

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



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3 Nov

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Pauline and Dick Bonney** on Seabank Road.

10 Nov

Aleyne Cook, from the Vancouver area, will be guest speaker. I am sure we will have a lively evening. A beautiful picture of an *Oxydendrum arboreum* in full autumn glory was sent by Mr. Cook to the RHS Journal "The Garden" and printed in the Oct. issue.

13 Oct

Gary Greene was unable to attend the meeting, so he sent his brother **Dale**, who showed us wonderful pictures of the gardens around Windsor Castle. Because he lived and worked on the grounds, he had many opportunities to take slides of various members of the Royal Family, as well as the fabulous rhodos and azaleas. We really enjoyed the evening.

MEMBER NOTES

We are all busy cleaning up after the driest summer in many years. Plants that had a good drink once or twice a week put on floral displays that lasted until now (last week of October) and shrubs with bright red or yellow autumn colour are giving a great show. My Fothergilla is finally showing many shades of red and orange, after several years of dull brown, and the Hamamelis are a wonderful sight.

Have you tried potting up winter pansies and ornamental cabbage/kale in your large pots and baskets? They look very bright and cheery and will look lovely for several months at least - as long as they are safe from the deer. I gave up on them several years ago and now fill the pots with varicoloured dwarf evergreens that the little pests don't eat.

MANY THANKS!

To all the people who help with the newsletters. My husband, **Ray**, who makes my scribbles into neat three-columned pages. **Bill Rozel**, who keeps track of the members' names and

addresses, and prints out neat address labels, and to **Jane Drown**, who looks after mailing the newsletters each month.

Do any members have prints or slides of the club members, gardens or shows in the early days of the club? If you find some, it would be nice to loan them so copies can be made for an album.

You have probably all noticed that the nurseries in the district are having fall sales. Now we have had a little rain, this is a good time to plant or transplant shrubs and trees. Island Specialty is having a renovation sale. 30% and 50% off many plants can be found everywhere. Black Creek Farm & Feed have coarse peat moss for sale. So as long as we have warm afternoons, spend some time with your friends at the nurseries and bag a few bargains.

Discussion at the October meeting included considering plans for the Rhodo shows and sales next spring. Plans so far include having the Courtenay show at the Fairgrounds on 25 April and the Campbell River show at the Willow Point Hall on 2 May. A garden tour is

planned for 16 May in Courtenay.

Talking of garden tours reminds me of Communities in Bloom. Volunteers in Campbell River have worked hard for several years on this project and have had encouraging results. All it takes is several enthusiastic people who will talk friends and neighbours into listing their gardens, and a committee who will send in the application, find a few gardeners willing to be judges, and short-list 30 or more gardens down to about 6. Provincial judges will then come in and the town's gardens will be judged against other towns with about the same population. It involves a few meetings, and three or four days of intensive work for the judges, but it is lots of fun.

When I think of all the beautiful gardens in the Comox-Courtenay area, I think it a shame they aren't on the circuit for best in their category.

In England, Britain in Bloom has been going for many years, and the categories include roof gardens, department stores, pubs - you name it. I felt rather amazed to read in a recent copy of Amateur Gardening that a hotel in Yorkshire (Yorkshire, where the highways have warnings

about the vicious side-winds that blow your car off the road!) won a Best in Bloom prize - they employ a full-time gardener who trained at Kew for seven years! Why are we so far behind, when we have many gardens to equal those in Britain?

COURTENAY RHODO GARDEN

Bed #5 is now finished. Many people see the plants as they walk along the path that takes them down to the river-mouth and the many birds to be seen. The next job is to clean up the "rock garden" around the big maple tree, and put in some new plants.

I heard Harry mention a beautiful rhodo called 'Great Eastern' and on looking it up in Cox's Encyclopedia of Rhodo Hybrids (Timber Press, 1988), found the following description "Another good Dexter hybrid which is becoming popular. Large, fragrant, ruffled, deep purplish-pink flowers, with yellow-green rays forming a blotch, in a large truss. Fine, glossy, light-green foliage on a well-branched plant of good habit. New growth yellowish. Roots easily, free-flowering and easy to grow. Fairly bud-hardy for a Dexter hybrid." It is hardy to -10F and blooms fairly late in the season.

Sounds wonderful! Where can

we buy one (or take a cutting)?

Brian Saunders, writing in the Times-Colonist last April, wrote an article entitled "Rhododendron, a Plant for all Seasons". During the winter, we can appreciate many of the attributes which are mentioned.

"Serious gardeners develop their gardens to reward them throughout all seasons, not only with the pageantry of blooms, but also with the form, colour and textures provided by trunks, bark and foliage of their trees and shrubs.

However, many evergreens grown for these effects in the winter and spring fall into obscurity in the late spring and summer as they are eclipsed by the floral displays common then.

Not so for many members of the genus Rhododendron, which not only provide this colour, form and texture of foliage, but, as a bonus, burst into exotic bloom between the flowering periods of the spring bulbs and early roses.

With 1000 species and 10,000 hybrids from which to choose, one can find an ample number which provide both foliage and lovely flowers.

Perhaps one needs to see R.

Sir Charles Lemon growing on top of a wall to appreciate the beauty of a rhodo with coloured indumentum, the wooly coating on the underside of the leaf. The dark-green upper surfaces contrast with the reddish-brown under surface to provide a wonderful display, especially on those days in winter when we get afternoon sun. "Sir Charles" produces lovely yellow flowers which are somewhat paler than the yellow of its fruity counterpart. Many other rhodos are available in a variety of sizes with coloured indumentum which varies from cream to chocolate.

The larger-leaved tropical-looking rhodos require space and shelter from the wind but provide wonderful focal objects. It would be best to choose from the hardier varieties, such as *R. rex* or *R. montroseanum* as the tender ones can be nipped by spring frosts.

One of the most versatile family of rhodos is that of *R. yakushmanum*. Many hybrids exist but all demonstrate the elongated dark foliage with a range of coloured indumentum. In addition they have a frosting of thin white indumentum on the upper side of the leaf and the new buds. The plants are compact, hardy and take

full sun. As if this was not enough, spring brings of a mass of pink flowers fading to white. Mass plantings of these easily obtained plants can be spectacular.

For those seeking the unusual, rhodos exist with leathery leaves and fragrant flowers while one exists with thin cut-leaves. A variety of smaller rhodos suit borders, rockeries, containers and bonsai. Whatever the use, these plants of minimum maintenance and year-round appeal can fill a need in anyone's garden, sunny or shady".

Ed. Notes:

I would like to make a few comments regarding the last article. First, about Sir Charles Lemon. I can assure you from first-hand experience that a day of intense sunlight on his current year's leaves will burn nasty holes. My plant spent the next three months covered with a glass curtain.

Two "Yak" hybrids which do not like full sun are *R. Coral Velvet* and *R. Cupcake*. They needed far more water than I was able to provide, and shade would have been nice too. Needless to say they already have new homes, under a tree.

As for the large-leaved species rhodos, *R. sinogrande* is surviving well in my garden, so far, though some leaves

were sunburned this summer. This and *R. rex* (according to Cox) are hardier than *R. montroseanum*. It depends so much on what kind of micro-climate you can provide.

These plants need shelter from strong winds more than anything.

LAZY SUMMER DORMANCY

I am going to quote from thoughts written by Bill Bedwell in the Sept. 98 issue of *Mid-Atlantic Rhodo News & Notes*:

"It is the third week in August and we are getting ready for really bad drought in Dinwiddie....My watering so far has been limited to recently planted stuff but will soon have to go into older plantings. A big, 7-foot rhodo that I moved last fall got a lot drier than I thought, so it has been pruning itself with selected limb death. There is some selected dieback on the old plants in the garden too. This may be a disease caused by drought stress, but the effect is the same. It starts with the weakest growth, I have noticed, and amounts to a self protective type of pruning where the plant reduces its top growth so the roots can better sustain the remaining growth that is stronger....

Over many years of fighting

occasional severe droughts, I have come to the opinion that less water is better than too much, especially in hot weather when very wet roots and high temperatures are ideal for root rot. Except for the first 3-5 years after planting, I prefer to let plants go dormant and protect themselves. Then I water with a few gallons per plant, depending on size, once a week, no deep soaking as you do with roses and most other plants. This seems to work best in my sandy clay loam, but I suspect that more watering is necessary in very sandy soil that retains so little water...

These conditions are ripe to cause a lot of fall flowering if we do get a significant amount of rain in Sept. or Oct. The plants come out of a drought-induced dormancy and react as if it is spring and time to bloom and/or start growing. That, in combination with early frosts can do a lot more



damage than a plunge to -5F in the dead of winter, I believe".

Look for more of this thought-provoking article in next month's newsletter.

Indumentum, writing in the South Fraser Rhodo Society newsletter in May 1998, offered good advice on how to prevent damage to rhodos from drought:

"Most rhodo foliage is remarkably sun tolerant but the shallow root systems are not. If the foliage starts to shrivel in the sun it is probably because the rootball is dry and the plant is suffering from extreme thirst, that is why well-mulched north facing slopes are preferred for rhodo plantings as the rootballs are angled away from direct sunlight.

Large-leaved rhodos transpire more water than those with small leaves, simply because of the larger leaf area. Large-leaved rhodos therefore prefer shady conditions which will reduce the evapo-transpiration rate from both the leaves and the rootball and cut down on overall water consumption. Nevertheless, because it is more important to shade the rootball than the leaves, a large rhodo often does not need to be

planted near a tree if there is sufficient rhodo foliage to provide its own shade.

There is another reason for planting shade trees, however, and that is to protect the blooms from wilting in the sun".

NOTES FROM THE VANCOUVER RHODO SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Oct. is the best month to take cuttings from most rhodos. Some of the newer hybrids like Lem's Cameo respond better if cuttings are taken in Feb.

Labelling - aluminum strips work well, also old Venetian blinds.

Rhodos bloom better in full sun than in the shade, but they must have superb drainage and frequent watering, to mimic the natural mountainous habitats that many rhodos come from.

This club is trying a new idea - trading rhodos with other members. What a good idea. For instance, if a member takes a few cuttings of a certain plant, and they all take, there could be several pots of excess plants tucked away in a corner. Meantime that member is looking for a special colour which another member has but doesn't like.

So - how about giving the editor a list of extra plants or rhodos you have looked for in vain in the nurseries?