Aconitum carmichaelii
Image by Richie Steffen
As we drive along the canyon road out of Ellensburg, Washington, basalt cliffs tower to either side. Many species of lichen paint the basalt in colors of orange, green, black, and white. Occasionally, we see balsamroot in bright but simple yellow blooming against the dark basalt while overhead vultures circle looking for some small dead morsel . . . or, perhaps, me by the end of the day. We walk on a footbridge over the Yakima River, and it is a transition from highway to nature’s chaotic beauty. The Umtanum Creek Canyon is our hike of choice, and it is a bit of a confusing ramble of trails which change each year with the shifting waterways. The aroma of sagebrush, drone of insects, gurgling of water and melody of birds are all reasons enough to walk in this place. People have used this valley for thousands of years as it was a major route used by the tribes of the Yakama nation. There is evidence of an old homestead which can be seen now only through the ancient apple trees and some haunted walnut trees. The canyon is home to over one hundred and forty species of native plants and hosts a great diversity of birds, insects, and mammals as well. For me, the highlight of the stroll was *Iris missouriensis* (Rocky Mountain iris) which glowed blue; and, because it was so unfamiliar, I almost thought the homestead had some garden iris growing nearby. But it is, indeed, a native plant. This is a tough plant to cultivate on the wet side of the Cascades but could be worth it if you are in the Olympic rain shadow, and it is easy from seed.
Umtanum Canyon is a rambling hike which would be suitable for most people; but, like all hikes I talk about in this article, caution should be used. When hiking on the east side of the Cascades, it is important to dress and check for ticks, watch out for rattlesnakes as you hike and, make sure to carry the ten essentials. For information on this hike, the ten essentials, and all the other hikes in this article, I recommend using the Washington Trails Association’s website, www.wta.org, where you can find the hike’s length, get directions and review recent trip reports made by other hikers. It’s important to consider avalanche risk if hiking during the winter months as well as the shoulder seasons, and a great resource is the Northwest Avalanche Center’s website: https://nwac.us/

For each hike discussed in this article, I’ll provide some basic information about difficulty, season of interest and location.

**UMTANUM CREEK CANYON**

**Difficulty:** Easy  
**Season of Interest:** Spring (April-May)  
**Length and Elevation:** 6.5 miles round trip with 500 feet elevation gain.  
**Location:** Near Yakima, Washington

**Plants of interest:** Numerous species of *Eriogonum* sp. (buckwheats), *Lomatium* sp. (biscuit root), *Eriophyllum lanatum* (common woolly sunflower, Oregon sunshine), *Salvia dorrii*
Notes: This hike has several alternate hikes attached; all are more difficult, but if you can deal with intense elevation gain (700 feet in about .5 mile), the hike up Little Bandera Mountain is full of interesting plants.

I’ve always enjoyed this trail for being close to Seattle and diverse in the terrain it crosses with the added benefit of a south-facing slope where the snow melts early. Starting off like many hikes in heavy forest with *Polystichum munitum* (sword fern), *Gaultheria shallon* (salal) and *Rubus spectabilis* (salmonberry), you steadily make your way up the stands of open forest. *Acer circinatum* (vine maple), which will glow red in autumn, begins to dominate rocky chutes. As the trail rises above the treeline, alpine meadows start to emerge. *Castilleja* (paintbrush), *Lupinus* (lupines), *Achellia* (yarrow), *Lilium columbianum* (Columbia lily) and *Pteridium aquilinum* (Dorr’s sage), and dominant throughout the shrub layer is *Chrysothamnus viscidiflorus* (rabbit brush).

**IRA SPRING TRAIL**

**Difficulty:** Moderate to Difficult  
**Season of Interest:** Spring (June-July)  
**Length and Elevation:** 6.5 miles round trip with 2420 feet elevation gain.  
**Location:** I-90 Exit 45. Close to Seattle, Washington.
(bracken fern) are mixed together in what feels like a classic Cascade scramble of color. In early summer, *Xerophyllum tenax* (bear grass) opens in dramatic masses of bloom above the trail and lures me back to this route over and over again. The trail leads to Mason Lake, a small but deep alpine lake surrounded by *Rhododendron albiflorum* (white-flowered azalea), *Spiraea splendens* (dense-flowered spiraea, rose meadowsweet, rosy spiraea, or subalpine spiraea) and, the elegant *Clintonia uniflora* (queen’s cup lily) blooming with a single white flower.

**BURROUGHS MOUNTAIN - TO 2ND BURROUGH**

**Difficulty:** Moderate  
**Season of Interest:** July-August (depending on snow melt)  
**Length and Elevation:** 6 miles round trip with 1,345 feet elevation gain.

**Location:** From the Sunrise parking lot in Mt. Rainier National Park, Washington.

**Notes:** At an elevation of 6,400 feet, the area surrounding the Sunrise parking lot is an amazing spot to visit with wildflowers all around in summertime. Hiking the beginning of this trail is an alternative for those who can’t hike as long or as steep.

The hike begins on winding paths through alpine meadows with Mt. Rainier looming ahead. As the trail ascends, you pass rocky outcroppings with *Penstemon davidsonii* (David’s penstemon) blooming out of small cracks and *Phyllococe empetriformis* (pink mountain heather) carpeting the soil. Ahead, the wind-swept hills look almost bare of vegetation, but in truth, the plant life is diverse and strange. After passing over the first Burrough, the landscape starts to get gravelly, and the plants hug the ground. In this area,
low-growing *Potentilla fruticosa* (shruby cinquefoil) can be found alongside the ridiculously flattened *Calyptridium umbellatum* (alpine pussy-paws), a bizarre relative of *Lewisia*. It only gets better from here.

Approaching the second Burrough, it does look a bit more daunting than the first, but you might be rewarded by seeing yellow-bellied marmots battling each other amidst cute little alpine *Saxifraga* with rocky scree flying around as they tussle. Or perhaps below looking into Glacier Basin, you will catch a view of mountain goats like we did. If that doesn’t do it for you, the views of the mountain are spectacular, and in the forefront is Winthrop Glacier riddled with crevasses. The highlight of the whole trail for me was seeing what my wife, Elise, called “the goth plant” — *Pedicularis rainierensis*, an endemic plant to Mt. Rainier National Park and a stylish one at that.

**ESMERELDA BASIN**

**Difficulty:** Moderate  
**Season of Interest:** July-August (my photos are from August)  
**Length and Elevation:** 7 miles round trip with 1,750 feet elevation gain.  
**Location:** Teanaway River Valley, Washington, from exit 85 off of Interstate 90

**Notes:** This hike begins at the same trailhead as Ingalls Lake; the Esmerelda Basin trail is much less frequented by people, and when I did this hike, I only saw one other person. It is an exposed hike, and it’s important to prepare for the heat in summer.

As you drive up the Teanaway Road North Fork, the crags of Esmerelda Peaks surround you, but Mt. Stuart dominates in the distance. Teanaway Peak is part of the Wenatchee Mountains, and this area is rich in serpentine rock, a slippery green rock which contains magnesium that can stunt the growth in plants but also has particular plants accustomed to growing in its soil. We did this hike in late August knowing that much of the early wildflowers would be long past, but this hike contains great late-blooming flowers, interesting ferns and also fruit to be had. The beginning of the hike is a slow ascent up a long valley, and as you rise, the plants change. Each time we passed a bog, I spied *Gentiana calycosa* (mountain bog gentian), a late blue jewel of a flower shining throughout. If we had hiked earlier in the year, *Dodecatheon jeffreyi* (Jeffrey’s shooting star) would have been blooming in profusion. A creek follows and crosses the trail, and near it *Aconitum columbianum* (Western monkshood) is common alongside *Streptopus amplexifolius* (twisted stalk) and *Castilleja miniata* (red paintbrush). I munched alpine blueberries as we walked, and under a drier, shady section of forest, I found *Gaultheria humifusa* (alpine wintergreen) creeping along with little red fruits that tasted a bit like candy. Nearer the top of this trail, odd ferns started to pop up like *Polystichum lemonii* (Lemmon’s holly fern or Shasta fern) which looks oddly stiff and upright poking up out of pure rock. At the end of the trail, you will find an expanse of mountains with the green color of serpentine stone throughout and *Arctostaphylos nevadensis* (pinemat manzanita) creeping along the rock in an otherwise quite barren landscape of conifers and stone.

Thanks for reading and good plant hunting! 🌿

For a good plant identification resource, I used:  
Plants of Washington Identification Key - Burke Museum  
https://biology.burke.washington.edu/herbarium/imagecollection/keys.php?Key=1

*Del Brummet is Head Gardener at the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden and NHS board member*
SOME FORMER HYDRANGEA RELATIVES FOR YOUR GARDEN

Text and Images by Richie Steffen
The Miller Garden has long been interested in hydrangeas and their related genera. Our three oldest climbing hydrangeas, *Hydrangea anomala* ssp. *petiolaris*, were planted in the garden by Mrs. Miller with the oldest plant now close to 65 years old, reaching high into a Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menzesii*). Over the years, we have not only grown several species and cultivars of hydrangea but also many other plants in the family Hydrangeaceae. Now, with the prevalent use of DNA in defining a species, many plants have experienced name changes and not surprisingly this has happened to this family of plants. Several genera once thought to be unique and separate from *Hydrangea* are now subsumed into this genus. The Miller Garden grows several of the subsumed genera which includes some striking ornamental plants that deserve much wider use in the garden, while others are oddities uncommon in nurseries and grown simply because a collector must!

One of these relatives that is commonly available is *Schizophragma*, now included in *Hydrangea*. The most common species is *Schizophragma hydrangeoides*, Japanese hydrangea vine. This former name now changes to *Hydrangea hydrangeoides*, with the new botanical name meaning: hydrangea that looks like a hydrangea. Don’t tell me taxonomists don’t have a sense of humor. Looking very much like *Hydrangea anomala* ssp. *petiolaris* out of flower, the two can be quite difficult to tell apart. In flower, the differences are clearer. Climbing hydrangeas have showy florets dotted along the outer rim of the smaller fluffy fertile flowers in the center. These showy florets are groups of four bracts attached together. The former *Schizophragma* also have showy bracts surrounding small fluffy fertile flowers, but these showy heart-shaped to teardrop-shaped bracts are held individually around the edge of fertile blooms. There are a few species and cultivars that will undergo this name change; below are several you will likely encounter with some internet searching (some nurseries will embrace the change right away from *Schizophragma* to *Hydrangea* while others may take more time):

*Schizophragma hydrangeoides* ‘Moonlight’ — this beautiful cultivar grows like the typical species, but the foliage exhibits a lovely silver cast with deep green veins. The silvery foliage is best in shade. Although flowering is heavier in more sun, the silver is lost for the most part. Selected as a Great Plant Pick, this is a must-have for all who have space for it to grow.

*Schizophragma hydrangeoides* ‘Roseum’ — a pink flowering form.
Schizophragma hydrangeoides 'Roseum'

Decumaria barbara
Schizophragma hydrangeoides ‘Minsens’ ROSE SENSATION™ - a recent introduction, it looks just like ‘Roseum’ with vague marketing that does not suggest why it is better or different from ‘Roseum’. This could be a renaming of ‘Roseum’. I just purchased a young plant so time will tell.

Schizophragma fauriei — now Hydrangea fauriei — a robust large-growing vine much like Schizophragma hydrangeoides, but the flower heads are much larger with larger showier bracts. A lovely specimen grows on the wall at the Bellevue Botanical Garden entrance.

Two other vining genera that are quite rare to see in gardens in the Pacific Northwest are Decumaria and Pileostegia. Only one species of Decumaria is usually available to purchase, Decumaria barbara, wood vamp. This evergreen vine is native to the Southeast, growing in woodlands and scrambling up trees and over rocks. It is quite hardy and easy to grow in the Northwest, but do not make the mistake I made by planting it in the shade. It will need full sun to flower here and will grow much denser and be pleasing to the eye. I was once able to purchase Decumaria sinensis, a species native to China, after I saw a stunning plant at the Huntington Garden in Southern California. Ultimately, this marginally hardy vine succumbed to a cold winter. Under the name revisions, Decumaria barbara becomes Hydrangea barbara and Decumaria sinensis becomes Hydrangea obtusifolia.

One of the name changes I am most sad about is the single species genus Pileostegia changing to Hydrangea. It is as...
much fun to say *Pileostegia viburnoides* as it is to grow it! This rare evergreen vine has no common name and is often simply called “climbing hydrangea” as if that will not be confusing. It could at least be called “cap covering climbing hydrangea” (what *Pileostegia* means) or “viburnum leaf climbing hydrangea” (even through the leaves do not resemble most viburnums). The revised name is *Hydrangea viburnoides*. The vine we have at the Miller Garden was planted in the early 2000’s not long after I started working at the Garden. It now reaches over 40 feet, but blooms sparsely due to too much shade. This vine can be kept much more compact with some annual pruning and will flower much better in full sun to bright open shade. The flowerheads are composed of only fertile blooms and are nicely fragrant.

A shrubby member of this tribe of plants that I have enjoyed very much over the years is *Dichroa*. Two species have been planted at the Miller Garden, *Dichroa febrifuga* and *Dichroa versicolor*. These change to *Hydrangea febrifuga* and *Hydrangea versicolor* with the recent scientific proposals. *Dichroa febrifuga* has been grown at the Miller Garden the longest and has proven to be the most sensitive of the two to cold winter temperatures. In mild years, it is a gorgeous low-growing evergreen shrub with very showy inflorescences of fertile flowers in mid-summer through late summer. Even though each individual flower is small, the clustered show is brilliant. The color is cobalt blue in our acidic soil. A seedhead develops as the flowers finish; and, as it matures, the rounded fruit that are a little smaller than a pea in size form a cluster of metallic blue. These spectacular seedheads are showy into early winter. *Dichroa versicolor* has a similar floral show, but the shrub grows taller with larger leaves and the fruit turns a dark intense purple color. *Dichroa versicolor* seems to be slightly more cold tolerant as well.

There are unusual hybrids between *Dichroa* and *Hydrangea*, formerly called × *Didrangea*. Under the name changes proposed, these become mixed into *Hydrangea* and will likely only be given a cultivar name. One such selection, × *Didrangea* ‘Sandy Reed’, would become *Hydrangea* ‘Sandy Reed’. These oddities will certainly be even more difficult to tease out of the enormous number of new *Hydrangea* cultivars released yearly. Perhaps these name changes are for the best. For one of these × *Didrangea* oddities to make its way to your garden without a lot of researching, it would truly have to be something different and spectacular.

I think one of the most unusual of the reassigned plants is the very uncommon shrub *Platycrater*. Prior to being included in *Hydrangea*, this was a single species genus with the sole
member being *Platycrater arguta*. Its new name is *Hydrangea platyarguta* with the common name of “tea of heaven.” In Northwest gardens, I would expect this shrub to reach about 3 feet tall in time. The flowers are carried in terminal corymbs (as are most hydrangeas) with a small group of 1 to 3 flowers. Each flower hangs from a long stalk with four broad white petals about one inch across with a center filled with bright yellow stamens. The flowers are charming, and the shrub is well worth seeking out. Recently, it seems that there has been some effort to introduce some cultivars and perhaps breed superior forms. A form called ‘Kaeda’ has flowers twice the size of normal and produces a few showy sterile florets as well as the white and yellow fertile flower.

You would never think of a *Hydrangea* as being an herbaceous perennial; but, with this revision of the genus, two genera we have grown at the Miller Garden now become herbaceous members of the genus. I have always had a fondness for *Cardiandra*. A few of the species are occasionally available but are difficult to find. The species I’m growing now is *Cardiandra alternifolia*, now *Hydrangea alternifolia*. It grows to about 18 to 25 inches tall and is upright in habit. In late summer, it will produce interesting purple pink flowers in a lacy, open inflorescence that ranges from flat to dome-shaped. Most of the flowers are small, fertile puff-like blooms with occasional sterile florets with three to four petals dotted around the flowerhead. It is a subtle beauty for the shade garden. Rarely, other species and some named cultivars have been sold. I have not grown any of these, but I would expect a similar show in the garden. The point to remember is that any *Cardiandra* is worth adding to the garden. These like regular watering, rich soils and will not tolerate hot sun or drying out.

The other herbaceous *Hydrangea* we have grown is *Deinanthe*. There are two species of *Deinanthe, Deinanthe caerulea*, now *Hydrangea caerulea*, and *Deinanthe bifida*, now *Hydrangea bifida*. Both species have similar flowering habits, flowering in mid-summer with terminal clusters of showy one-inch relatively flat flowers. The petals are rounded with a ring of stamens encircling the center of the bloom. *Deinanthe caerulea* has blue flowers with the cultivar ‘Blue Wonder’ being the form most widely available. *Deinanthe bifida* is white with pink forms sometimes offered. The foliage is large and bold and very hydrangea-like. *Deinanthe bifida* has an interesting split on the tip of the leaf. These perennials detest sun and will not tolerate any afternoon sun without yellowing or burning. Give these choice plants open to dappled shade, rich soil and do not skimp on the summer watering.

Even though I think the name change of these plants does not add clarity for gardeners seeking fine plants, you should not shy away from tracking down these horticultural beauties. They do offer a much wider range of form and interest beyond the typical *Hydrangea*. Not all of these plants are offered every year; and, when they are, they are often in short supply so be diligent in your searching. If you happen to procure one of these prizes, enjoy it to the fullest in your garden! ♦

* Richie Steffen is Executive Director of the Elisabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden and past president of NHS.

(Editor’s Note: For clarity, plant images are labeled with their names prior to recent taxonomic changes.)
About a year ago, I watched a webinar by James Golden highlighting his garden in New Jersey. Located on a ridge above the Delaware River, I was mesmerized by his photographs, especially his ability to take the best advantage of lighting without resorting to any noticeable tricks or enhancements.

Those photographs, and Golden’s concepts of lighting and vistas, are the heart of his new book, *The View from Federal Twist: A New Way of Thinking about Gardens, Nature and Ourselves*. Unlike many other memoirs on building a garden, this author/gardener is very deliberate about working with pre-existing flora including “a tangle of vines, trees and dangling, dead limbs.” Although this approach may not appeal to all, Golden helps the home gardener consider how their plantings fit into the larger, surrounding environment.

Challenges included soil that is both very clayish and very wet. Some invasive trees were removed, but mostly he planted smaller trees, large shrubs, tall grasses, and perennials and allowed the plants to work out their own interaction and layout. Some plants failed, others thrived, and some overwhelmed. Parts of the garden are impenetrable. Throughout, there is a thriving ecological web beneficial for many creatures.

Much of the book is a photo essay, well supported but not overwhelmed by text that weaves input from well-known authors, from visits to other gardens, and even quotes from literature or classical music concepts. He carefully watched the varying angles of the sun through the seasons to capture different moods, and for enthusiasts, carefully identifies all his planting choices.

The author also recognizes a “spirit” of the garden, even though that concept is contrary to his deeply held, science-based, rational beliefs. Accepting this idea of spirit has helped Golden to appreciate the development of the garden in ways over which he had little control.

Hardscapes are minimal, but a circle created with argillite, a plentiful grey stone found in the area, is indicative of the whole garden. “Its creation is an example of how the slow accretion of ideas over several years can offer a solution to a problem you didn’t know exists.”

*Brian Thompson is the manager and curator of horticultural literature for the Elisabeth C. Miller Library.*
THANK YOU TO OUR PATRONS!

The Education Program would not be possible without the tremendous support of our Patrons. Their generosity helps NHS provide an outstanding webinar lecture program for Northwest gardeners. With the great success of this program over the past three years, we have been able to reach an even wider audience and look forward to continuing this program and to providing interesting in-person events.

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Northwest Horticultural Society
Dear NHS Members,

What a fabulous gardening season we are in the midst of! As I look above my computer at PowellsWood, I see dahlias preparing to burst, hardy bananas stretching for the sky, and alstroemeria ready to reveal their summer glory. The garden is absolutely teeming with wildlife. These days the garden feels truly heavenly. I trust you are finding similar levels of enjoyment as you bask in your own plant paradise. Gardening is rich with reward and now is high time to soak it all in.

Speaking of bursting, this summer’s calendar is full of opportunity for you to grow as a gardener. Thanks to the diligent effort of our NHS board and committees, we offer a wide variety of programs that are both inspiring and educational. Webinars, tours, and classes are happening now! If you haven’t joined one of them yet, I encourage you to sign up today.

I would also like to invite those that might be interested in joining a committee of NHS to reach out and let us know. NHS is composed of generous, passionate, hardworking individuals who are dedicated to our educational mission. It is a lovely group of folks, and we would be delighted if you would consider being a part. There is plenty of work to be done!

I am forever grateful for the inclusive nature of the NHS. Only ten years ago, I was a complete garden newb. At the time, I was attempting to create a garden without much knowledge when my neighbor stopped in to check out what I was doing. Unbeknownst to me, my neighbor was Greg Graves from Old Goat Farm. If you know Greg, he is a Northwest gardening legend. He formerly served as president of NHS and has been a staple of NHS tours and classes for many years. Greg became my guide in my garden journey. He introduced me to plants I had never heard of, fed me armloads of books, and regularly showed me around his beautiful property. He is the one who encouraged me to further engage with this passion. He introduced me to you and showed me that I have a place in the hort world. In my mind, Greg serves as a profound example of what all of us should strive for — graciously spreading the joy of gardening to those around us.

It is an honor serving on this board. It is an honor to be alongside others who are consumed with love for plants and gardens. It is an honor to share this joy.

Thank you to NHS for offering garden newbs like me a place to grow and belong.

All the best,

Justin Henderson
NHS President
“The greatest gift of the garden is the restoration of the five senses.”

— Hanna Rion, 1875-1924, American author