

RECOGNIZING TWO LONG-TIME VOLUNTEERS

It was their dogs that first brought them to Dominion Brook Park.

In 2005, while walking their two Golden Retrievers, Joan and Stu MacDonald came upon a group of volunteers weeding and raking in the Park. After a quick chat to discover what this work was all about, they decided that this was a cause that they wanted to join. They became regular members of the Wednesday morning work parties. Sometime their dogs would join them, lying quietly on a blanket as the work went on around them. Stu worked in the Park for 15 years and Joan for 17 years.

In recognition of their long service and significant contribution, a *Vitex agnus-castus* 'Shoal Creek' has been planted in the southwest corner of the Park. Also known as the Chaste tree, this is a plant native to the Mediterranean and will grow into a small tree. It boasts aromatic gray-green foliage and attracts butterflies and bees to its clusters of fragrant violet blue flowers that bloom over an extended season.



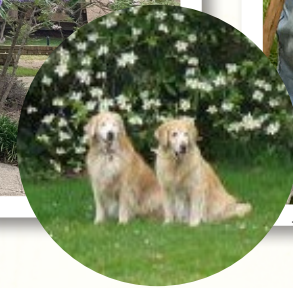
Stu MacDonald



Vitex agnus-castus



Joan MacDonald



THE 2023 WORK SEASON

Another work season has come to an end. It was a challenging summer dealing with low rainfall and very dry conditions for the plants in the Park. Many volunteer hours were spent watering. But with the help of the District we installed more irrigation lines which will allow for regular and efficient watering in many of the beds. We continue to add mulch to help with moisture retention as well as weed control; this year in the sunken garden. In addition, some of the collection of plants benefited from aesthetic and structural pruning, shearing and invasive plant management.

Despite the low levels of rainfall, this season was not as hard on the plants in the Park as some previous summers. The flower

and foliage on many species were impressive. Keaton Peddle is a certified horticulturalist who joined our Board two years ago. He has spent many hours working in the park. He believes that while there was less precipitation through continuous condensation of clouds, we had more consistent humidity in the air, especially during the night and morning. A drought refers to a lack of rainfall not a lack of humidity. All rainfall comes from humidity but not all humidity is produced from evaporating rainfall. Large bodies of water like the ocean play a much larger role. A small amount of regular moisture in the air (humidity) this year, allowed plants to engage in more consistent metabolic activity than the previous year.

ACTIVITY NEXT DOOR AT THE CENTRE FOR PLANT HEALTH

Work is progressing well on the new science facility at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) Centre for Plant Health, just south of the park. Construction is now over a third complete, with the frame of the header house building – the structure closest to the park – now finished and roofing panels being installed. This building will serve as a hub for operations such as shipping, potting and transplanting for the connected greenhouses, which are also under construction. Once complete, the new facility will provide scientists with state-of-the-art amenities and tools to eliminate virus infections from valuable fruit and grape varieties and facilitate testing for imports and exports that support Canadian agriculture and trade.

In October, drilling started on the site to supply the new buildings with geothermal energy. This energy source, alongside other sustainable design features, will help establish a net-zero carbon facility that is expected to save 200 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) annually.

Recent visitors to the park may have also noticed a new crosswalk on East Saanich Road. This was installed as part of the renewal project with the District of North Saanich to allow staff and

visitors to cross more safely between the east and west sides of the site. We hope visitors to the park will find it useful when crossing over from the Panorama Rec Centre!

For more information, visit [Renewing the Sidney Centre for Plant Health](https://www.inspection.gc.ca/centre-for-plant-health) or contact cfia.CPH-Sidney-CPV.acia@inspection.gc.ca.



Construction at the Centre for Plant Health

ARMCHAIR TOUR OF THE PARK

Part 4

By Ian Cameron

When we left our tour in the last issue of the newsletter we were standing ten metres from the end of the path leading down from the kiosk, and we were looking back at the two trees, one on either side of the path. I talked about the one on the left, a *Quercus dentata* (Daimyo Oak, Emperor Oak, Sweet Oak), which brings me to the other tree, which is also an oak, but doesn't have lobed leaves. This may be the reason that this plant was misnamed not once, but twice in the Government's plant card catalogue before it was correctly identified in 2002. It had been labeled as a *Garrya Thuretii* and then speculation in the record suggested *Quercus densiflorus*. But in fact it is a *Quercus phillyreoides*, or Ubame oak.

Ubame oaks are evergreen, hardy to zone 7, so in Canada they will grow only on southern Vancouver Island and a small part of the lower mainland. Like the Daimyo oak, the Ubame is also native to Japan, but the one in the park came from France in 1913. The Ubame is used fairly extensively as a boulevard tree in Europe.

Legend has it that the park planners wanted to order one from Japan, but were told that they could not be shipped abroad as they were the source of bincho-tan, or white charcoal, which was and is highly prized in Japan.

White charcoal is made by heating ubame wood in a kiln at approximately 240 C for five days, then raising the temperature to around 1,000 C for five hours. Once carbonised, the material is taken out and covered in a damp mixture of earth, sand and ash. The result is charcoal that takes the natural shape of the oak wood that was used to make it, but looks like white metal. It is much harder than black charcoal, and rings with a metallic sound when struck. Wind chimes and a musical instrument, the tankin ("charcoal-xylophone") are made from bincho-tan. A different process produces a dye that women used to blacken their teeth, a practice called ohaguro. It showed they were married, prevented tooth decay, and was thought to be beautiful. Omnes homines suos mores.



ubame oak leaves

PARK STATS - 2023

- Wednesday work parties: 29
- Rain-day cancellations: 0
- New volunteers: 5
- Hours of work in the Park: 887
- Tours: 13
- People on tours: 156

We look forward to seeing you back next year. We will be back to work on Wednesday mornings in March or April (depending on the weather.) New recruits are always welcome. You can get in touch with us by email through our website [dominionbrookpark.ca](https://www.dominionbrookpark.ca)

Thank you for your contribution!