

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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

Vol. 13 No. 7

March, 1998

President Robin Harrison 339 4754
Vice-pre Guy Courchesne 336 8642
Secretary Marleen Crucq 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

March

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Robin & Jennifer Harrison, 919 Highwood. (Turn down Cambridge, off Pritchard. 919 is the first house on the corner of Cambridge and Highwood).

10 March

Chip Muller of the Seattle Rhodo Society will be on hand to tell us of some of his adventures on a recent trip to the High Himalayas.

10 February

This meeting included a variety of items - the ByLaws were reviewed and adjustments approved by the members. A questionnaire form was processed by members, and a lively question-and-answer period kept members thinking and talking for some time.

Results of the questionnaire seemed to show that members are happy with social events such as the Christmas party and annual BBQ. Speakers on various subjects to do with rhodos are very popular. Most people enjoy touring gardens - in this area or further away, and several good suggestions were made as to subjects for discussion or for newsletter articles. Thanks everyone for participating.

DATES TO REMEMBER

26 April Rhodo Show and Sale at the Courtenay Fair Grounds.

3 May Rhodo Show and Sale at the Thunderbird Hall, Campbell River.

12 May Tour of Jo Ann Foster's garden, 1995 Beaufort Ave. then the Annual Meeting will be held at the United Church Hall.

12-14 June Greater Victoria Flower and Garden Festival at the Juan de Fuca Recreation Centre in Victoria.

20 June Annual BBQ at Pauline and Dick Bonney's home. More information later.

MEMBER NOTES

Thanks to El Nino, we continue to have wild, mild wet weather. Our only day of winter(?) - snow, anyway, was the night of our January meeting, and the total precipitation in my rain gauge amounted to over 18" for January. We are at the middle of February now and it is still raining, not quite as hard though. I feel sure all of last year's lime and fertilizer is long gone from the garden. The first dry day I plan to follow the advice in the Feb. newsletter.

During the question period at the Feb. meeting, several people asked about nematodes for eliminating root weevils. There are several problems: they are of no use unless the air and soil have warmed up and the ground is damp. This is not always possible here. If there is a warm spell in June, then soak the ground thoroughly before using the

nematodes. The other problem at present is availability. Both Harry Wright and Madeleine Simmons offered to find the addresses of suppliers.

ICING PEONIES

This item is really for the people who, I have heard, honestly believe that as soon as you cross the 49th parallel, you are knee-deep in ice and snow, regardless of the time of year. A member asked how to encourage her peonies to bloom.

There is no doubt these plants do very well in Winnipeg; not so well on the coast. Madeleine has a no-fail method to be used in winters such as that we are experiencing at present: Buy large bags of ice, and place the ice on the crowns of the peonies during January. As soon as the ice melts, buy more. This chilling, done 3-4 times during an "El Nino Winter" seems to make these plants realize they should settle down for a winter snooze instead of poking their heads up as soon as the days stretch out a few minutes. Try it - it works!

BOOK REVIEW

The Canadian Gardener, by Harris & Saunders, pub. Random House, Toronto, 1990.

My first thought on picking up the book in the library was "How can anyone write a book about Canadian gardening, when one considers the wildly different zones, rainfall, climate, soil - Winnipeg and Vancouver might just as well be in different countries!"

However, I was pleasantly surprised. Firstly by the magnificent photographs (Tim Saunders) of a

wide variety of gardens. Every photographic caption was carefully labelled with the climatic zone and name of the gardener (but not the province or town).

The written material (Marjorie Harris) is comprehensive. There are chapters on principles and design elements of gardening, equipment needed, buying plants, soil improvement and garden societies; variations of gardens - woodland, prairie, cottage, planting natives - then suggestions for shade gardens, small and large gardens and many others.

There is a good section on hardiness zones and descriptions of plants that will grow in each. We are, of course, blessed in that we can grow most plants hardy in most zones, with exceptions such as alkaline soil.

This is a good book for an informative "winter read", and an excellent choice for a gift. It is a coffee-table sized book but one that will be picked up and browsed through on a regular basis.

PIERIS

Here is another wonderful addition to your garden, and a striking companion for rhodos. Pieris insists on an acid soil and grows happily in the same ericaceous compost that is suitable for the rhodos. Also, Pieris not only have dainty (white, pink or red) bell-like flowers similar to those on many other members of the Heath family, but many of them have striking red new leaf growth in spring. They are also evergreen, and next year's flower buds form by late summer, which combination makes them a very attractive plant, year-round. They are perfectly hardy in the Pacific Northwest. They form compact, well-mannered plants, very

well suited to the any garden, large or small.

There are many varieties of Pieris on the market, more all the time because they are so popular. I bought one with variegated leaves, some 20 years ago. It is now about 4 ft. in height. Only last year did it have a few flowers; this spring it is loaded with buds. I had read this variety takes about 20 years to bloom - how true!

There are new varieties around now, some loaded with flower buds when only about 1 ft. in height, in a 1 gal. container. John Kelly, writing in "Amateur Gardening" in Dec. 1990, described the flowers on a typical plant so well that I just have to copy his words:



"Each little flower has its own individual stem. Take a bunch of a couple of hundred flowers and imagine the stems bright red against the greenish white of the developing buds and then against the pure white of the open flowers, and you have a recipe for one of the best shrubs for winter and spring that you could think of.

Then imagine great, billowing masses of white, pink or red flowers, hanging like lush, lacy ornaments on a lavishly decorated Christmas tree, and you have an idea of what some

of the modern pieris can be like.

Make sure you give them a bit of shade, in a spot out of cold winds and not in a frost pocket (the new growths are vulnerable to late frosts), remember about their lime phobia, and you'll never want to be without them again".

Ed. note: I have lost the new red foliage on "Forest Flame" a couple of times in 20 years, with a sharp May frost, otherwise they seem perfectly hardy.

These varieties were available in England in 1990; I have seen some of them here. No doubt there are many more by now.

Brightly coloured new foliage: "Forest Flame", "Wakehurst", "Flaming Silver", "Red Mill" and "Mountain Fire".

Floral beauty: P. japonica "Dorothy Wycoff". P.j. "Flamingo", P.j. "Valley Valentine", all with pink or red flowers, and P.j. "Purity", P.j. "White Pearl" and P.j. "Snowdrift", all with white flowers. P. taiwanensis has lovely white flowers with a scent of honey.

Mr. Kelly comments: "'Forest Flame' is the most well known pieris. For unknown reasons some gardeners insist on calling it 'Flame of the Forest' and nurserymen list it as P. formosa forrestii 'Forest Flame", neither of which is correct. It is a hybrid between P. japonica and (probably) P. formosa, and should be written simply as Pieris 'Forest Flame'".

'Forest Flame' make a neat, rounded shrub, 'Wakchurst' has the most brilliant red leaves, and 'Firecrest' grows to about 20 ft. in height instead of the 10 ft. of the other two. If you need a really small

plant, look for P. j. "Variegata", a small, neat plant in sun but up to 10 ft. in shade. P. j. "Pygmaea" grows to 1 ft. "Little Heath" has silver-edges leaves and "Little Heath Green" is also tiny but has unvariegated leaves.

WHY LATIN NAMES?

English was derived from Latin, to a large extent. Words like 'aggregate', 'campanulate', and 'lance' need no explanation, so when they are used as Latinized descriptions of flowers or leaves you know what they mean.

What brought this to mind was a letter from a reader of Amateur Gardening, discussing flower names, which points out very forcibly the problems we can have with 'English' or 'common' names. After all, how many different kinds of flowers are called 'daisy'?

"I recently came across an old book in which a lady spoke of flowers in her garden called bigold, cow fat, cow flop, herbive and sops in wine. Today's names, much prettier, are chrysanthemum, red valerian, foxgloves, forget me nots, and pinks."

Now, if only both of those people had used the proper botanical names, no one would have trouble knowing what they were describing, whether 50 or 100 years ago.

With this in mind, I plan to list a few botanical Latin words each month, in the hope that they will help you when reading plant labels.

Albiflorum	white flowered
Argentea	silvery
Atropurpurea	purple
Aurantiacus	orange
Aureum	golden
Cardinalis	scarlet
Caerulea	blue

Citrinum	lemon-coloured
Cyaneus	blue
Favescens	yellowish
Glauca	grey or bluish
Incana	greyish
Lacteus	milky white
Luteum	yellow

CAMELLIAS

Many of our members live in a warm little microclimate where the following advice is not needed, but if you live away from the salt water, which modifies the climate, you will be wise to buy *Camellia japonica* or its hybrids with *C. saluenensis*, which are known as *C x williamsii* or the Williamsii Hybrids. There are a great many of these, and they are all hardy as laurels.

There are a few pitfalls, however.



The Japonica hybrids need warm summers to set buds, but the Williamsii hybrids don't seem to care. If a shrub is planted where the sun hits flower buds early in the morning after a frosty night, you will likely lose them. Dappled shade and protection from cold winds is appreciated.

The white flowers on some

varieties are prone to blemish, and the enormous flowers on some varieties look dreadful after a heavy rain. Some of the Japonicas do not drop their flowers when spent, so the bush looks frost-burnt.

Williamsii hybrids drop their flowers all in one piece, so the bush looks neat when flowering is over. Japonicas drop individual petals.

Vine weevils can nibble the leaves; otherwise there are few pests or diseases.

The biggest problem I have found, is in labelling. Labels seldom tell you anything about the parentage of the plant; new varieties not listed or pictured in the books

seem to come out every year, and often the flower looks nothing like the picture on the label. This is where the big gamble comes in. If you don't know whether or not it is a Williamsii hybrid, should you take a chance and buy it? I'd say, better not unless you have a place to protect it in the worst of our winter weather. In other words, plant it in a pot and carry it into the greenhouse, porch or garage for a month or two, for a couple of years.

A final bit of advice - don't like me, bring it out of the cold greenhouse too early. Feb. 1 is too early - a few hours against (I thought) a warm wall outside, and all the flower buds dropped off my C.w. 'Donation'.

Results of Member Questionnaire
Feb. 1998

Of the 23 people who answered the questions, 23 attend meetings to hear from the experts, 22 to socialize with other gardeners (including rhodoholics of course) 11 to share and expand knowledge, 13 to take advantage of plant sales, and 14 appreciate use of the library.

Comments on other speakers or subjects included:

- have more contact with other Rhodo chapters
- invite more people from other chapters
- more information on companion planting

The Christmas party and annual BBQ are very popular - over 20 people thought they are great, and most feel they are well organized and see no need for changes. One person suggested a pot luck supper at Christmas.

No one offered to help with newsletters, but suggestions included having articles on "tricks of the trade", tips and suggestions on proven practises, concern over Honey Fungus, local problems and solutions to them, and the suggestion that each member contribute one article per year to the newsletter.

Gardening subjects which are the most interesting to members include new Rhodo hybrids and newly discovered species, insect control, slides of gardens and tours of gardens, general care of rhodos and companion plants, fragrant plants, rock gardening, garden design, and ponds.

21 people thought "mini presentations" to be a good idea. People who signed the paper (and therefore, I presume, would be

willing to give a 10 minute talk on some aspect of gardening) include Barbara Osaka, Dave Curry, Linda Easton, Jennifer Smith, Bob and Marion Lofthouse, Bill Rozel, Guy Courchesne, Mary Palmer, Harry Wright and Dick Bonney.

Garden tours are very popular. 21 people like tours in this area, 16 on the Island, 14 are willing to go further afield. 18 would like to tour public gardens and 18 love nurseries.

Further suggestions include touring more members' gardens, and the suggestion that plants could be sold at that time, with a percentage going to the club. One person asked if there are newsletters available from public gardens on the Island, University of B.C., etc.

Members who have more ideas or who didn't attend the Feb. meeting can still fill out forms and give them to the newsletter editor.

R. PEMAKOENSE

Here is a darling little rhodo which needs a bit of extra care. The buds and flowers are susceptible to frost, so plant it where the early morning sun does not hit it. I put a cloche over mine in early January - now will it flower - or not? The flowers are huge, for the size of plant, and such a delicate pink and white, that it is worth waiting for a year or two if a frost catches the blooms. When happy, this rhodo can show a mass of flowers in which it would be hard to find a leaf.

In the wild, in S.E. Tibet, this plant grows at 10,000' to 12,000', spreading over mossy rocks on steep slopes. It never grows very tall, but will sprcad by stolons if happily planted near a moss-covered rock.

