

## Van Dusen Gardens

- Jenny Brown takes a walk in Vancouver's 'secret garden'



**To** many people, VanDusen gardens in Vancouver, BC is one of the few magical and tranquil havens to be found to escape from the noise and stress of the city. But it is also be a place of adventure, fantasy and learning

Where else in the city can you get lost in an Elizabethan Maze, walk on a floating bridge, find turtles basking around lakes, join in on a Scarecrow Festival or see the magnificent festival of lights at Christmas?

Walking through the gardens is like stepping into a Monet painting, but spiced intermittently with brilliant splashes of color. If you stroll through the early morning autumn fog, you are blanketed in a cocoon of quiet, like you've just trespassed on an abandoned movie set. So many varieties of plants, flowers, trees and birds are basking in their own world of perfect bliss; one almost feels guilty for disturbing it. Gardeners are industriously snipping away in their own meditative state sculpting giant leafy animal hedges that look as though they could effortlessly dip down into the flowing ponds and take a drink. Then you enter different sections of wide open spaces lined with armies of trees that are dropping gold, red and orange leaves onto the perfectly manicured plush green lawns.

Nancy Wong, Public Relations Director of VanDusen Gardens is lucky enough to absorb this spectacular scenery every day. She describes the view from her office as like looking through a stained glass window. "It is more than a garden, it is a living museum. People often stop by on their way home from work before the long commute to Richmond or White Rock to unwind."

In 1910 the gardens site was an acreage of stumps and bush. Owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway, it was leased by the Shaughnessy Golf Club from 1911 until 1960 when the golf club relocated. CN wanted to put in a subdivision, but many citizens were strongly opposed. In 1966, the VanDusen botanical Gardens Association was formed to assist the Vancouver Park Board with saving the site. The land was purchased with shared funding from the City of Vancouver, the Government of British Columbia and the Vancouver Foundation with a donation by WJ VanDusen. The Garden officially opened to the public on August 30, 1975.



VanDusen is a living museum of plants gathered from around the globe. Many have been saved from extinction in the wild because botanical gardens provide a safe place for them to thrive. It is home to 7,500 different kinds of plants

assembled from six continents. The Elizabethan maze is planted with 3,000 pyramidal cedars. More than 60 varieties of birds can be seen at various times in the garden.

The site is leased out for functions such as the 'All British Car Meet', art exhibitions and one year the cast of the long running British soap 'Coronation Street' were signing autographs here.

More than 100 courses a year take place from the accredited Master Gardener Program to non-credit courses and weekend seminars.

In 2000, 155,586 people visited the Garden. "In the summer there can be 1000 people at one time", says Nancy. "It's amazing that there are 55 acres and it never feels packed. 75% are tourists and 25% are from the local community. There are 1,600 volunteers ranging in age from 25-55. Often visitors come and end up wanting to volunteer. There are 200 events, not produced by gardens itself, but we rent the space."

VanDusen Gardens is open daily from 10.am.

As the daylight length changes so does the closing time:

Current hours: Oct 1 to March 31 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Address: 5251 Oak Street at W 37th Ave (North West corner)

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Admission rates - Winter season (Oct 1 to March 31):

Adult (19-64) \$5.00

Senior (65+) \$3.50

Youth (13-18) \$3.50

Child (6-12) \$2.00

Family \$11.00

(2 adults + 2 people age 6-19)

Children under 6 free

Members free

### **Upcoming events in October:**

12-27 Fourth annual Scarecrow Festival. Each scarecrow is created by a class of lower mainland school children using recycled or recyclable materials. Vote for favorite 10-4 daily. Sign up for programs on Oct 19 and 26. Call 604-257-8669 for more info on family adventure.

13-19 Sunday to Saturday – Autumn Leaves. Special themed tours of Japanese maples by Heron lake, sugar maples in the Canadian heritage garden and the eastern woodland. Daily at 2 pm with an extra tour at 1 pm on Sunday and Saturday. Free for members with garden admissions.

Special features to be seen this time of year: heathers, maples, eastern North American and ginkgo trees, autumn crocus, fatsia, rubekia, asters and hydrangeas.



At the end of the tour, be sure to stop by the wonderful Shaughnessy Restaurant for brunch or dinner. There's California style dining in the gardens. Although at it's most spectacular in the summer as all the walls are opened out for full viewing of the gardens it is a great winter spot and perfect for that after meal stroll. Or if you only just have time for a brief stop on the way home, as Nancy Wong says "The stillness and serenity offer more relaxation than a Martini."

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**Michael Wright will soon be 'The Happiest Fag in the World'**  
**a Vancouver personality on the 'up and coming list'.**  
**Jenny Brown**