

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P. O. Box 3283 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4

Vol. 13 No. 1

September, 1997

Sept. 2

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Jennifer and Robin Harrison, 919 Highwood Dr., Comox. (Turn down Cambridge, off Pritchard. 919 is the first house on the corner of Cambridge and Highwood). This meeting includes all members of the outgoing executive as well as the "new" ones.

Sept. 9

Kristi O'Donnell of Meerkerk Garden will be our guest speaker. Kristi will tell us something of the history of this interesting garden, and show pictures of work that has been done, and some of the fabulous rhodos which are being tested and developed there.

President Robin Harrison	339 4754
Vice-pre Guy Courchesne	336 8642
Secretary Marleen Cruick	339 7845
Treasurer Ernie Exner	339 6845
Ways&Means Linda Easton	923 4166
Librarian Linda Deneer	337 8287
Social Marion Lofthouse	334 4609
Membership Pauline & Richard Bonney	3397594
Editor Mary Palmer	923 6629

Member Notes:

It is months since the intensive club activity of the spring - two successful plant sales and shows, even with the late wet spring, a well-attended BBQ in September, 1997

Marion's & Bob's lovely garden, and very popular garden tours. After the summer of well-earned rest, rhododendron-wise, it is time to get back to work.

There will be a work party at the Courtenay Rhodo Garden on Sept. 6 at 9:00 am. Please phone one of the committee members if you have rhodos to donate or sell, for filling Bed #4. *SEPT 13*

Plans are being made to tour gardens for the purpose of admiring fall leaf colours, on Sunday 19 October. Peter Wams of the All Seasons Bonsai Nursery will guide members through several gardens with trees which colour well in fall. Plans include meeting at Filberg Lodge at 1:00 pm, visiting several other gardens, then coffee and a brief meeting at the Comox United Church on Comox Ave. The regular Oct meeting will not be held.

There will be a sale of rhodos and alpine plants at Haida Gold Nursery, 769 Chaster Rd., Courtenay, from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. on Sept. 13. 6
The usual cuttings demo will be held at Harry Wright's garden in October, and a demo

and workshop on making hypertufa containers is being planned for late Sept. in Linda Easton's garden. This activity will be limited to 10 participants, so speak to Linda if you are interested.

Remember - guests are always welcome at our meetings. Bring your knowledgeable family or friends - their experiences are sure to enhance our gardening interest and education.

Members who live in the Black Creek and South Campbell River areas might be interested in joining a group which has started re-establishing the Montfort garden at the UBC Research Farm. Linda Deneer, Linda Easton and Mary Palmer can give further details. At present, nothing remains of the "Oyster River Garden" except many and varied trees, planted at least 50 years ago, which will make an excellent framework for shrubs such as rhodos and their relatives.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome back to another season of Rhododendron meetings and activities. Our meetings give us the opportunity to meet new

friends, exchange ideas and plants, and to generally become more inspired with the fascinating group of plants that bind us together.

This past year has been an exciting one for our club, with the development of the Rhododendron Public Display Garden behind the Chamber of Commerce building in Courtenay. The display of colour this spring was fabulous. Thanks to our hardworking garden committee Harry Wright, Dick Bonney and Bernie Guyader, and many others involved in the planning and installation, for making the garden a reality.

Our 2nd Annual Garden Tour this spring was very successful. In addition to raising money for the display garden, the tour help to increase public awareness of gardening in general. The Shows and Sales in Courtenay and Campbell River were also very successful in promoting our club and in raising funds. The success of these events was due primarily to the efforts of the many club members who pitched in to help organize and conduct them.

September is the time when retiring members of the executive take their bows and are replaced by others. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the

outgoing officers for their hard work: Don Law (Treasurer), Bill & Barb Rosell (Membership) and Jennifer Harrison (Secretary).

Welcome to new members of the executive: Guy Courchesne (Vice President), Dick & Pauline Bonney (Membership), Ernie Exner (Treasurer) and Marleen Cruq (Secretary).

To keep our meetings and activities interesting and relevant we need input from the general membership. Suggestions on program topics are always welcome. If you have a bright idea, talk to any of the executive members or raise it at one of our general meetings.

I look forward to seeing you at our September meeting.
Robin Harrison,
President.

GRASS

We are blessed (or cursed, depending on your point of view) in this area, with many beautiful grasses, wild and ornamental, and this is the time of year they really come into their own. Drive along the road between Courtenay and Campbell River, and note the lovely grasses and their flowers, tall and short, yellow, bronze and brown. Farmers' fields also look lovely, with grasses and corn.

There are many ornamental grasses which will give striking accents to your garden. Some are invasive - so plant them in pots so they can't escape. Many give us graceful clumps which can be divided and shared among friends. Some, unfortunately, are only half-hardy here, so read the labels and plant the delicate ones in sheltered corners.

Grasses look attractive most of the year - even in winter if they are not smashed down with snow. They are usually very easy to grow, maintain and propagate. They will adapt to almost any soil, many will grow in bone-dry situations, others are happy in bogs. You can have a collection (in pots perhaps) or use them to highlight the character and shapes of other plants. Some tiny ones look lovely in the rock garden.

Sedges, rushes and bamboos, which are all grass-like, also have their place in the garden, and afford great contrasts in colour and size. Pampas grass, with its giant plumes, makes a striking centrepiece, but if you find it too overwhelming, or if the plumes are smashed by the first fall "south-easter", then browse the nurseries until you find one of the short varieties such as 'Bertinii', 2-3 ft. in bloom, or 'Pumila' at 4 ft. 'Sunningdale Silver' is a modest-sized pampas with

narrow foliage which sports a silver midrib.

Of the festucas, 'Elijah Blue' is the bluest of the blue, and perfectly hardy. 'Bowles' Golden Grass' has lovely golden leaves for months, and golden flowers. It seeds itself gently around the garden so I always have pieces to share with friends. Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola' is a lovely little Japanese grass which is suitable for a container or in among rocks. It is comparatively expensive, but as it slowly expands in size, it can be divided and shared.

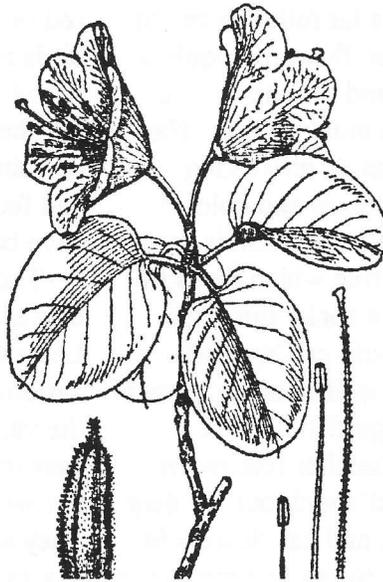
Alas, neither Japanese Blood-grass (*Imperata* 'Red Baron') nor purple fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum') survived even a moderate winter in my garden, but there are many others that are hardy. If you want tall, for the back of the border, with graceful flowers for dried arrangements, look for the various miscanthus.

Take a look through the nurseries at this time of year, for grasses with flowers on them, and choose suitable plants for enhancing your garden. If you buy one now, in a small or 1-gal. pot, take it out, spread and/or cut the roots, and replant in good soil in a 2-gal. pot for the rest of the summer. Place in its

permanent position "after the rains come".

R. WILLIAMSIANUM

In 1986, Gary Greene wrote the following informative article describing this lovely rhodo, for our newsletter. *R. williamsianum* is a dwarf



species, reaching 5' at maturity. It was discovered by R.H. Wilson in 1908, growing in isolated thickets, at 8,000 ft. on Mt. Wa-Shan in the Sichuan province of China. A larger-leaved form was later found growing on Mt. Omei.

This rhodo was named after J.C. Williams, (1861 - 1939) of Cornwall, who ultimately was responsible for "Hummingbird" and "Cowslip", two of this species' most popular hybrids. It grows as a compact, low spreading shrub, with small roundish leaves. New foliage opens bronze to brown and becomes a bright, glossy green.

The flowers, little bells in various shades of pink, hanging in loose trusses of 2-3, around 2" long, can produce a show that almost completely conceals the foliage. The blooms show first colour in early April and peak about the 3d week.

This plant is best grown in full sun and is hardy to about -20C (5F) but flowers and young growth can be damaged if it is planted in a frost pocket.

This species has been a very popular parent in hybridizing and is at least a 50% parent of Bow Bells, Brocade, Hummingbird, Jock, Kimberly, Maureen, Mission Bells, Temple Belle and Willbrit, all of which are rose-pink. Cowslip and Moonstone are two good creams and Olympic Lady is a very good white.

The parentage of all these is easily recognizable and hybridizers almost always use *R. williamsianum* for its size, shape and foliage, working only to improve or change the flowers. It is difficult to choose which is best - they are all attractive, easy-to-please plants.

MORE MEMBER NOTES

Are any members considering attending the fall conference in San Jose in October? The cost of getting there, by air, is

surprisingly low!. \$305 return (as at 15 July) will take you from Vancouver to San Jose, via Reno. One can leave Campbell River at about 7:00 am and be in San Jose by 3:30 pm.

TAKE A BREAK - READ A BOOK!

If you have a small garden, run, don't walk to the nearest library and get a copy of John Brookes "The New Small Garden Book", Dorling Kindersley 1989.

This book is full of wonderful full-colour pictures of plants and garden ideas as well sketches of steps, patios, windows and storage spaces and a section covering construction and planting details for making many garden projects. I liked the 'before' and 'after' photos and drawings of improvements to various small back yards. The only complaint is that in this country, bricks and stone are not as easily available or affordable as in Britain. We don't have very many old brick buildings to tear down and rebuild into different forms. Still, the plans and ideas are there and the book is well-worth perusing.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Frank Dorsey, writing in the May 1997 newsletter of the Vancouver Rhodo Society, listed some other members of

the Ericaceae which make marvellous companions for rhodos in the garden. Look for some of these plants in the nurseries:

Enkianthus campanulatus grows to about 2 metres, has dainty flowers and wonderful fall colour before the leaves fall.

Kalmia latifolia has bright pink or red flowers, requires full sun, and blooms a little later than most rhodos. Harry Wright has an interesting variety of sizes and colours.

Arbutus menziesii is a beautiful tree which loves to live on hot rocky outcrops, mainly south of Campbell River. It is difficult to grow in ordinary garden soil. *A. unedo*, a smaller relative, is easier (but watch out for deer eating it), and has flowers in the fall at the same time as the strawberry-like fruit from last year's flowers.

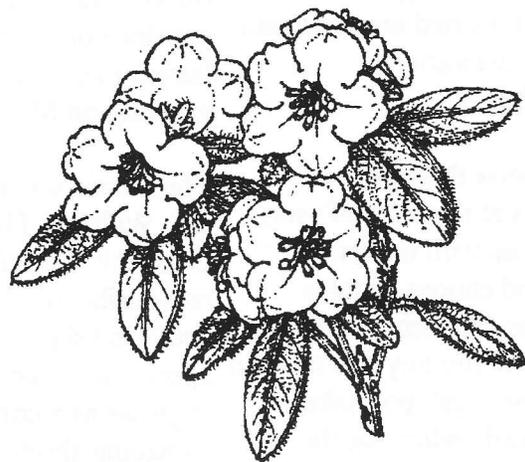
Leiophyllum buxifolium, a native of the New Jersey Pine Barrens, is a small shrub for the front of the border. It has tiny boxwood-like foliage and dainty pink buds which develop into starry white flowers.

Menziesia ferruginea, like *Rhododendron albiflora*, grows wild in our mountains but PLEASE do not try to dig them and

transfer them to the garden - they nearly always die. Get seeds, cuttings, or buy from a nursery. It has small cinnamon-red flowers and lovely autumn colours. *M. ciliicalyx*, an Asian relative, might be easier to find in a nursery.

Pernettya has huge pink, red or white flowers which the birds never seem to eat. I found the plant very invasive, but they certainly are eye-catching. You must have male and female plants in order to have berries.

There are many other interesting rhodo relatives - *Leucothoe*, *Lyonia*, *Pieris*, and various *Gaultheria*, as well as the vast *Erica* family - not all easy to find in the nurseries, but well worth the search. They all like acid soil, a mix of sun and shade, and rain, which we can usually provide with little effort.



R. leucaspis