NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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Nov 4

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Marleen Crucq - ~~2393~~ 2301 Seabank. Drive along Coleman Road, down Waveland to Seabank, and turn ~~left~~ R at the bottom of the road. Look for the 2nd house on the left with a wooden sign ~~#2393~~. If you get lost, her phone number is 339 - 7845.

Nov 11

Glen Jamieson from MARS - Mount Arrowsmith Rhodo Society, that is, will show us some of his wonderful slides "The Garden in Winter".

Oct 19

Harry Wright and Robin Harrison laid on a most beautiful afternoon, weatherwise, for our tour of Filberg Lodge grounds, and **Ann Chevrier**'s garden. Tree leaves have not all coloured up as well as they might, this year, but there was much to admire - the wonderful bark on mature trees, bright Japanese Maple leaves, and many perennial plants still in bloom. Also two cute donkeys who are always happy to entertain visitors.
Then back to the church hall for discussion and coffee.
What a wonderful change from sitting all evening and going home in the rainy darkness. At least one member who lives on an island, with difficult evening ferry schedules, was able to come. We must do this more often!

Dec 9

Party time! Remember to look for interesting and inexpensive gifts suitable for gardeners, and if you know some rhodo-inspired games, talk to Robin or Bill Rozel.

MEMBER NOTES

What do you think of the 15,000 tons of flowers left by the public around the Royal residences in London after the death of Princess Diana? Royal Parks workers and various volunteer groups have been sorting wrapping paper and plants to be composted. Cards with still-readable messages have been sent to Diana's family, still-fresh flowers to hospitals, and toys to childrens' homes. What a waste! If everyone had donated a few pounds to one of Diana's favorite charities, they would be richer by thousands of pounds, whereas most of the beautiful flowers will end up as compost.
Information taken from Amateur Gardening 27 Sept.

Have you inspected the Comox Valley Rhodo Garden lately? It will be a picture in the spring, when the flower buds open. If you have any plants to sell or donate, there is room for a few more. We owe a vote of thanks to the committee members, **Harry Wright, Dick Bonney and Bernie Guyader.** This committee has done a terrific job. Now the club must decide whether to leave the area "as is", or continue removing grass and planting rhodos. How much money and time do members want to put into this project in the future? Please consider the pros and cons, and be prepared to discuss the matter at the next meeting.

The committee has asked for volunteers for a "call out list", so that for brief maintenance jobs or emergency help (such as when the area was flooded Oct 9) they can quickly call up some extra helpers. Give your name and phone number to **Harry, Dick or Ernie Exner,** who is replacing Bernie on the committee.

Can anyone spare a few nice plants to be used as door prizes? Over the years, Bernie and Harry have been most generous, but surely other members can provide plant material. The $ table has been sparsely populated also, with one or two members bringing quantities of plants, bulbs or seeds. When you are doing your fall or early spring plant dividing, pop a few into containers for sale at the meetings. Sharing with friends is the fun part of gardening, don't you think?

THANK YOU

The Editor would like to thank all the newsletter helpers who work quietly in the background. My husband, who spends hours setting up the newsletter and adding pictures, **Bill Rozel**, who keeps the mailing labels up to date, and **Jane Drown,** who not only provides envelopes at no cost, but mails the newsletters every month. Thanks a million, guys, I couldn't do it without you! Come to think of it, I couldn't do the newsletter without all the help and inspiration I find in the weekly copies of Amateur Gardening magazine. This is, bar none, the best gardening mag - I believe I have tried them all.

WHY DO LEAVES TURN COLOUR IN AUTUMN?

Every year we look around in wonder, then try to explain to each other why and how it happens. Quoting from Amateur Gardening: "In the sap and some of the cells of

plants are pigments, the most well known being the green chlorophyll. The other pigments are carotin - orange and red - and xanthophyll, which is basically yellow. Under temperatures below 45F, chlorophyll production ceases and a breakdown of all the pigments occurs. Usually chlorophyll breaks down first, thereby exposing the other colours. If these pigments are in abundance, then one would expect good autumnal displays, but the situation is not that simple.

During the growing season, plants with the use of chlorophyll and sunlight change carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and water from the soil, through the process termed photosynthesis, into sugars. These sugars are used as energy by the plants, or combined with other chemicals to form tissue-producing materials.

Excess produced during the growing season may be stored in the roots and stems. Any other excess is converted into flavinoids (other coloured substances), particularly if cool nights slow the movement of sugars produced during the previous day. This is a safety mechanism to prevent a high sugar concentration in the leaves.

Therefore, cool nights following sunny days should encourage the production of orange flavones or red-scarlet or purple anthocyanins. Anyone who has mixed colours knows red and yellow mixed will produce orange, but yellow mixed with purple will give brown shades. Combine these two colour-producing methods with the tannins naturally produced in many plants, along with the oils that some plants produce from excess sugars and starches, and waste matter deposited in leaves, and a more complicated situation arises.

Some plants are very reliable in their production of the needed chemicals and will produce a good show every year, notably varieties of Acer palmatum such as Osakazuki. Many plants never produce a good show, and others do well if given the correct conditions. Recently, nurserymen have been selecting and propagating more colourful forms of good autumn foliaged trees and shrubs.

It is a well-known fact that many young actively growing trees and shrubs do not give of their best when almost all of the sugars produced are needed for growth. As soon as the growth rate settles down, they start producing more and better colours.

Sunny days followed by cool nights, below 45F, are needed for the best displays. Adequate moisture is needed to prevent premature leaf fall. The best garden site for these trees is an open site where the plants receive all sunlight possible, and cool nights. A slight ground frost will cool the air and encourage colour production.

NATIVE AZALEAS

The magazine Fine Gardening (Dec. 1995) contains a very thorough description of Southeastern Native Azaleas, native that is, to the Eastern United States. Many grow in the mountains of North Carolina (Hardiness Zone 6) but many are hardy to Zone 5 or even colder.

They are versatile garden plants, all deciduous, often with striking fall colouring as well as beautiful perfumed flowers in spring. Some flower as early as Feb.- March, others are still performing in August. They grow anywhere from 2 to 20 ft in height. Flower colour ranges from white to rosy pink, yellow to deep orange and red. Most of them grow in moderately moist to wet soils, but R. calendulaceum tolerates dry soil.

In my garden they are watered once a month in a dry summer, otherwise not at all except by rain. They are in an acid, free-draining soil, with lots of mulch and sun most of the day. 20 years of our variable winters has never bothered them. Deer occasionally nibble the odd leaf but no other pest bothers them.

If you want continuous colour from Feb. to August, look for the following plants- (just remember the article was written by a resident of North Carolina and blooming times here might be different):

The earliest to bloom, in Feb. - March, include:
R. canescens - Piedmont Azalea - can bloom as early as Feb.
Pale pink flowers with long stamens which give the effect of a bush covered with pink butterflies.

R. periclymenoides - pinxterbloom - soft pink flowers which open with the first new leaves on trees and shrubs.

R. vaseyi - Pinkshell Azalea - native to a few areas above 3000 ft. in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Its clear pink, fragrance-less blooms attract the first butterflies of the season. It grows well in woodlands north of New York City and in full sun in Massachusetts.

In mid to late spring, when leaves emerge in the forest, the next group of azaleas bloom.
R. calendulaceum - Flame Azalea - has the most brilliant red-orange to yellow flowers you can imagine. It appreciates a dry spot with late afternoon sun.

R. atlanticum - dwarf or coastal

azalea - grows in moist woods near the coast, and has lovely white flowers.
R. viscosum - swamp azalea - grows near the edge of wetlands, has similar white flowers, but grows to 10-15 ft.

R. arborescens - sweet azalea - has white flowers with a heliotrope fragrance.

Summer-blooming azaleas include the following:
R. prunifolium - Plum-leaf azalea - is a dependable bloomer from Zone 8 northward. Brilliant red flowers last from August into Sept.

Hybridizers have given us some exciting new plants such as `July Jewel',`July Jubilation' and `Summer Lyric', all derived from R. prunifolium. Look for `Pink and Sweet', `Lemon Drop', `Parade' and `Lollipop', whose parent is R. viscosum, and for vanilla fragrance `Golden Showers' from R. arborescens.

Remember all azaleas are Rhododendrons, and need the same acid, well-drained soil. They like organic matter, and essential nutrients, especially phosphorus and potassium.
They like more sunshine than most rhodos, but appreciate "cool feet". A good layer of mulch every year is welcome.
For two years after planting, give generous amounts of water in dry seasons; after that they are not as fussy.
Originally written by Dick Bir, an Extension specialist with North Carolina State University.
Pruning can be done, if necessary, but restrict it to taking off dead wood, unless you must cut down the height. Do this immediately after flowering so you don't disturb next year's flowers.

SOILS

Continued from an article on soil in the June 1997 newsletter from Mid-Atlantic Rhodo News and Notes:

Drainage
We must be sure that surplus water has a chance to drain off. Most plants don't like "wet feet". Only those with specially adapted organs cam survive in constantly wet soil. So if natural drainage is not available, tiling is essential. Proper drainage not only gives the plants a greater chance for existence, but it allows soils to "warm up" sooner in the spring. This warmth causes the various compounds to become more readily available to plants though their roots.

All these preliminary preparations lead us to the point of the needed materials in the soil which, when taken into the plant, are stored inside as foods which are essential in the formation of cells, their development and growth. Growth is nothing more than the laying down of new cells. Have you ever stopped to consider what a wonderful mechanism a plant is? The leaves take in carbon dioxide from the air, obtain through the roots water from the soil, and (in the presence of light) manufacture foods which are distributed through the entire system.

There are many elements in the soil which are needed for the growth of plants once they are changed into proper forms, first by minute organisms in the soil, so they may be absorbed by the roots, and later compounded within the plant in such a manner as to be usable for growth.

When you buy a fertilizer you will find an analysis on it such as 4-12-4. This indicates the percentages of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in the mixture. There are other elements present in the form of impurities; they do not need to appear in the analysis shown yet many of them are extremely important.

Nitrogen is associated with stem and leaf growth and colouration of flowers. Phosphorus energizes the plant, produces greater root development, strengthens stems and gives earlier flowering. Potassium is a conditioner. It plays a part in root development, stem strength, and deeper colour in flowers.

Several lesser or "trace" elements are required in smaller quantities and are sometimes present in the soil in sufficient amounts that there is no need to add them. Without iron, green colouring (chlorophyll) would not be adequate. Without lime, roots would not develop properly and stems would be weak. Others, such as magnesium, manganese, sulphur, zinc, and boron all play a role which spells health for the plant. The addition of these elements to some soils seems to work magic on plants.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

That is why we can buy specially formulated rhodo fertilizer which mentions on the label "plus trace elements" and why many people swear by the addition of seaweed to the mulch around the rhodo bed.

Applications of fertilizers to diseased plants or those growing in poor soil are usually wasted. Be sure to start with soil in good physical condition, then add the plant foods needed to give you and your plants greater satisfaction.

HYDRANGEAS

Nearly every year we have a spectacular display of hydrangeas in this area. They are happy in the

same conditions as rhodos with regard to acid soil, part shade for protection from the strongest summer sun, and generally hardy in our cool wet winters. During the summer and fall we are treated to not only large flower-heads of white, blue, pink or maroon, but many varieties have leaves which change colour in October. I have found they need water during periods of drought, but my soil is underlaid with river gravel.

"The Hydrangeas", written by Michael Haworth-Booth in 1950 - my copy came from the Garden Book Club in 1975 - was published by Constable & Co. This is a comprehensive book, but has only black and white photos.

As of 1995 there is a new book, even more comprehensive, and full of excellent line drawings as well as black and white and coloured photos. This book, **"Hydrangeas"** was written by Toni Lawson-Hall and Brian Rothera, and published by Timber Press.

Hydrangeas, like Rhododendrons, are an ancient plant - fossils from 12 - 70 million years ago have been found in western North America, from Alaska to Colorado and California, and also in China. Now, they grow naturally in eastern Asia, in eastern North America, and western South America. They were introduced into England and France during the 17th and 18th centuries, but were favoured garden plants in Japan for centuries before that.

In this genus are to be found dwarf and taller shrubs, small trees, and climbing plants. They have been divided into two sections - eleven deciduous species, all in cultivation and described in the book, and twelve evergreen self-supporting climbers, not as familiar or easy to purchase. Two of these are described in this book.

Flowers of hydrangeas are a conspicuous feature, being freely borne, long-lasting and often highly decorative. There are tiny fertile true flowers in the centre of the corymb, with large conspicuous sterile enlarged sepals around the edges.

The book has many full-sized examples of leaf and flower shapes, and should be very useful for identifying hydrangeas in the garden or nursery. There is a copy of "Hydrangeas" in our library. Be sure to borrow it if you plan to buy one of these plants.

HAMAMELIS

Here is a beautiful, hardy shrub that gives a great show in the garden, first in mid-winter, when the flowers burst out regardless of snow or frost, and in the fall when the leaves change from green to bright yellow, orange and red, or mixtures of several bright shades.

Hamamelis virginiana, used as a rootstalk for grafting various Chinese and Japanese varieties onto, blooms in the fall - pale yellow flowers with a faint perfume, and yellow leaves. H. mollis, the Chinese Witch Hazel, is spectacular when it blooms in winter (often in January in this area), with large yellow flowers and strong soapy perfume. The leaves turn to bright yellow in fall. `Jelena' often blooms by Christmas, with coppery flowers and bright coppery leaves in fall. `Diane' has almost red flowers, matched by brilliant red leaves in fall, according to the books. Mine has yellow leaves rapidly turning to brown, this fall.

There are many other Hamamelis, all of them bright winter accents to your garden. They make lovely companions for rhodos, with rather horizontal grey branches, flowers long before most rhodos are in bloom, and bright leaves in autumn when the rhodos have reverted to offering shiny dark green leaves and vari-coloured flower buds. Leave lots of room for the hamamelis though - they will be 10' high with a 15' spread in 15 years. Plant snowdrops or species crocus underneath for a striking winter show.

President Robin Harrison 339 4754
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Librarian Linda Deneer 337 8287
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Have you renewed your membership? If not, do so immediately to avoid missing a copy of the ARS journal.