

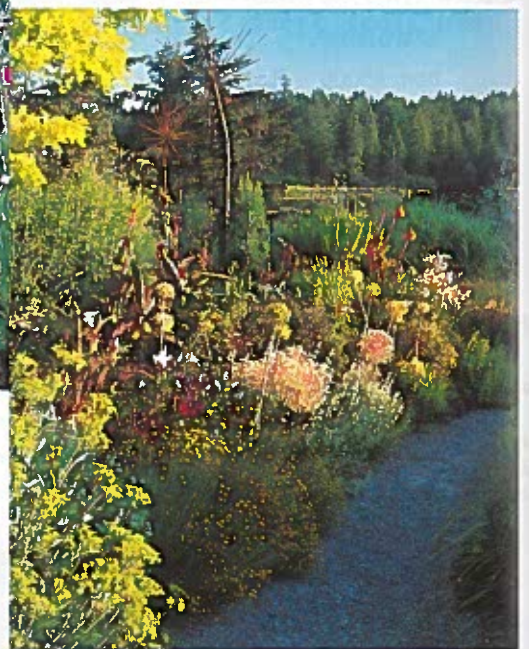
Pacific Paradise

The Horticulture Centre of the Pacific near Victoria
is a plant lover's nirvana BY ALDONA SATTERTHWAITE

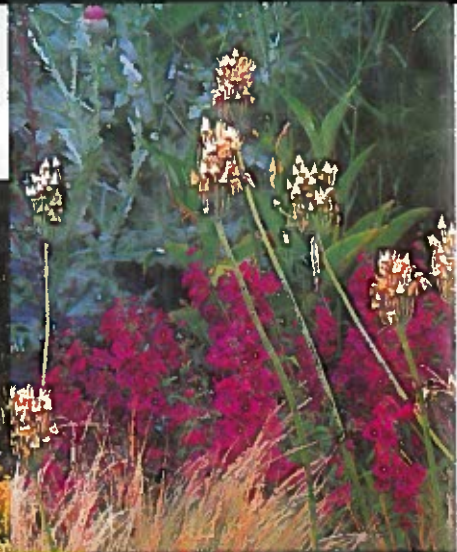


One of my favourite West Coast public gardens is located in the municipality of Saanich, on the outskirts of Victoria, British Columbia. The Horticulture Centre of the Pacific (HCP) is all about plants—period. It doesn't boast a luxurious restaurant, chi-chi gift shop or multimedia visitor centre. But for just \$5, you can enter this magical horticultural realm any day except Christmas and lose yourself among its 40 hectares, 2.4 of which are divided into 24 demonstration and teaching gardens with more than 10,000 varieties of plants on display.

The staff here is small, but an army of students—20 of them this year—work



ABOVE: one of the masterful borders created by the Hardy Plant Group. Dominant plants include cape fuchsia (left), hot pink and silver swaths of rose campion, purple *Verbena bonariensis* and chamomile. **RIGHT:** allium seed heads and cannas stand out in a bright gold and burgundy bed.



24 gardens

- Bees, Birds and Butterflies (2004)
- Children's Garden (2004)
- Container Demonstration Area (seasonal)
- Dahlia Trial Garden
- Doris Page Winter Garden
- Drought Tolerant Garden
- Groundcover Garden
- Hardy Fuchsia Garden
- Heather Garden
- Herb Garden
- Lawns
- Lily Garden
- Mixed Perennial Beds
- Mixed Borders
- Native Plant Demonstration Garden
- Native Plant Restoration Area
- Orchard
- Ornamental Grass Garden
- Rhododendron and Hosta Garden
- Rose Garden
- Takata Garden
- Vegetable Garden
- Water Feature Garden
- Woodland Garden



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: lambs' ears, an *Allium christophii* seed head and geranium leaves; a corner of the Rose Garden, which looks handsome even in the off-season; *Nectaroscordum siculum*, penstemon and Scotch thistle.

under the watchful eye of head gardener Andrea Stempski, herself a graduate of the Niagara Parks Botanical Gardens and School of Horticulture. The students help to maintain the gardens, part of the HCP's 10-month-long accredited diploma course in landscape maintenance. Volunteers and members of various garden clubs and groups—including the Victoria Horticultural Society, the Dahlia Society of Victoria, the North America Heather Society, the Lily Society of Victoria, the Victoria Rhododendron

Society and the Takata Society of Victoria—take care of the rest.

I was particularly impressed by the work of the Hardy Plant Group, which has designed big, bold and unexpected mixed borders in three 700-square-metre beds. Landscape designer Diane Pierce, who teaches at the HCP and is one of the leading member/gardeners of the group, describes the beds this way:

"Billows of colour surge on the hillside, like great waves at sea. Reds, oranges, corals and yellows merge into softer yellows and creams. Further down the slope, the hot colours become more gentle—whites, blues, mauves and pinks.

"The borders are unified by deep



LEFT: a graceful bridge in the cool green refuge that is the Takata Japanese garden, with ferns, irises and ornamental grasses providing a foliage counterpoint. In summer, astilbes add pretty patches of colour. **BELOW:** a portrait of hens and chicks.

purple and silvery grey foliage. 'Forest Pansy' Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy'), 'Diablo' ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Diablo'), *Rosa glauca*, purple-brown cow parsley (*Anthriscus sylvestris* 'Ravenswing') and purple spurge (*Euphorbia dulcis* 'Chameleon') are set off by silvery sea orache (*Atriplex halimus*) and artemisias, which reflect light on even the dullest day.

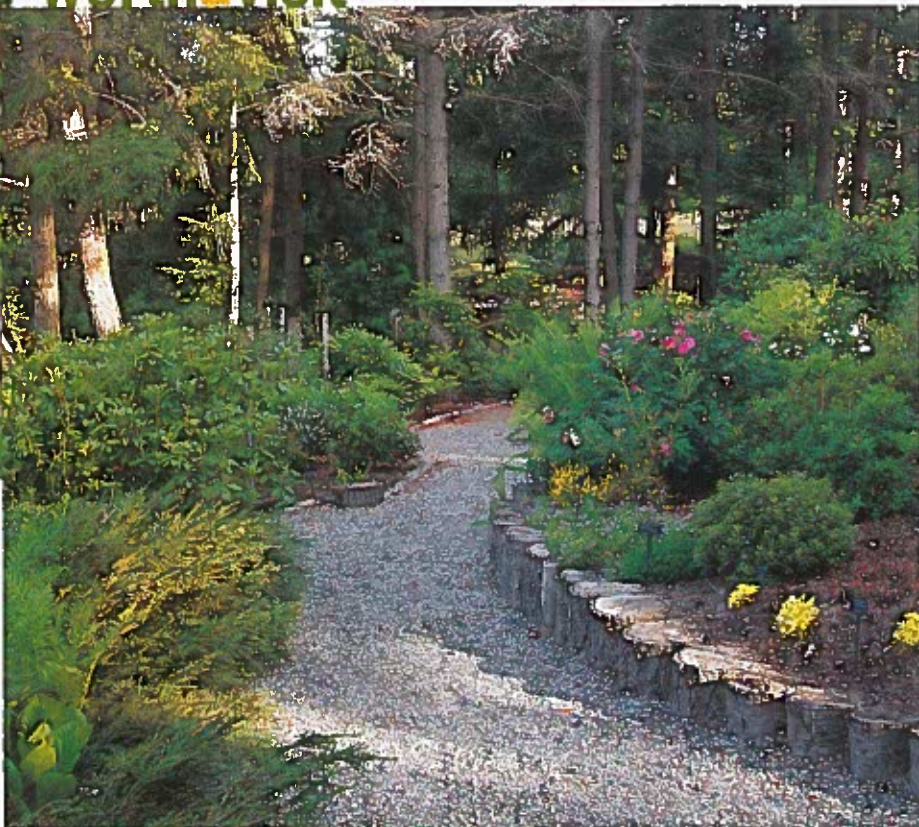
"Trees with gold, purple and silver foliage, such as golden black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia'), European beech (*Fagus sylvatica* 'Purple Fountain') and weeping, willow-leaved pear (*Pyrus salicifolia* 'Pendula'), add height and drama. Around them, the exotic broad leaves of cannas, bear's breeches (*Acanthus mollis*), sticky Jerusalem sage (*Phlomis russeliana*),

You can enter this magical horticultural realm any day except Christmas





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: the bright colours of penstemon and hebe make a striking pair; looking through plantings of rhododendrons toward the Doris Page Winter Garden; *Allium giganteum* and sticky Jerusalem sage.



honey bush (*Melianthus major*) and Chinese rhubarb (*Rheum palmatum* 'Atrosanguineum') contrast with the feathery foliage of bronze fennel and sword-like, striped New Zealand flaxes, as well as irises, libertias and various grasses.

"Biennials self-sow, popping up in different spots each year. Exotics mix freely with commoners, for even sweet clover (*Melilotus officinalis*), gathered as seed from an Alberta farm ditch, looks lovely and airy among its fellows."

Founded in 1979, the not-for-profit HCP suffered some initial setbacks—funding hiccups and the occasional vagaries of nature—but has always been buoyed by the enthusiasm and determination of its members and volunteers. Bob Clarke, curator of the Takata Japanese Garden, tells me the \$50,000 his garden needed in seed money was raised through bingo nights. He is currently raising money to add a 12-by-18-metre Zen Garden.



Among the first gardens established at the HCP was the Doris Page Winter Garden, created in 1985 to honour a well-known horticulturist, television host and HCP volunteer, and a tireless champion of the beauty and usefulness of winter foliage and flowers in woodland settings. The garden is now lovingly maintained by Patty Brown, a former HCP student. Visit soon and you'll see more than 500 examples of plant material suitable for a Zone 8 winter garden, including hellebores, winter aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*) and trout lily (*Erythronium* spp.). ■

if you go

THE HORTICULTURE CENTRE OF THE PACIFIC

505 Quayle Rd.
Victoria, British Columbia V8X 3X1
Telephone: 250/479-6162
Summer hours: April 1 to September 30; 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Winter hours: October 1 to March 31; 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Admission: \$5; members free.
Guided tours available at extra charge.

AMENITIES: 24 gardens, parking, washrooms, some seating; light refreshments and souvenirs at Welcome Booth; plant sales. Limited wheelchair access. Dogs on leashes are permitted.