

Self guided program: A Sense of Spring



An educational resource for self guided sensory exploration at VanDusen Botanical Garden
When to Visit: May / June
Grade Level: K - 3

This self guided tour takes you to some of the more spectacular parts of the Garden in the spring season. Exact blooming times are in the hands of Mother Nature, so you may find not everything in this tour will be in bloom when you visit. As you walk along, be sure to look way up and way down, so as not to miss any of the beauty unfolding.

Garden Guidelines

Please spend a couple of minutes discussing these guidelines with your group before you begin to explore the Garden.

- VanDusen Botanical Garden is a place of beauty, education and conservation with many plants and animals to see. Please do not pick any living plants or plant parts.
- Respect the wildlife in the Garden, this is their home. Spend time observing the wildlife but try to not scare or hurt animals in any way (including insects).
- Respect your fellow Garden visitors: please do not run and make lots of noise in areas where other visitors might be enjoying some quiet time or a guided tour.
- Keep to pathways and grassy areas when walking to protect the plants from accidental damage. Look for the small trails that take you through the garden beds.
- Place all garbage in garbage cans, or appropriate recycling bins. If you can't find a garbage can or recycle bin, put it in your pocket or bag until you do find one.
- When visiting indoor areas of the garden (such as washrooms and the Arrival Hall, keep noise to a minimum and remember that other visitors and staff use these spaces as well.
- Have lots of fun and enjoy the amazing world of plants!

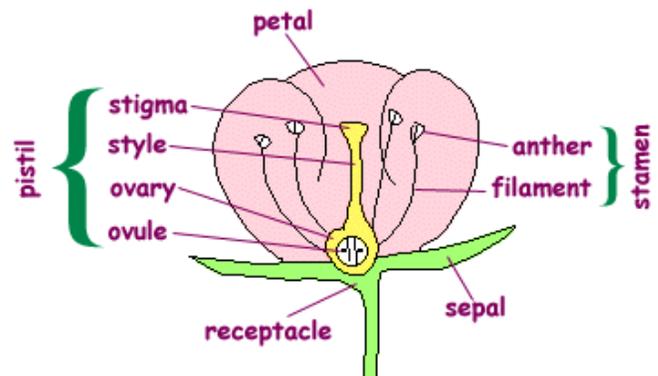
Stops for the senses

Stops are numbered on the Garden map that accompanies this document. You are welcome to visit them in numbered order, or choose those that interest you most. There are plant name labels in the Garden to help you identify plants.

Start: Begin your tour by exiting the main doors of VanDusen's Visitor Centre, which officially opened in October 2011. Take a moment to use your **sense of sight** and admire the view. What is the first thing that catches your eyes out here?

Stop 1: The Fragrance Garden is full of plants with distinct scents. Take a few minutes to explore the plants here using your **sense of smell**. Which one(s) are your favourite? Right next to the Fragrance Garden is the Herb Garden. Sniff around here for a bit - use your fingers to gently rub the leaves and then smell them. What do you think people might use some of these herbs for?

Stop 2: Loderi Rhododendron Path – follow this bark mulch path to surround yourself with colour and fragrance through the Loderi rhododendron collection. Look out for "Loderi King George", described by many as the finest of the Loderi Group, it has large pink-white blooms and is slightly scented. On a warm day, the scent from the rhododendrons on this path is more pronounced. What do they smell like to you? Which one is has your favourite colour of bloom? The large size of rhododendron flowers makes them a great for looking at flower parts. Can you point out some of the parts?



Stop 3: Dove tree (*Davidia involucrata*) In May, large white bracts (which are actually modified leaves) hang from the branches hiding small greenish-white clusters of flowers. Look up and see if you can guess why this large tree is also called the handkerchief or ghost tree.

Stop 4: *Rhododendron fulvum* - look for a large rhododendron shrub with large, dark green glossy leaves. Gently feel with your fingers for the fine hairs on underside of its leaves. Try feeling under the leaves of other rhododendrons on the path to compare them.

Stop 5: Ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*). The common name of these ferns is derived from their fronds which resemble...what do you think? Ostrich feathers! The ostrich fern's immature fronds are known as fiddleheads, are edible, and have a flavour similar to asparagus or green beans. We won't be eating these ones today.

Stop 6: Paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*) - look for a cinnamon-brown coloured tree with peeling, papery bark. Admire the different patterns and textures that the bark creates. Do you see anything in the patterns, i.e.: faces, animals, etc...?

Stop 7: Pigsqueak (*Bergenia purpurascens*) Would you like to hear a pig squeak? Look for a plant that is low to the ground with large, dark green, round leaves that are pink underneath. Gently rub one of the thick, leathery leaves between your fingers. Can you hear a grunting noise?

Stop 8: Fern Dell - this area of the garden is full of dozens of different kinds of ferns. Spend some time walking through the area and count up how many different ferns you can find. Some of them have interesting names or leaf shapes - share your favourite with the group and explain why you like it.

Stop 9: The Laburnum Walk. The bright yellow hybrid goldenchain trees (*Laburnum × watereri 'Vossii'*) that surround you give off a scent and are beautifully contrasted by the round, puffy purple **alliums** planted below.
Note: the seeds of this tree are highly toxic!

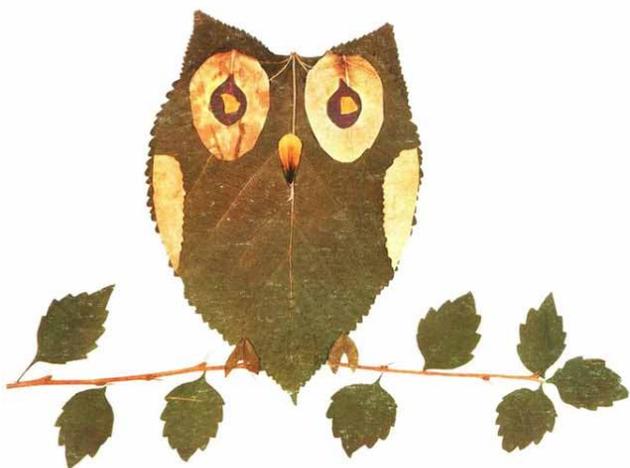
Activites

Do as many of the following activities as you like at anytime during your tour.

Activity 1 - Mystery Bags: Bring with you some bags with items of various textures. Students touch the hidden objects in a bag and then try to find something in the area of the garden they are in that feels like it. Remember to stay on the pathways!

Activity 2 - Earth Art: Find an open area (eg: somewhere on the great lawn or near the maze or Forest Lake). Spend some time looking for and gathering natural objects that have fallen on the ground nearby, such as leaves, seeds, flower petals, interesting pebbles, sticks etc...Be thoughtful and considerate of the plants and the landscaping of the Garden as you collect. Items on the edges of garden beds can be taken as long as they are not attached to plants and you do not need to walk into the beds to retrieve them.

Come together as a group in the open area again and create some 'earth art' on the ground. Think about colour, shape and texture while you work. You may want to make something abstract, or perhaps make something that resembles a plant or animal. Some example images follow:



Earth art is meant to decay back into nature, so take some photos if you like, but please leave your artwork in the garden for others to enjoy and allow it to return to the earth!

Activites (continued)

Activity 3 - Discovering Together: This activity is best done in a large area that the children can explore on their own such as around the Great Lawn or near the Elizabethan Maze. Split into partners.

Objectives:

- Students will use their senses of touch and smell to explore objects in nature
- Students will be actively involved in teaching their classmates

No materials required, except for one natural object that you picked up previously that has an interesting smell or texture.

What to do:

- Gather all students and adults into a circle
- Ask for one student to be a volunteer. Ask them to close their eyes and you give them the natural object
- Ask your volunteer to use descriptive words to describe how the natural object smells or feels. Let them open their eyes to see what the object was.
- Now tell students they are going to work in pairs and they have to find objects to show their partner
- One of the pair will have to close their eyes while the other seeks interesting natural objects.
- The partner that can see carefully leads the other to the natural object (such as a plant to touch to smell), or gives an object to their partner
- The one with the eyes closed has to use descriptive words to describe it.
- They can alternate after each object

Guidelines for activity:

- The partner that can see is responsible for the safety of their partner
- Don't lead partner to anything that they wouldn't want to touch or smell
- Give them their boundaries for the area to explore

Summarize by asking the group as a whole:

- What was the most interesting natural object that you felt or smelled?
- Did you enjoy finding things for your partner to experience? Why?
- Would anyone like to take the whole group to see any of the natural objects they experienced?

Activity 4 - Under the trees – a sensory poem:

Recommended location: the Great Lawn

Ask each child to choose a tree nearby that they think is special and sit down underneath it quietly for 5 minutes. Suggest they focus on the following:

- Take time to listen to the sounds of the trees and wildlife around you.
- Feel the ground beneath the tree and the parts of the tree you can reach – the roots, trunk and bark, low branches and leaves.
- What woodland smells do you notice? Does your tree smell at all?
- Look closely at different parts of the tree. What colour is the bark, leaves, flowers or seeds? Are there any patterns in the bark or flowers? Are there any holes or signs that animals have visited this tree?

Using their observations and discoveries invite them to write a tree poem. For example, finish each sentence: (You may choose to use the worksheet on page 5 for this activity.)

Under the trees I saw...

Under the trees I heard ...

Under the trees I smelled ...

Under the trees I touched ...

Under the trees I felt ...



Under the trees

at VanDusen Botanical Garden

written by:

Under the trees I saw...

Under the trees I heard...

Under the trees I smelled ...

Under the trees I touched ...

Under the trees I felt ...

FAQ

How long does it take to walk to the Maze? Allow up to 20 minutes to walk to the Maze from the Visitor Centre, and another 20 minutes to explore it.

Where can we have lunch? Once inside the garden, you will find a covered picnic area outside the Visitor Centre if you follow the Centre's walls to your left all the way to the end of the paved area. There are recycling and garbage bins here, as well as a wooden chest to stow your bags while you explore the Garden. This box is not secure so please do not leave any valuables. Keep in mind that other visiting groups may also be using this area. If the picnic area is occupied, you are welcome to eat anywhere on the Great Lawn or beside the Maze on the stone steps.

Where are the washrooms? Inside the Visitor Centre as well as at the opposite end of the Garden in the Offices building near Gate 5. You will also find portable toilets throughout the Garden. It's best to have your group use the washrooms in the Visitor Centre before beginning your tour.

How do we pay? Check in and pay with the Admissions Desk. Cost is \$5/child. One adult per 10 children is admitted free, additional adults pay the \$5 rate.

When does the Garden open? Garden hours change with the seasons. For more information please visit our website at <http://vandusengarden.org/visit/plan-your-visit>

Further questions? Please call 604-718-5898, Tues-Fri, 10 a.m.- 4 p.m.

