

Enter the Entry Gardens

THE PLANTS OF THE
PACIFIC CONNECTIONS GARDEN, PHASE 1

BY NIALL DUNNE AND RANDALL HITCHIN



This fall sees the historic grand opening of Phase 1 of the Pacific Connections Garden, sited at the south end of Washington Park Arboretum. Phase 1 includes the Garden's central welcoming meadow and interpretive shelter and the main trail leading from the meadow through the future Cascadia forest. For plant lovers, the main draw will be the series of intricately designed entry gardens surrounding the meadow. The five mixed

borders—ranging from 80 to 180 feet wide and from 40 to 60 feet deep—are beautiful botanical vignettes, offering previews-in-miniature of what is to come in the Garden's five Pacific Rim immersion forests.

They are also wonderful exhibits in and of themselves, featuring not only choice specimens of the temperate climate species from Chile, China, New Zealand, Australia and Cascadia that will populate the forests—but

ABOVE: Iconic plants in the new entry gardens of the Pacific Connections Garden. *Clockwise from upper left:* New Zealand's *Phormium tenax* (New Zealand flax), Cascadia's *Thuja plicata* (Western red cedar), Chile's *Araucaria araucana* (monkey puzzle tree) and Australia's *Eucalyptus* species (gum tree). *Center:* China's *Ginkgo biloba* (maidenhair tree).

also ravishing, cultivated selections of these species. Like the Witt Winter Garden and the Japanese Garden, the new entry gardens can be thought of as focal points of pure ornamental design in Washington Park Arboretum. As they mature and fill in over time, they will become part of the Arboretum's rich legacy of formal horticultural display.

The following article provides a close-up look at the entry gardens by highlighting aspects of their design and profiling some of the fabulous plants that you will see in them. It will also briefly look ahead to Phase 2 of the Pacific Connections Garden project, which is already getting underway.

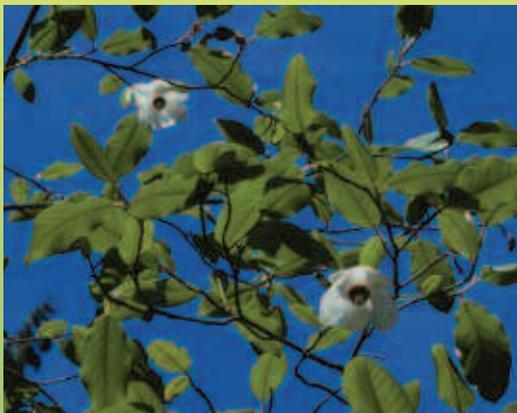
New Zealand

Let's begin at the north end of the welcoming meadow, where you will find the New Zealand entry garden, a fanciful recreation of an indigenous scrub-forest edge or clearing. This garden places a strong emphasis on brightly colored and contrasting foliage. Airy, broadleaved evergreen trees form the backdrop of the display and provide a striking foil for the large, strappy, colorful evergreen monocots that predominate in the understory.

Canopy trees include long-leaved lacebark (*Hoheria sexstylosa*), a small, multi-stemmed evergreen tree from the Hollyhock family

(Malvaceae) that grows up to 24 feet tall and produces long, glittering, deeply incised leaves that are light green. In summer, one-inch wide, pink-centered fragrant flowers hang in clusters among the leaves; later, they develop into broadly winged, purple seed pods. Several cultivars of *Pittosporum tenuifolium* also frame the garden and separate it from the adjoining China display on the west side of the meadow. Known as *tawhiwhi* by the Maori, *P. tenuifolium* is another small tree, growing up to 30 feet tall. The leaves are glossy and pale green and often have wavy margins. Clusters of small, bell-shaped purple flowers appear in late spring and give off a delicious honey scent, especially towards evening time.

An explosion of *Phormium* (New Zealand flax)—both straight species and variegated forms—takes place in the shrub layer. Cultivars include *P.* 'Yellow Wave,' which grows four to five feet tall and boasts two and one-fourth-inch wide chartreuse leaves with lime-green margins, and *P.* 'Maori Chief,' which grows a foot taller and produces slightly larger green leaves with rosy edges. Other spiky monocots in the understory include the arresting *Astelia nivicola* 'Red Gem,' from New Zealand's South Island. Growing one foot high, it forms tufts of broad, silvery foliage, with a strong, red



The China entry garden in the Pacific Connections Garden will feature the stunning spring blooms of *Magnolia wilsonii*.



Billardiera longiflora (climbing blueberry) is an evergreen vine that will knit together trees and shrubs in the Australia entry garden.

flush that deepens with cold weather, particularly at the base. Spikes of small, cream-colored flowers appear in spring followed by exquisite orange berries on female plants.

Dicots are featured in the understory, including a number of great *Veronica* (*Hebe*) species. *Veronica topiaria*, for instance, is a wonderful accent plant. It grows up to three feet tall and forms a tight dome of half-inch-long gray-green foliage; small spikes of bright white flowers sit atop the plant in summer. There's also the extraordinary *Veronica ochracea*, which—because of its scaly, arching, light-green leaves—has the appearance of a low-growing conifer. But there's no mistaking the plant's angiosperm credentials when it puts out lovely white flower spikes in summer.

Australia

Moving clockwise or eastward around the welcoming meadow—and crossing over Arboretum Drive East (just pretend you're traversing the Tasman Sea!)—you arrive at the entry garden for Australia. Like the New Zealand border, this display features an airy canopy and understory dominated by broadleaved evergreens; however, the foliage palette is different, consisting primarily of blues, grays and gray greens. The foliage provides a shimmering backdrop to a season-

long succession of splashy floral pageantry.

The canopy consists of large, wonderfully architectural *Eucalyptus* species, namely *E. glaucescens* (Tingiringi gum), with its peeling white bark and narrow, sweetly scented, silvery gray-green leaves, and *E. pauciflora* (snow gum), with its smooth, ghostly white trunk and long, narrow, gray-green leaves. These are accompanied by small trees such as the densely branched *Acacia pravissima* (Ovens wattle), which grows up to 20 feet tall, produces small, triangular, gray-green foliage, and dons a spectacular coat of powder-puff, bright-yellow flowers in early spring.

In the shrub layer down under (pardon the pun!), you'll find a diverse selection of evergreen flowering shrubs, including the delightful *Callistemon pallidus* (lemon bottle-brush), which grows up to 15 feet and produces narrow bluish-green leaves. In late spring to early summer, it flaunts one- to three-inch-long spikes of creamy-yellow flowers. Two *Grevillea* species are particularly noteworthy: *G. victoriae*, which grows six feet tall and produces elliptic, silvery foliage (reminiscent of an olive), and *G. juniperina* 'Molonglo,' a low-growing selection with bright-green, needle-like leaves. Members of the protea family (Proteaceae), *Grevillea* species bear fabulous, long, spidery blossoms. The flowers of *G. victoriae* are



Cascadia's *Fuchsia magellanica* features hummingbird-attracting blooms.



Umbellularia californica (California bay laurel) is a small broadleaved evergreen shrub that will thrive in the Cascadia entry garden.



The New Zealand forest is part of Phase 2 of the Pacific Connections Garden.

coppery red, while those of ‘Molonglo’ are a subtle, soft yellow.

Also in the understory—creeping along the ground or weaving through the shrubs—you’ll find the unusual *Billardiera longiflora*, or climbing blueberry. Native to New South Wales and Tasmania, this evergreen vine features lance-shaped, dark-green leaves and yellow, trumpet-shaped summer flowers. Small, apple-like, blue-violet to purple berries festoon the vine in fall.

Cascadia

On the south end of the welcoming meadow is the Cascadia entry garden—a lush, dense, dark-green forest planting. The canopy is strongly slanted towards coniferous evergreen trees, reflecting the prominence and diversity of these plants in our native flora. Small broadleaved trees, showy shrubs and herba-

ceous perennials in the understory add flashes of flower color and contrasting foliage texture to the canvas of dark green.

A column of iconic, large Pacific Northwest conifers—including Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) and mountain hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*)—frame the garden. Also present is Brewer’s weeping spruce (*Picea breweriana*), a Siskiyou native that develops a striking, pendulous form as it matures. Interweaving between the conifers are broadleaved evergreens such as *Umbellularia californica*, the California bay laurel, with its long, narrow, yellow-green glossy leaves (which can be used in cooking as a substitute for sweet bay). Three cultivars of the vine maple (*Acer circinatum*) are planted at the head of the trail that bisects the entry garden and leads to what will eventually become the Cascadia forest. This small maple has broad,

palmately lobed leaves that turn a gorgeous orange-tinged red in autumn.

Cultivars of native mahonia (*Berberis* species) and red flowering currant (*Ribes sanguineum*) fill the shrub layer and provide impressive floral fireworks from late winter to early spring. Six cultivars of the flowering currant have been planted, including white ('White Icicle'), pink ('Strybing Pink') and red ('Pulborough Scarlet') selections. Bolstering this early season flower extravaganza is *Garrya* x *issaquabensis* 'Pat Ballard,' a showy selection of the hybrid silk tassel (a cross between *G. elliptica* and *G. fremontii*). This tall shrub produces elliptical, wavy-edged, dark-green foliage and stunning 12-inch mauve catkins, which hang from the branch tips like icicles in wintertime. Later on in spring, the beautiful Western azalea (*Rhododendron occidentale*)—a large deciduous shrub, growing up to 15 feet tall—will chime in with bright clusters of fragrant, two-inch, white flowers splashed with pink and/or yellow.

Snaking through the foreground of the Cascadia entry garden is a wet swale, which has been planted with riparian and wetland species such as native *Juncus* and *Carex*. Here also, you'll find specimens of the spectacular umbrella plant (*Darmera peltata*), which produces one- to two-foot-wide umbrella-like leaves on two- to six-foot stalks and bears round clusters of bright-pink flowers on tall spikes in spring.

Chile

Wedged between Cascadia and China at the southwestern tip of the welcoming meadow is the Chile entry garden. Like Cascadia, this display features a lush green forest canopy with a brightly contrasting shrub layer; but it is distinguished from the latter by a predominance of broadleaved evergreens (rather than conifers) in the canopy layer. Conifer specimens, such as a handsome plum pine (*Podocarpus salignus*) and a now-famous monkey puzzle tree (*Araucaria araucana*)—

the first new accession into the Pacific Connections Garden—are certainly present, but play second fiddle to the broadleaved Chilean fire tree (*Embothrium coccineum*), Chilean lantern tree (*Crinodendron bookerianum*) and boxleaf azara (*Azara lanceolata*).

The dazzling Chilean fire tree has been celebrated elsewhere in these pages (see "Immerse Yourself in a Chilean Forest," by Sarah Reichard; "Bulletin," Winter 2008). A lesser-known beauty is the Chilean lantern tree, a small evergreen growing up to 15 feet tall and producing narrow, glossy, sharply toothed dark-green leaves. In late spring, large, pendulous scarlet flowers hang from its branches like tasty-looking cherries, or beautiful painted lanterns. Boxleaf azara is somewhat better known. It features small, shiny, paddle-like dark-green leaves neatly arranged on stiff, herringbone-patterned branches. In winter, abundant, fluffy, apetalous yellow flowers are held in clusters in the leaf axils and emit a strong fragrance reminiscent of sugar cookies, vanilla and chocolate. Yum!

Let your gaze descend into the understory and you'll find the shrub layer fizzing with fabulous cultivars of *Fuchsia magellanica*, including yellow-leaved and variegated forms. Showy fuchsia flowers bloom profusely from late spring to first frost and range in color from the standard red and violet to soft pinks and whites. Other delights in the shrub layer include *Eucryphia glutinosa* 'Nana,' which grows up to three feet tall and features handsome, toothed oval leaves. In late summer, the plant is covered with chalice-shaped white flowers, each bearing a dense tuft of stamens. Also, look for the unusual *Hydrangea serratifolia*, a climbing evergreen hydrangea that uses suction pads to hoist itself into the canopy and produces sprays of bright, white flowers in summer.

And how could we neglect to mention *Ugni molinae*—which, in spite of its less-than-promising generic name, is a real showstopper! Commonly known as the Chilean guava, this

shrub grows up to six feet tall and produces attractive, glossy, bronze-tinted leaves. Pendant, urn-shaped, cream-colored flowers hang from the leaf axils in mid-to late spring and develop into lovely, small, maroon berries, which taste—as advertised—like little guavas. Yum yum!

China

Continuing clockwise around the meadow, you arrive at the China entry garden, which includes the interpretive shelter (see “The New Pacific Garden Interpretive Shelter,” by Elizabeth Loudon; “Bulletin,” Spring 2008). In comparison to the other four displays, this one looks a lot more like a traditional “garden” than a naturalistic recreation of a particular native vegetation type. That’s because the plants were sampled widely from across China and chosen mainly for their cultural importance—their significance as culinary, medicinal and ornamental crops.

Anchor plants include the dove tree (*Davidia involucrata* ‘Sonoma’), with its heart-shaped, vivid-green leaves and large, pure-white flower bracts, which hang in rows beneath the branches in spring and flutter like white doves when the wind kicks up. They also include ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*)—with its distinctive fan-shaped leaves and fleshy, yellow edible seeds—and Wilson magnolia (*Magnolia wilsonii*), famed for its large, pendulous, sweet-smelling, pink spring flowers. Both species have a long history of use in the traditional Chinese pharmacopeia.

A grove of sweet-shoot bamboo (*Phyllostachys dulcis*) compartmentalizes the garden from the New Zealand display to the north. This timber bamboo produces marvelous, tall (up to 40 feet), three-inch-wide, sinuous canes and masses of large, drooping, pale-green leaves. As the common name suggests, the young shoots are very sweet tasting and can be eaten raw. (Other edible bamboos need to be parboiled to remove bitterness prior to consumption.)

In the forefront of the garden, you’ll find such treats as *Paeonia suffruticosa* ssp. *rockii*, probably the most sought after tree peony of all time. In early summer, it produces jaw-dropping, four-inch-wide, frilly, white-petaled flowers with maroon and yellow centers. There’s also *Rhododendron sinogrande*, which boasts the largest leaves of any rhodie—up to a meter long!—and large trusses of white to pale-yellow, late-spring blossoms. And the Chinese chain fern, *Woodwardia unigemmata*—a lovely plant with rose-copper-colored new fronds. The list of botanical beauties goes on.

Pacific Connections, Phase 2

Now that Phase 1 of the Garden is complete, the Arboretum is moving ahead with Phase 2 of the project, which includes the designing and planting of the Cascadia and New Zealand immersion forests, and the restoration of the Hohmdahl rockery. The rockery, located at the south junction of Arboretum Drive East and Lake Washington Boulevard, will be planted with eye-catching Chilean species and signal to motorists and passersby that something new and wonderful is afoot in the Arboretum.

Seattle Parks and Recreation and the University of Washington Botanic Gardens have hired the Seattle-based Berger Partnership to create the designs for Phase 2. As this article goes to press, Berger has already created some spectacular concept drawings for the Cascadia and New Zealand forests. The firm will also help calculate the cost of materials and maintenance for the project so that the Arboretum Foundation can fine-tune its funding-raising campaign and help bring the next phase of this exciting endeavor to fruition. ∞

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