



### **Gardens to Visit Dianne and Gary Westlake**

Some spring time before you die, you need to stand on the edge of the quarry at Butchart Gardens on Vancouver Island, B.C. It will take your breath away. We had seen photos of the place but they did not compare to being there when the spring flowers are at their peak. We just got back from a trip to the west coast and, of course, visiting gardens was high on our list of things to do.

Butchart was like Disneyland for anyone who enjoys looking at gardens. It was clear that someone was constantly deadheading, picking up leaves and trimming everything so that it all was fresh and new looking. There was not one tulip that was past its prime, since someone had cut old blooms off. The Camellia were clean and bright while everywhere else they were a bit brown around the edges. We even heard that they plant daily, replacing plants with new ones or moving pots in and out of the garden. All this, yet there were very few gardeners evident. Apparently they do all this early in the morning or at night. There was one person cutting a lawn, even though it did not seem to need any cutting.

The eye candy went on and on from one major garden to the next. We could not see all of the gardens from one vantage point. We walked a short distance from the entrance through a grove of trees and on through a cut in the rocks and suddenly, we were at the rim of the old quarry. Almost all of the original rock surface was covered with plant material. The scale of the garden was immense with curved paths, lawns and garden beds on the bottom while ivy covered the steep parts. In the centre was a large mound of ivy covered rock with stairs winding up to another lookout. We walked down the ramp to the far end and passed by a huge bog garden on the other side of the ramp. The far end overlooked a large animated fountain. We then made our way around the bottom of the quarry through its many paths and gardens. Every time we turned a corner, there was a photogenic vista. The majority of the plants themselves were not especially unique or different but the way they were organized and the colours that were placed together made for a great show.

We did not have high tea, which is something the folks from the west coast seem to like to do, but we did eat in the dining room overlooking the Italian garden with its formal pools and hedges. It was all just too pooh pooh. And all the time we were having our wine, with carefully prepared and well served lunch, we had no idea that the Japanese garden was just behind the hedge. Although smaller, it was as spectacular as the quarry, covered with moss and winding paths and bridges down to the boat slip where there was a great view of a tiny harbour. There were other gardens including a perennial garden with many roses and peonies which will be great to look at later in the year.

We enjoyed the Botanical Garden at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver just as much, but for different reasons. Although well designed and beautifully laid out, it is a collection of plants. Some of these we had never seen before because they are native to the west coast or they were part of the

collection of plants from around the world. We spent most of a day and took a huge number of photos.

Besides having the collections of plants, there was a wonderful demonstration garden in the botanical garden with fruit trees espaliered in every possible way imaginable. Espalier is a method of training trees to grow along walls, fences and trellises. Trees can be made into many designs. One fruit tree was made to spell the letters 'UBC'. There was even a pear tree trained along a low fence forcing the entire tree along a line no more than a foot off the ground.

We loved seeing skunk cabbage, the heaths and heathers, the Mahonia and something that looked like trout lily on steroids. We rarely see these things growing in our area.

Our own garden cannot be like Butchart due to a shortage of resources. Neither can it be a botanical garden even though we have tried to collect every plant known to man. But we can incorporate small bits of each of these into our garden. We always get ideas from every garden we visit, whether it is large or small, whether it is organized like a collection or designed for impact. Sometimes when you see a great garden your first instinct is to go home and rip everything out and start again. But once the feeling passes, you realize that there is always something that you can use. We visited a wonderful small urban garden on a bus tour this week and you will probably find some aspect of this garden in ours in future along with bits of Butchart, UBC Botanical and every other garden we have seen.

Visiting gardens is a good thing and all gardeners need to do it every chance we get.

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