

# Grow with DIGA



Spring 2007

## From minimizing plant growth to supersizing yields

The Disabled Independent Gardeners Association (DIGA) has two upcoming workshops, ranging from the minutia on bonsai to digging the dirt on compost.

The first, held late April, features an introduction to classical Chinese gardening, while May's event examines how to use compost to form the best soil for organic vegetable growth.

"DIGA grew steadily in 2006, we held regular workshops and saw more new participants," explained program coordinator Betty Cheung. "I shall continue to organize informative lectures plus hands-on workshops this year."

Sessions get underway on **Friday, April 27** with a lecture from Sandy Knoll, president of the Taguchi Bonsai Club, on how to create your own bonsai from everyday garden materials. This is followed by a tour of Vancouver's Dr Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden.

It runs from **1:30pm to 4pm**, meeting at Room 304, Chinese Cultural Centre, 50 East Pender Street. The lecture and one-hour guided tour each cost \$5.

The following lecture, held **Wednesday, May 23**, examines all aspects of soil preparation. Sharon Slack, head gardener at City Farmer will show how to prepare soil from compost, as well as soil amendments with organic fertilizers, to maximize your crop of salad greens and tomatoes.



Eastern style: DIGA members can enjoy guided visit to the Dr Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden.

## Workshops in the works

Looking a little further ahead, DIGA members can expect the following workshops:

**July:** "DIY Succulent Planters"

**August:** Outing to Langley - "Gardens to Attract Butterflies"

**October:** Winter Planters & UBC Apple Garden tour

**November:** "Gardening 101: Session II or DIY Poinsettia Planters"

Afterwards, we will visit the nearby Maple Community Garden, to meet the people responsible for one of the area's most accessible community gardens, with raised beds and accessible pathways.

It's held at City Farmer, 2150 Maple Street (near Arbutus & 5<sup>th</sup> Ave), Vancouver, with the talk and tour running from **2pm to 4pm**. Again, the cost is \$5, and there is limited free parking at the venue.

Places at both events must be booked in advance. Contact Betty Cheung at 604-688-6464 ext. 106 or email her at: [bcheung@disabilityfoundation.org](mailto:bcheung@disabilityfoundation.org).

# Workshop reviews by Betty Cheung

DIGA has already held two well-attended events in 2007.

The first, "Orchids for You," was held at G F Strong Rehab Centre in February. Wilhelm Bischoff, former Chairman of the Vancouver Orchid Society, and his wife Carla, talked about growing orchids for the home and garden, and introduced several species that were easy for beginners to start with.



Green fingers: DIGA members enjoying Gardening 101 workshop, March.

After the event, Bischoff stated: "Being appreciated is the best reward a person can ask for. We enjoyed the afternoon and also the many questions that were asked. We hope that we have been able to help everybody grow orchids for their own pleasure."

The second of the year's sessions was "Gardening 101: Session I – Choosing Plants for Early Spring & Gardening Tools Review," held at GardenWorks in Mandeville, in March.

Garden Communicator 2006 award-winner Conway Lum introduced flowers and plants that bloom in spring, handing around plants and flowers for us to take a closer look. He then described the purpose of different gardening tools available in the shop.

Tetra Society of North America national coordinator Pat Tweedie and volunteer-engineers Jay Drew and Harry Hardy were present to describe how Tetra can adapt tools and create gardening chairs to help remove the barriers to gardening. Drew described a few recent Tetra projects, plus the famous Olympic flag holder and a new "ground-digging" tool created for Vancouver mayor Sam Sullivan. Tetra info: [www.tetrasociety.org](http://www.tetrasociety.org).

## Summer outing info

We are planning a garden tour and workshop at Petals & Butterflies Farm Nursery in Langley.

It will likely be held from **11am to 1:30pm** on **Saturday, August 4**. This falls on a long weekend. The venue includes hilly ground – so those in manual wheelchairs will need helpers.

Let us know if you want to take transit, as if there are enough people interested, we may arrange a group trip with HandyDart in Surrey

Contact Betty by phone at 604-688-6464, ext 106 or email: [bcheung@disabilityfoundation.org](mailto:bcheung@disabilityfoundation.org).

## Plant sales & garden shows

**April 29, 10am – 4pm:** VanDusen Botanical Garden Annual Plant Sale. @ VanDusen Garden parking lot, 5251 Oak St., Vancouver. Free admission to sale and gardens during event. Info: [www.vandusengarden.org](http://www.vandusengarden.org).

**May 5 & 6, 9am – 4pm:** Vancouver Orchid Society 30th Anniversary Show & Plant Sale. @ Richmond Curling Club, 5540 Hollybridge Way, Richmond. Admission: \$7. Info: [www.vancouverorchidsociety.ca](http://www.vancouverorchidsociety.ca).

**May 13, 10am – 4pm:** UBC Botanical Garden Perennial Plant Sale. @ UBC Botanical Garden parking lot, 6804 SW Marine Drive, Vancouver. Free, plus free admission to the garden during the event. Info: [www.ubcbotanicalgarden.org](http://www.ubcbotanicalgarden.org).

# Seasonal reminders and tips

Gene Rothert, developer of the Learning Garden for people with disabilities at the Chicago Botanic Garden and president of the American Horticultural Therapy Association, states in his book *The Enabling Garden* that people of all ability levels can enjoy growing plants by planning ahead and making some adaptations.

It is DIGA's goal to link members who need help to volunteers/gardeners on a one-on-one basis. We can also call on volunteers from the Tetra Society of North America to invent and build custom adaptive gardening devices to enable you to get the most from this pastime. Contact Betty Cheung for more information.

## Bulbs after spring

When your tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and amaryllis flowers have faded, a little care is needed to ensure they re-bloom next year:

- Snip off the dead flowers so they won't go to seed (except daffodils);
- Allow the plant to die back naturally in a warm spot in the light, keep soil moist – this is a critical work period for leaves to re-charge the bulbs, and this takes around six weeks;
- Sink the bulbs into the soil outdoors or keep them indoors in a bright spot, and don't let them dry out;
- Wait until August (more follows).



**Enabling devices:** Tetra volunteer Jay Drew talks about custom assistive devices to enable people with disabilities get the most from gardening.

## Raised Beds

I have taken a few phone calls about raised beds lately. I asked Sharon Slack, head Gardener at City Farmer, for information. She stated:

- Gardening in raised beds is similar to gardening in containers.
- The beds should be constructed so that the middle can be reached from either side, but can be of any length.
- The depth of the soil will determine the size of plants that can be grown, but the basics remain the same. Most salad greens only need about a foot of soil, bigger plants 18" to 24".
- Provision for adequate drainage must be made – the bottom layer should be coarse sand or other similar material.
- The soil should be a sifted compost or commercial container mix. The soil should be amended with an organic fertilizer (according to package instructions).
- Then the fun part, adding the seeds or plants!

**Free pots and containers:** Orval Olsen in New Westminster has some small pots and containers to give away. DIGA members can call him at 604-526-0084.

## Call for volunteers

Do you want to share your love of gardening?  
Please contact Betty (604-688-6464) if you can spare time to help DIGA members in their gardens.

## Special thanks

We must acknowledge the DIGA supporters, our board of directors and especially Sam Sullivan, who helped revive this gardening program!