

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P. O. Box 3183 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4

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## 2 June

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Linda Easton, 4077 S. Is. Hwy, Campbell River. Look for the wheel beside the driveway, up the hill from Oyster Bay and south of York Road.

## 20 June

The annual BBQ will be held at the home of Pauline & Richard Bonney, 2393 Seabank Road, Comox. See map. Bring food for a potluck dinner (the club will provide meat). Bring plate, cup, utensils and lawn chairs.

## 12 May

What a beautiful evening to tour JoAnn's and Dutchy's garden on Beaufort Ave. It was hard to tear ourselves away and get over to the hall for the meeting. This garden has many beautiful species rhodos, some just coming into their own after some years of

growing. *R. edgeworthii* was left out for the winter, in a protected corner, for the first time, and because we had a mild winter, it suffered no damage.

After reviewing and making several small changes in the Constitution and ByLaws, the meeting was turned over to Linda Easton, who handled the election of several new officers. For the coming two year period, Harry Wright will be President, Ways and Means will be handled by Dave Crucq, and Dr. Kirsten Emmott will operate the library. We are still looking for a Vice-President and for someone to take an interest in food. Come On, people - no Social Convenor, no coffee and cookies!

## 17 May

Another successful tour of 6 beautiful gardens in the area. The weather was excellent, and people were enthusiastic about plants and displays. What a great way to get new ideas and learn "what plant where". Many thanks to all who participated or worked in the gardens.

## MEMBER NOTES

A handsome sign has been carved and put on display at

the Rhodo Garden. The plants have given a splendid display of flowers this spring and the garden is a real credit to all the members who have worked on it.

The most often asked question this spring has been "Why did so many flower buds on supposedly hardy rhodos turn brown or black and not open into flowers?" The answer has to be, as usual, El Nino. We had no winter at all until early April, when there were 5 or 6 nights of -5C (22F) temperatures. This blasted flower buds, though it had no other effect on the plants. The only thing to do is take them off when you dead-head, and hope for a different winter next time.

Talking of dead-heading - the perennial question - should I or shouldn't I. After carefully observing many plants over the years, especially deciduous azaleas, I can honestly say "Yes, please dead-head as many as you can reach, for two reasons. First, because old shrivelled flower heads look messy, and second, because often, no new growth is initiated. A third reason, in my garden, is that when/if we get rain in June, the wet, sloppy

azalea flowers fall onto my hosta leaves, lie there and rot and leave big holes in these leaves. Three good reasons to stand there, hour after hour, day after day, picking the darned things off". And don't forget the Skin-so-Soft. It melts the sticky residue in no time.

On reading over replies to the Questionnaire sent out several months ago, I noticed several people asked for more garden hints. I will try to put some in each issue. I'd like to mention landscape fabric, for instance. I tried laying it between and around plants in shrub borders, covered it with bark mulch, and for a year or so it looked very neat. Then grass and weeds started sprouting in the bark mulch (all that rain) and before I got to them, the roots wiggled down through the fabric - and what a job to remove them. I am sure now the best method is to lay newspaper, several sheets thick, with bark mulch on top. The paper rots out after a year or so, and any weeds that sprout are much easier to remove.

This is an excellent way to remove lawn and make room for more rhodos. Cutting out turf is hard work, and soil has to be replaced. Much easier to cover the lawn with newspaper and bark mulch and wait a few months, then dig holes for the

rhodos. Bob Lofthouse gave me this advice and it works like a charm.

#### **R. WILLIAMSIANUM**

This past few weeks I have noticed particularly the bright bronze or red new leaves on the williamsianum hybrids. R. williamsianum itself is such a dainty thing, with little round leaves, pink bells, and lively bronze new leaves. It is hardy (-5F) and has been used for many years as a parent for some of the most attractive rhodos in the garden. There are white, pink, yellow and red rhodos which have this plant, or one of its hybrids, as parent.

**Bow Bells** - a mound of lovely pink bells, shiny copper new leaves, and perfect for the small garden, growing to 3' in 10 years.

**Linda** - another compact plant, very hardy, with trusses of 7-8 rosy red flowers.

**Royal Pink** - has given a wonderful display of pretty clear pink flowers this year, in tight ball trusses, different from most williamsianum hybrids.

**Elizabeth Lockhart**, a sport of Humming Bird. The deep green leaves are overlaid with dark, reddish chocolate brown, and young foliage is very red. The flowers are deep red. A striking plant.

**Humming Bird** has deep pink to red flowers, and a light coating of indumentum on the rounded foliage.

**Moonstone**- a compact mound of smooth, oval leaves and creamy yellow flowers.

**Rothenburg** makes a 4' mound of glossy leaves and light yellow flowers.

**Mission Bells** has much to offer - sun-tolerant, compact, shiny leaves, pale pink, slightly fragrant campanulate flowers. A dainty plant.

**Gartendirektor Glocker**, a low growing, sun loving plant displaying pink flowers with deeper pink edges.

**Gartendirektor Rieger** is a beauty, with cream flowers spotted with red.

All these, and more. Read the tags, ask the nurseryman, read the book, look at the leaves. Many of these hybrids have the rounded leaves and bright reddish or bronze new leaves of their parent. Many have the typical bell-shaped flowers in loose trusses. And all seem to be hardy in our area.

Much of the above information from Greer's Guidebook, 3d Ed.

#### **DO YOU HAVE A COLD, WINDY OR EXPOSED GARDEN?**

You might like to know what plants will do well. First, it would be wise to have a screen between the garden and the prevailing wind. You could plant pines, junipers or hollies, and while they become established, protect them with

a fence, or a temporary screen made of plastic mesh between posts.

Hawthorns will stand up to the wind, as well as having beautiful flowers and fruits.

Heathers of all kinds are excellent, as they are low-growing and sun tolerant.

Many alpines do well in windy positions, and those with grey leaves will stand unlimited sun and little water. For summer colour, add campanulas, dianthus and hardy geraniums. There are many ground covers that not only do well, but protect other plants. Prostrate conifers such as Juniperus sabina, and Pachysandra will quickly fill space for you.

Several Euonymus fortunei are excellent carpeters of poor soil. There are several variegated forms.

Pernettya is a tough, hardy spreader. With male and female plants you will get quantities of huge white, pink or red berries. Various Berberis will make a prickly barrier and many have beautiful autumn foliage as well as red or orange berries. Tamarix can make a handsome tree of tiny pink flowers and slim leaves (see Bernie Guyader's plant) and will take any amount of salt spray. So also will Hippophae rhamnoides, with narrow silvery foliage and bright orange berries in fall.

For an early spring display, add quantities of species crocus planted in among the ground-covers, and you will soon have an attractive year-round display.

This information taken from a Feb. 1998 issue of Amateur Gardening. They also recommended Rhododendron ponticum, which no doubt makes a good, tough windbreak, but I am amazed that anyone in Britain would plant it, these days, after all the warnings of how it has taken over the country-side in many places, and has to be bulldozed out.

#### BOOK REVIEW

Vireyas, a Practical Gardening Guide by John Kenyon & Jacqueline Walker, Timber Press, 1997.

This beautiful little book is in our library. By the time you finish reading it, you might feel you can grow these beautiful rhodos. They must live in the house, or a bright sun room, for the winter, but they will be happy in a sheltered spot in the garden from the end of May until the first threat of frost in Sept. or Oct.

This book is full of useful advice for growing vireyas outdoors in warmer climates than ours, but we can follow much of the advice they give. There are wonderful

photographs to entice you to try them. And the perfume! At a Fall Rhodo conference several years ago, Bovees Nursery, Portland Ore. had a terrific display of these plants, most in full bloom, and the flower colours and perfume simply dragged everyone across the room.

**Christopher Fairweather**, who has several good rhodo books to his credit, recently wrote an enthusiastic article in Amateur Gardening, which describes the rise, fall, and rise again of the Vireya rhodo in our homes and gardens.

**Vireyas** comprise 1/3 of all the rhodo species in the world. They live mainly in the steamy tropical forests of Malaysia, Borneo, New Guinea and the Phillipines. While on a visit to the Strybing Arboretum in San Fransisco, Mr. Fairweather was given several cuttings of vireyas which soon rooted and gave a stunning display of yellow and orange flowers.

Before 1914 the Veitch nursery in England had bred 500 or so different hybrids of vireya. What happened to all these plants? First the First World War, then the 1930s depression, and the increasing cost of heating greenhouses, then the Second World War, and now the increasing cost of garden labour.

During the past few years, many people have brought back new (to us) rhodos from the Himalayas and China, most of these bone-hardy in our gardens. Still, there are other people looking over and bringing back seeds and cuttings of vireyas.

**Mr. Fairweather** has now built up a large enough collection to be able to sell some from his garden centre in Beaulieu. If you can travel to see the Rothschild gardens, be sure to visit the vireya garden also.

**Harry Wright** has a collection of vireyas - perhaps he can be persuaded to part with a few cuttings if you ask nicely, and if you have the right spot for them. They grow in a very loose soil mixture (rather like the mixture made up for orchids) - lots of coarse fir bark, peat, chopped and composted bracken, with a little grit.

#### **MORE MEMBER NOTES**

Talking of bracken, I have read several times that it is a wonderful addition to your compost mix. Pick the fronds in June, the experts say, and pile them up for a few months. Once turned brown they are easy to chop or snap into small pieces.

#### **HARDY GERANIUMS**

The January 1998 copy of the

magazine Horticulture has caused me to make another little list of geraniums to acquire. And, by the way I consider Little River Nursery the only place on the central or north Island where you can find many named varieties. The tags used by nearly all nurseries just say "Hardy Geranium" on them.

A new variety of *G. macrorrhizum* is '**Czakov**', a with a brighter flower than '**Bevan's Variety**' and a mound of 15" foliage rather than the spreading habit of the others. Another new variety, '**Variegatum**' has marbled creamy and pink foliage; the flowers are a rich rose but produced seldom. This is a slow-growing plant which needs extra moisture and fertilizer, unlike the others in its family which will be happy (and spread like mad) in the driest shaded corner of the garden.

**G. phacum** has lovely dark purple up-facing flowers, and I am happy to have one. Now there is a new one, '**Samobor**', with dark purple bands on the leaves. There are also two white-variegated forms, '**Variegatum**' and '**Taff's Jester**' which brighten up plantings of ferns and hostas. If you don't like the dark purple flowers of '**Mourning Widow**' then look for '**Joan Baker**', with grayish lavender

flowers or "**Album**" with pure white flowers.

If you want a change from *G. macrorrhizum* for dry shade, or a hot sunny position in poor soil, look for *G. renardii*, which grows in ever-expanding clumps of beautiful foliage. The greyish lavender flowers are not showy. You might be able to find a plant of '**Phillipe Vapelle**'. *G. renardii* crossed with *G. platypetalum*, which has deep lavender flowers.

**G. renardii** crossed with **G. gracile** has given us '**Chantilly**' with felted, lobed, bright green foliage and pinkish lavender flowers. The foliage of this one will burn in a hot sunny position.

A spectacular new hybrid, '**Salome**', is a cross between *G. lambertii* and *G. procurrens* if you like intense yellow foliage and deep rose flowers veined with purple.

There are many more geraniums described in this article. I borrowed it from the Campbell River library. If you are interested in these plants, you should borrow it too. Hardy geraniums make wonderful companions for rhodos and are bone hardy in our area. Some remain more or less evergreen all year, others disappear into the ground for the winter.