

"THE SEASON'S WILD FLOWERS"

Radio - University Studio,  
April, 1st.1938.

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Friends of the air, instead of presenting a straight fifteen minute talk on flowers, I have arranged with one of my advanced students, Miss Joan McTaggart Cowan to be present, and discuss with me some samples of spring flowers from the University Botanical Gardens.

A month ago we had no flowers, and a month from now, when I expect to give another of these talks, many other flowers will be available for discussion.

This is the first time I have arranged a dialogue discussion, and if you prefer this to a straight talk on spring flowers, I will be glad if you will either let me know directly, or inform the University Extension Department, so that I may know whether to repeat, or change, the form of my broadcast a month hence.

All right Joan, how shall we begin, I would suggest that you tell the people what flowers we have here. Well, we begin with these catkin bearing trees; Hazel, Alder, Willow, these and most other catkin bearing trees flower before leaves appear, so that pollen, carried by the wind, can easily reach the seed bearing catkins.

Willows are exceptions amongst catkin bearing trees, they are specialized for pollination by insects, and their fruits are quite different.

Apart from the catkin bearing trees we have some flowering shrubs, how many of these do you know? Flowering Currant, Indian Plum, Bearberry and Oregon Grape. We have two kinds of Barberry known as Oregon grape Holly leaved Barberry, and Dwarf Barberry.

How can you tell them apart? (glossy pinnate and dull palmate.) These are sometimes grown in gardens aren't they? The Holly leaved one is, it grows faster than the dwarf Barberry and makes a nice evergreen mass. Its fruits too are quite ornamental. By-the-way do you remember anything of special interest about the flower. (short pause) Oh! yes! the sensitive stamens. That's right, when the flower is fully open, the stamens spread widely, and when the flower is disturbed by insects, or by touching it with the finger or a pencil, the stamens bend suddenly toward the centre. This is to ensure that insects are dusted with pollen before they leave the flower.

I should think there would be confusion between two flowering shrubs with such similar names as Barberry and Bearberry.

Much confusion does exist, because both plants have medicinal properties, and the bark of the Cascara tree which, as you know, is quite different from these two, is sold under three names, Barberry bark, bearberry bark, and Cascara bark. Do they use the bark of the other two?



No the leaves of Bearberry, and the roots of Barberry are collected for medicinal purposes. The Indians use the leaves of Bearberry to smoke, like tobacco. This is one of the plants the Indians call Kinnikinnie. I believe some people mistake the Bearberry for Cranberries, - is there any similarity between the two? Well! perhaps a little, it trails on the ground, and produces attractive looking red berries, - but they are not very palatable.

Here are two other shrubs that are often confused, the Flowering Currant and the Indian Plum. I should think everybody would know the Flowering Currant, it is such a popular garden shrub - especially for spring flowering. Yes but everybody doesn't know the Indian Plum, and many mistake it for a white flowering currant, it flowers about the same time, and often the two can be found growing together. Is there a white flowering currant? Yes, I have seen specimens of a pure white one, found on a small island in Howe Sound, but unfortunately I've not been able to get cuttings for the gardens; the man who found it, tried to locate it again, and failed. So many shades from pale pink to dark red makes the Flowering Currant quite useful for garden decoration. I see you have a number of Flowering Currants like small trees in the Botanical Gardens, are they the same species as the others. The very same, they are simply trained to a single stem, and all lower buds rubbed off when young. They make beautiful specimens for the middle of a flower bed.

Does the Indian Plum grow around here? You mean - around the University? No - I mean around Vancouver. Oh yes, it is pretty well distributed through Pt. Grey, South Vancouver, Burnaby, and all up the Fraser Valley, and down into the States. In the summer time its fruits are very attractive, and make beautiful indoor decorations; they are not good to eat however; they are very astringent, and cause your mouth to "pucker" up.

Now, suppose you tell the listeners what other flowers we have on the table here, (Name them as you lift them from the table). These are Dogtooth lilies, Trillium, Blue-eye grass, Bleeding heart, Butterbur, "Skunk Cabbage". Wait a minute. I beg your pardon! Yellow Arum. Well, why did you call it Skunk Cabbage, when you knew it was wrong? I knew that most of the listeners would recognise the plant by the wrong name, and if I called it Skunk Cabbage, it would give you a chance to correct the error. It would come better from you, than from me. We have no time to go into details just now, further than to say, that the Skunk Cabbage is an Eastern plant not found in B.C., it is quite different from our yellow Arum. It appears that old timers coming from the east, not knowing the name of our Arum, and noticing the unpleasant odour, called it Skunk Cabbage, thus the error began. Many other wild flowers have been given erroneous common names. For example, you said this was Bleeding Heart. Yes, I have often wondered why it was called that, because it does not much resemble a heart, Now, look, turn the flower up, with the stalk downwards, - doesn't that resemble Dutchman's breeches?



It surely does. I have heard it called Dutchman's breeches, but I thought it was just another name for the same plant. Bleeding heart is a garden plant, with a white, distinctly heart-shaped flower, the red petals projecting through the tip, like a drop of blood.

Are these Dogtooth lilies from Victoria? Well now, - I can't be certain where I got the original stock of this, but you don't think that all the pretty flowers are confined to Victoria - do you? No, but the Victoria people have so many of these lilies, and collect such quantities that they even have them for sale in florists stores. There are some interesting facts regarding these. First, they are widely distributed over the islands, and the lower mainland in the coast area. In some districts they are very abundant, but I do not propose to tell where; because I do not wish to see them exterminated. Real nature-lovers can visit such regions and admire the beauty of these flowers without picking them. They leave the flowers for others to enjoy, but many thoughtless and selfish people are impelled to possess everything that gives them pleasure, and simply cannot pass these up.

If people are so fond of them could they not grow them in their gardens? I have often wondered why we don't see more of our showy native plants in gardens. Many people have planted these lilies in the garden, and after a few years they gradually disappeared. The secret of keeping these indefinitely is to plant



them in shallow soil, not more than 4 or 6 inches deep. Dig out the place where you want to grow them, and place a layer of slates, or slabs of concrete, or close fitting rocks about 5 inches below the surface, fill in the soil and plant your bulbs. You see, every year a new bulb forms below the old one, so that it gradually works farther down, until it gets so far below the surface that the food supply is exhausted before the shoot can reach daylight. The layer of rock compells the bulbs to stay within reach of the surface. This in fact is the reason why you find so many around Victoria, there is so much rock with a shallow layer of soil - ideal for such bulbous plants, and spring flowering annuals.

Can the lilies be grown from seed, or is it necessary to get bulbs? By all means, grow them from seed, but prepare the ground first. If you are not in a great hurry, get two or three seed pods when ripe, sow them soon after collecting, and in about 3 or 4 years you'll have a wonderful show; you can have yellow ones, and pink ones too - they are beautiful. Are there pink and yellow native species? Certainly, the pink ones are found near the south end, and also at the north end of Vancouver Island, and two kinds of yellow ones are in profusion on our mountains. I suppose the mountain ones are still under snow, and won't be in bloom until summer. In their natural habitat they will probably not flower until June or July, but we have yellow ones from the Selkirk Range in bloom now; you see, many alpine species flower in the spring time "When its springtime in the Rockies", it is summer down here. (Petasites).



Have you anything particular to say about this flower? the Butterbur. No, I just included that because it is one of our conspicuous spring flowers, so abundant by the roadsides in some districts, that many people wonder what it is. Some people call it colt's foot, but that name is usually given to another plant which is rarely seen in British Columbia. Listeners may recognise this plant by its dense heads of small white flowers on a thick stalk 8 inches or a foot high. Later on, the area on which these flowers are found will be covered by a dense mass of round deeply lobed leaves, and the flowers replaced by heads like thistle-down.

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Our time is up, and we have to go. See you again with some more wild flowers next month, watch for the announcement.

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