

So Long Cedars by Fran Benton

I am sitting with a nice cup of coffee and a freshly made chocolate croissant looking out the window at the rain. Bloody rain. Fall colours are lovely but all this rain is getting in the way of some quality fall gardening. There is, however, this lovely pastry to consume, mmmmmm! Out my window is a grove of cedar and fir trees. Hmmm, I wonder how old are they? The monster western red cedars are probably over 60 years old. But how old are cedars as a group? Conifers developed as a group over 400 million years ago in the Devonian. Our cedars developed about 65 million years ago, give or take a few million years.

I fret about the cedars because the drought we have been experiencing in the last few years is having a serious impact on them. As you drive up island you can see that some of the cedars along the roadside are dead and dying. Cedars need lots of water and they thrive in our wet west coast forests. They like



the company of other trees, especially their own species, and hate being exposed by logging. Cedars associate with sword ferns in the wild as both enjoy being damp. If the cedars are in an exposed area or experience a lot of hot dry weather they suffer. They are in good company as our Arbutus is suffering from a blight that damages and occasionally kills the tree. Climate change makes our weather more unstable but I always thought it would make us wetter not drier.

Here is some useful cedar information gleaned from trotting along the information highway. You know how you get itchy every time you take cedar branches to recycling? It turns out that cedars have three chemicals in their branches that are pretty irritating. Plicatic acid can give you asthma and contact dermatitis. Thujone gives the menthol smell of the branches. In small quantities it is used to make perfume. In large quantities it can harm the nervous system. Thujaplicin is a fungicide and bacteriacide. It's this chemical that makes cedar so good for blanket chests. Ever notice that plants do not like growing under cedar trees? Now I know why!

Now, back to that pastry!