

# IN THE GARDEN

WITH STEVE WHYSALL



Gary Lewis of Phoenix Perennials displays a table full of blooming hellebores in Richmond. He has brought the plants in for today's Hellebore Hoorah event.



Douglas Justice, of the UBC Botanical Garden.

When Doug Justice was a kid, he learned to identify trees from the backseat of his dad's car as they flashed past at 100 km/h. He was encouraged to do this by his father, Clive Justice, who was one of the most influential landscape architects in Vancouver back in the 1950s and '60s.

"We'd be on a trip to the Kootenays or California and as the landscape changed my dad would point out the different crowns of trees," says Doug.

"It forced me to look at things more closely. And I learned that while plants look superficially alike they can be very different."

Now the associate director at the University of B.C. Botanical Garden, Doug often teaches courses on plant identification, only not at high speed.

Over the past year, he has helped the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival identify 35 of the key flowering ornamental cherry trees in the city. This research has now been turned into a book, *Ornamental Cherries in Vancouver*, which will be launched tomorrow at VanDusen Botanical Garden.

The compact 82-page, spiral-bound, pocket-size guide contains crisp profiles of 35 specific cultivars including *Acanthopeltis*, *Akebono*, *Kanzan*, *Amanogawa*, *Ukon* and *Shirotae*. Each entry consists of a photograph of a specific cultivar, taken so you clearly see its natural size and form, as well as a close-up of the flowers, so you can easily confirm your identification.

The photos are accompanied by a brief description of a tree, including a translation of the Japanese name, a few comments on the tree's history and performance record, and notes on key characteristics such as size, shape, foliage and flowering time.

Selling for \$15, the book is a little gem, a great reference to have in hand in spring when Vancouver's 36,000 cherry trees turn streets pink with blossoms. The book is a fundraiser for the festival, which was started in 2005 by Linda Poole, who is still directing the event.

Doug Justice will be at VanDusen Saturday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the entrance to sign copies of the book.

The year's Cherry Blossom Festival gets under way officially on March 31 with a Cherry Jam at noon at the Burrard SkyTrain station.



Cherry blossom

**ONLINE**  
Check out Steve Whysall's new podcast series, *In My Garden*, and his in the Garden blog, both available at [www.vancouver.sun.com](http://www.vancouver.sun.com)

## HURRAY FOR HELLEBORES

**SPECIAL OFFERING** | Unique collection of connoisseur plants comes to Richmond nursery



BY STEVE WHYSALL  
VANCOUVER SUN

If there's a perennial that always captures the heart and imagination of a plant connoisseur, it's the hellebore, especially new strains of *Helleborus* hybrids, also known as the Lenten rose. There is more oohing and aahing over this plant's shy, nodding cup-shaped flowers than any other in the perennial lexicon.

Is it justified? Well, there's no question that hellebore flowers are beautiful. They come in exquisite shades of red and pink, yellow and green, purple and white, even slate black.

Many of the most popular kinds produce charming, single open-faced flowers, but others have anemone-like centres or very fancy ruffles.

Part of the appeal of hellebores is that you need to kneel down and gently lift the chin of the flower to fully appreciate the bloom. Many people like to cut the flowers to float in a dish or bowl. When you have a variety of flowers, this can make a delightful and totally elegant table centerpiece.

Today, and over the weekend, hellebore lovers from all over the Lower Mainland will be flocking to a little nursery in Richmond to snap up some of the rarest and most coveted kinds, many of which are being offered for the first time.

Hellebore Hurrah at Phoenix Perennials, 3380 No. 6 Road, will be the grandest

offering of hellebores in Canada with dozens of specialty varieties brought in from some of the top growers in the U.S. Nursery owner Gary Lewis says that unlike other blooms, hellebore flowers can last a long time because, technically, they are not flowers at all.

"It is fortuitous for us as gardeners that the colourful part of the hellebore flower is the sepal.

"If you think about flowers in general, the petals usually have a short lifespan, while the sepals can last for months. The long-lived sepals of hellebores are what give us the months of colour we so appreciate."

Many of the plants that will be sold at the Hellebore Hurrah are part of specific seed strains or series. For instance, there are the Winter Jewels strains and Winter Dreams and Mardi Gras series.

These are all carefully bred lines grown from seed to maintain a certain characteristic, such as beautiful flower or foliage colour.

Some of the best strains have been developed by growers like Marietta O'Byrne, of Oregon; Charles Price, of Seattle; and Judith and Dick Tyler, of Pine Knot Farms in Virginia.

The best of their new breeds will be available at Lewis's nursery.

From O'Byrne's Winter Jewel strains, there'll be Golden Lotus (yellows), Ruby Wine (wine red) Jade Tiger (green flowers with purple edge) and Black Diamond (shades of slate, black and purple).

O'Byrne's Mellow Yellow strain, featuring an impressive collection of yellow-flowering hellebores will also be available.

From Pine Knot Farms, the Winter Dreams series includes such beauties as 'Apricot' (shades of pink, apricot and yellow), 'Pure White' (a clean white single flower) and 'Picotee' (pink flower with a red star centre). From Charles Price, Lewis got the Mardi Gras strain.

"These offer clear, reliable colour lines



Helleborus 'Onyx Odyssey'



Helleborus 'Golden Lotus'



Helleborus 'Painted Doubles'



Helleborus 'Berry Swirl'

including white, yellow, clear pink, smoky purple, green, red, dark purple and slate black," says Lewis.

As well as all these treasures, Lewis has acquired *H. ericsmithii* 'Winter Moonbeam' from Harveys Garden Plants in the U.K. This plant has blue foliage with crisscross silver veins and flowers that start out white and age to pink.

Hellebores are shade-loving plants that

flourish best under trees and shrubs in light shade.

Many gardeners like to clip away the old foliage so the flowers are more easy to see.

*Hellebore Hurrah* is from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. *running through Sunday at Phoenix Perennials, 3380 No. 6 Road, Richmond. For more information call 604-270-4133.*

[swysall@vancouver.sun.com](mailto:swysall@vancouver.sun.com)

### February-blooming hellebore to add a splash of classy flower power to Winter Olympics



Hellebore 'Vancouver Medallion'

A special February-blooming hellebore is being grown at an Abbotsford nursery specifically to give Vancouver some beautiful flower power for the Winter Olympics next year.

Valleybrook Gardens is already starting to grow thousands of a select variety of *Helleborus x niger* crosses that will be named 'Vancouver Medallion' for the occasion.

The hope is that the plant, which has beautiful creamy white flowers,

will be planted all over Vancouver, especially in high-profile locations such as Stanley Park, to wow tourists and add a splash of colour to drab February streets.

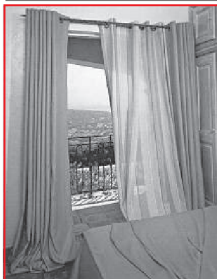
The plant was developed at the Belgian nursery of Het Wilgenbroek as part of its Winter Magic series. In Belgium, the plant is sold under the name 'Gandy Love', but it will give a new trademark, 'Vancouver Medallion' for the Olympics.

Valleybrook chose this specific plant because of its ability to perform flawlessly, blooming early in the year.

"Flowers are held high above very clear foliage on pink-tinted stems," says John Schroeder, president of Valleybrook.

"The large flowers are white with a pink tinge and the plant flowers profusely. We selected it to show the world what a wonderful gardening o-

mate we enjoy in Vancouver," he says. The Garden Club of Vancouver is also planning to use the plant, paying for a carpet-bedding scheme at Prospect Point. The club has approved \$5,000 to pay for the plants and is working with Vancouver Park Board to get the job done. Local businesses will also be encouraged to use 'Vancouver Medallion' in containers and window boxes to give the city a splash of winter colour.



Visit our stores to  
**WIN \$500**  
toward your next purchase  
Check  
[www.fabricana.com](http://www.fabricana.com)  
for details

**BEAT THE TAXMAN**  
**NO PST & GST**  
until March 1, 2009

Pay no PST and GST on ALL in-stock drapery and upholstery fabrics. Renovate now to take advantage of the new Home Renovation Tax Credit.

**50% OFF**

- Faux Silk TAFFETA Prints and Plains
- Embroidered Faux Silk
- Embroidered Organza

Interior Delights provides custom-made draperies and blinds constructed with top quality material, professional workmanship and unbeatable everyday low prices ensuring on time, one right first time delivery of our product. This is the FABRICANA DIFFERENCE.

**INTERIOR DELIGHTS**  
A Division of Fabricana Imports Ltd.  
**Home Window Fashion**  
Richmond 604-276-2553  
Coquitlam 604-528-9100