

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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March 4

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Marion & Bob Lofthouse**, 4307 Munster Rd., Courtenay. Drive west on Lake Trail Road, past the Comox Logging Road and Marsden Road, to Munster Road.

March 11

"Plant Hunting In China". **Steve Hootman** of the Species Foundation will give us a description of the trip made by a group of rhodoholics to China in the fall of 1995, including Peter and Kenneth Cox. This was a seed-collecting trip, and it will be interesting to hear how the baby plants are coming along.

Feb. 11

Harry Wright gave us a stimulating talk on Garden Design and showed interesting slides of plants in his garden as well as a graphic representation of how the garden has evolved. I made some notes to be a reminder to members of the basic points outlined.

A garden should have a basic plan, but there is continual change as plants grow or die.

The plan should include an entrance, a work unit, a liveable garden, and a transition zone from the house to the garden. Planning prevents problems and solves problems. Items to consider in a liveable garden are privacy, spaciousness, proper proportions, circulation (flow of people), light and shade. Thanks, Harry. Your garden is a graphic example of the kind of planning that you advise.

MEMBER NOTES

Who brought the set of slides "A Garden Tomb" to the Christmas party? Len Simmons is still holding these slides for the owner.

Campbell River members - if you are interested in joining garden tours or offering your garden for a tour, please contact Terry at the C.R. Community Hall, 286 - 1161, between the hours of 8:30 to 3:30, on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. The groups are small, 12 - 15 people, and the dates are May 15 & 29, June 12 & 26 and July 3 & 17.

Mount Arrowsmith Rhodo Society will be holding their annual Truss Show and Sale, at the Parksville Community Hall on

Sunday April 27. Their annual Gardens Tour will be held May 17 & 18, touring gardens in Nanoose, Parksville and Qualicum. Tickets will be available at the Mulberry Bush bookstores in Parksville and Qualicum.

LABELLING PLANTS

How often have you heard someone say "My Pink Pearl doesn't look like Harry's - or Jim's - or Brenda's?" And no wonder, I say.

There are so many ways and times that a label can be misplaced, lost, stuck into the wrong pot or tied onto the wrong plant. I recently had cause to consult every shrub book on hand, trying to identify the Hamamelis in the yard. Luckily they are all blooming at the same time this year. There is the 25-year-old H. mollis (I think) with its large yellow flowers, strongly perfumed, and bright yellow leaves in fall. It could be H.m. 'Pallida' though.

The plant labelled H. x intermedia 'Jelena' probably is. The one labelled H. x i. 'Diane' surely is 'Magic Fire', judging by the orange flowers, but it could be H. x i. 'Ruby Glow' and the one with no label, with bright dark red flowers,

is probably *H. x i.* 'Diane'.

Well, I am not a *Hamamelis* expert, and am so happy to have shrubs in bloom in late winter that I don't really care what their names are.

Perhaps the only way to be ABSOLUTELY SURE of the name of a rhodo is to find one, in bloom, correctly named or at least the plant you want, and beg cuttings from it in the fall.

MARCH CHORES IN THE GARDEN

One tsp. per foot of bonemeal or rhodo fertilizer for the rhodos. It is probably safe to prune *Buddleias*, some clematis (those that flower in late summer), ornamental dogwood and willow stems. All of these plants will appreciate a little fertilizer. Remove dead flowers from the hydrangeas (if you cut the leafbuds at the tips you will probably cut off this year's flowers).

If you plan to buy container-grown or bare-rooted trees or shrubs, including rhodos, be sure to prepare the soil ahead of time, by digging a large hole and mixing peat moss, bark mulch, leafmold etc. with bonemeal. Place some of this in the bottom of the hole, and pack the rest around the shrub as you plant it.

Check the plant - does it have roots wound round and round the pot? Shake out or cut and spread the roots. Many potted plants these days are in bark mulch with little or no soil and you may find infestations of wood bugs. Dunk the whole root system in a pail of water to drown the little pests.

Firm gently around the plant, and

water in. Always try to plant so the soil-line on the stem or trunk remains the same as it was in the pot. If there is a water shortage, remember these new garden inhabitants must have extra water for their first two summers. They also need extra protection in severe winter weather. After 5 years plants are either well acclimatized or dead.

HATLEY GARDEN

Did you know there are some very interesting gardens in Hatley Park, site of Royal Roads University, in Victoria? These public gardens are located on 140 acres of land, surrounded by an urban forest. There are many interesting trees, including *Acer palmatum dissectum* and *A.p. atropurpureum*, *Aralia spinosa*, *Cercis siliquastrum*, *Cunninghamia lanceolata* and *Davidia involucrata*, among many others, in the Japanese garden, more *Acers* in the Tennis Court Gardens, *Gingko biloba* and several *Pinus* in The Glen, *Mespilus germanica* (Medlar tree) in the *Camellia* Wall area, and many others, some over 100 years of age. This garden is open to the public 7 days a week, year-round, dawn to dusk. Remember to pay a visit next time you go to Victoria. Note: This was excerpted from an article by Bill Dale in the Nanaimo Rhodo Society newsletter of Nov. 1996.

HERBAL OILS

A fascinating article in *Amateur Gardening* 28 Dec. 1996, describes a simple method of making up your own herbal oils. You are warned that some oils can affect some people in a negative way (for instance sage oil is not to be used by pregnant women). Test them on a small area of skin before dumping quantities in your bathwater!

Lavender Oil is easy to make. Pick 8 oz. of lavender flowers on a hot, dry, still summer day. Take them indoors and quickly wash and dry them. Place the flowers in a clean, clear glass bottle and pour in a pint of soya or grapeseed oil. Leave the bottle on a sunny windowsill for 2-3 weeks. Strain the flowers off and decant the oil into a clean dark bottle, then store in a cool dark place. Be sure the bottles are squeaky clean and have tightfitting lids or corks.

A few drops in the bath can be very relaxing and a few drops massaged into the temples and back of the neck can help relieve a headache.

Many other uses are mentioned, Rosemary oil can act as a hair tonic and conditioner and Sage oil can help relieve swelling in tired, aching legs. Pick and process the leaves and/or flowers the same way as lavender, but remember to test them on your skin before using any quantity.

HOW MANY LEGS HAS YOUR FAVORITE INSECT?

Stefan Buczacki, writing in *Amateur Gardening*, discusses our insect friends and foes, by considering their legs - numbers of, that is. Millipedes, for instance, have large numbers of legs, and eat vegetation of all kinds. Centipedes, who have many less legs, are good friends, for they eat many kinds of garden pests. Woodlice (woodbugs, some call them), eat anything it seems. Spiders and harvestmen have 8 legs and are good friends, but lice, with 8 legs, are baddies. Insects, with 6 legs, can be very very good, but when they are bad they are horrid.

On to 4-legged creatures, which are generally counter-productive in the garden. Consider the deer, mice and rabbits escaped from next-door. Among the two-legged clan are neighbours' children and birds who can be garden helpers - or destroyers! We are down to one-footed creatures such as slugs and snails which are baddies in the garden, and finally those with no feet, our friends the earthworms and some pests such as eelworms. A great deal of activity in the garden at all times - and we haven't started to consider the bacteria yet!

THE TRIFLORA SUBSECTION OF RHODODENDRONS

The Trifloras are mainly tall growing plants (some people consider them rangy or loose in shape) with "butterfly shaped" flowers with long protruding stamens. Most of them are hardy enough for our area, *R. lutescens* being the only one hardy to +5F, the rest hardy to 0F or lower.

R. augustinii grows to 6 ft. or more, has flowers in shades of mauve or bluish, white or pinkish, or lavender. It will be happy in sun or part-shade. This rhodo is a parent of many dwarf and medium-sized hybrids such as 'Blue Bird', 'Blue Diamond', 'St. Breward' and others. They are generally hardier than the species.

R. concinnum is vigorous, hardy and quite compact. The leaves are dark blue-green with large yellow scales on the underside. Flower colour varies from pinkish lavender to wine red (look for the Exbury and Tower Court forms for this colour). This species is easily rooted, easily grown, and blooms when quite young.

R. Ambiguum is similar to *cincin-*

num except for lance-shaped leaves and pale or greenish-yellow flowers. The best known hybrid is 'Biskra' (*cinnibarinum* x *ambiguum*) which dates from 1934 (a Rothschild hybrid).

R. keiskei is a little charmer, native to southern Japan, hardy and the most dwarf member of the Triflora subsection. It produces pale yellow flowers in groups of 3-5. The dwarf form 'Ebino' has reddish-bronze winter leaves and new growth. 'Shamrock' is a hybrid from this form of *keiskei*. There is a prostrate form, of which 'Yaku Fairy' is a lovely compact, low-growing mat only a few inches high in full sun.

Peter Cox considers 'Yaku Fairy' to be one of the best of all parents of dwarf hybrids, producing low, vigorous, compact and free-flowering progeny. Hybrids include 'Ginny Gee', 'Patty Bee', 'Too Bee' and 'Wren'. Others, a little taller, include 'Mary Fleming' and 'Princess Anne'.

R. lutescens has spectacular yellow, flat-faced flowers, and narrow lance-shaped leaves 4" in length. It can become straggly in shade. New growth on the best forms is bronzy red, and the bark is smooth, brown and flaking. 'Bo-Peep' is a hybrid of this plant. Late spring frosts can damage the flowers, so plant it where early morning sun cannot touch them.

R. yunnanense is partly or nearly deciduous, has lance-shaped leaves with marginal bristles. It can become straggly if not planted in full light, and needs careful pruning when young. Flowers are pink to white with olive to crimson spots, in trusses of 3-5. Flower buds are often formed in the top leaf axils

as well as in the terminal bud. The effect is of a sheet of white or pink, as new leaves open after the flowers. 'Alison Johnson' and 'Yunncinn' are hybrids from this plant.

R. rigidum and *R. davidsonianum* are rather similar to *R. yunnanense*, differing in size and shape of leaves. *R. d.* 'Ruth Lyons' with deep pink flowers is considered the best form. 'Snipe' is a *davidsonianum* hybrid.

R. oreotrephes has lovely glaucous roundish leaves which look colourful year-round. It is covered with pink or mauve flowers and appears to be indifferent as to position in sun or shade.

This article adapted from one written by Robert Bishop in the PARS newsletter of March 1994.

BASIC RHODO CULTURE

This article is excerpted from one issued by our club some years ago, and is full of timely information, particularly for beginning gardeners.

1. For rhodos, soil drainage must be sharp. rhodo roots have an unusually high requirement for air in the soil. Standing water replaces necessary oxygen, resulting in a stunted or dead plant.
2. If the soil is heavy or alkaline, plant in raised beds with a mixture of topsoil and ground bark.
3. Rhodos prefer filtered sunlight, though some varieties can flourish in direct sun, depending on latitude and longitude. Avoid sites with reflections from light-coloured walls or paved areas. Some sun is required for flower bud formation.
4. Do not plant in windy locations like the corner of a house. On the other hand, some air movement is

necessary to reduce excessive dampness and potential for fungus diseases.

5. Avoid sites under roof overhangs, adjacent to concrete foundations, and under trees with dense shade or aggressive root systems.

6. If the area slopes, do not plant in a low area which is a frost pocket.

HOW TO PLANT RHODOS

1. Rhodos have a shallow root system. The multitude of small fibrous roots enables soil to cling in a tight ball. This greatly simplifies the planting and transplanting of a rhododendron.

2. Rhodos can be planted almost any time of the year, provided the soil can be properly prepared. Exceptions are very hot or very cold weather.

3. If balled and burlapped plants are dry, soak them for a few minutes in a tub of water to which a little fungicide has been added. Remove the burlap and use a forceful stream from the hose to wash an inch or so of soil from the rootball. "Real" burlap can be left around the plant, but plastic burlap and string must be completely removed as they may take many years to rot down. If the plant appears to have been planted in a solid block of clay, remove this before planting, by hosing and picking it off.

4. Container-grown plants should also be soaked. Potted plants are often root-bound. The rootball should be cut and disturbed before planting.

5. Dig a hole wider and deeper than the root ball. The size of hole will depend on soil conditions:

a. In heavy clay or soil, plant above ground in raised beds.

b. In moderate clay or sandy soils, prepare a hole twice the diameter and again as deep as the root ball. Mix the backfill soil with at least 50% organic material such as shredded bark, peat moss or compost.

c. In rich woodsy loam the hole need only be large enough to easily contain the root ball.

6. Fill in the soil, add the plant, and water to settle. The top of the root ball should be level with or slightly above the surrounding soil.

7. Sprinkle a small handful of rhodo fertilizer around the drip-line - not near the trunk.

8. Mulch with pine needles or bark chips, to hold moisture, cool the soil surface, and control weeds.

AFTER CARE

Fertilizer:

Young rhodos should be fertilized before and after blooming. A small handful of rhodo fertilizer or blood and bone. Older plants seldom need fertilizer unless the leaf colour indicates a deficiency, or if the plant is not flowering satisfactorily.

Water:

The roots should be moist but never wet for long periods. Once a week watering equivalent to about 1" should be satisfactory in very dry weather, but try to give extra water when blooming and until new growth has hardened.

New plantings and shrubs near the roots of thirsty trees such as Douglas Firs need extra water.

Pruning:

Pruning is seldom necessary, except to remove unwanted leggy or broken branches. Immediately after flowering is the best time for this, except for damage from winter storms, which needs to be cleaned up as soon as possible. Cut just above a whorl of leaves. The leggy branches of older plants may be sawn back to a more desirable height. This severe pruning will force lower dormant growth buds to emerge. Pinching the terminal shoot of younger plants in spring will encourage branching and produce a more compact plant.

TAKE A BREAK

This puzzle has been made for the entertainment and, perhaps, even the education of those rhododendron lovers, who, sometimes, seek other amusements.

Following is a list of hybrid rhododendrons with their letters scrambled. When they are unscrambled the first letters will form the name of another rhododendron.

rcikoh
aolha
mroeo
tnuioam
terge
leleans

Greer's book might help.