yew

Yews in our Park

We have an impressive collection of yew species at Dominion Brook Park that are worth a closer look. The majority are fifty years old or more. These photographs highlight just three of the dozen or so varieties that we have.

The exceptional Pacific yew (*Taxus brevifolia*) specimen on the south side of the ravine displays the rare tree form of this species with stunning reddish-purple bark especially in the sun and rain.

Two *Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata', commonly called Irish yew, grow upright forming splendid dark green black pillars. One is in the northwest corner of the park and another in Bed 6 just to the east Sam's sunken garden.

Two excellent variegated English yew (*Taxus baccata* 'Semperaurea') specimens glow in glorious gold and are almost maintenance free. There is one at the bottom of Bed 10 across from the new planting in Bed 2 and another on the east side of the north entrance.



Irish Yew



English Yew

Staff this issue: Jody Aylard, Keaton Peddle, Dawn Gould