

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

**Holly and stockings
Wise men and brandy
Chocolates and puddings
Poinsettias and candy
Joseph and Mary
Children and sleighbells
Presents and sherry
Chimneys and candles**

MERRY CHRISTMAS

7 Dec

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Dick and Pauline Bonney**, 2393 Seabank Rd. Drive down Waveland to Seabank, turn left a short distance to 2393.

14 Dec

Our famous annual Christmas party. The executive will bring the food and **Bill Rozel** is planning another of his amazing "fun and games" sessions. Everyone attending should bring along a useful gift for a gardener, value about \$10. If you have a group of slides of rhodos or other garden plants that you would like to share with the other members, contact Dick Bonney by 5 Dec. so he can make up a carousel for this evening.

21 Dec

The executive and spouses are invited to **Gwen's place, 769 Chaster**, for the evening. Drive along Back Road to 10th (flashing red light), turn right and down the hill to Chaster. Right again to the end of the road and into Harry's garden.



9 Nov

Dave Dougan brought slides of some of the beautiful rhodos in his garden on the Malahat. Dave has a much admired example of *R. Ken Janeck*, a handsome *Yakushimanum* seedling, which makes a beautiful mound of pale pink when in bloom. Some beautiful little primulas have seeded themselves into a solid mass of colour. (no deer in that garden!)

Dave also gave information on the Western conference recently held in

Eureka Calif, and advised us of plans for next year's conference to be held in Duncan next Sept. There are lots of exciting items to look forward to - bus trips, a salmon BBQ, interesting and informative talks - so be sure to mark the dates - Sept. 13 - 17, on your new 2000 calendar.

Harry brought samples of some of the fall leaf colour we are blessed with. If you are thinking of buying a shrub or tree, visit the nurseries when the fall colours are at their best. Sometimes the colour varies from one sample to another on shrubs bearing the same name. Leaves on some of the deciduous azaleas turn to fantastic yellows, oranges, reds and browns, and you can check for fat flower buds at the same time.

BOOK REVIEW

I have been browsing through a wonderful book, *CAMELLIAS*, by Stirling Macoboy, Timber Press 1998.

There are over 1000 camellias illustrated by sharp, accurate photographs and thorough descriptions. If you have an unknown camellia in your garden, you will likely be able to identify it now. For most of us in the north Vancouver Island area, the only ones reliably safe for us to grow are the hybrids produced by J.C. Williams of Cornwall in 1930. Since that time, others have made similar crosses, and there are now quite a few really hardy camellias. To quote Mr. Macoboy "...they are almost all splendidly vigorous, free-blooming

shrubs with handsome, semi-glossy leaves, leather-surfaced rather than lacquered. They flower freely over a long season and don't have the nasty habit of clinging to their dead flowers".

A copy of this book is in our library and it is well worth the time it will take you to go through it. Camellias make wonderful companions for rhodos - many bloom earlier in the season and it is important to plant them where the sun will not hit the flowers on frosty mornings. They appreciate the same acid soil with lots of mulch. I think it is safe to say they are immune to weevil and deer damage.

NERINES

Have you had any luck growing these beautiful plants? Only one, *N. bowdenii*, is considered fully hardy, but there are many others which will probably survive the winters here if given a little tlc in the form of perfect drainage in winter. In the wild, they grow on rocky screes and they cannot stand having wet feet. Add humus and sharp grit to the soil and plant them at the foot of a warm house wall, where they will probably be safe except in the most extreme winter weather which we get once every 20-30 years.

These plants come from southern Africa. The lily-like flowers rise on 2 ft. stems from bulbs resting just beneath the surface of the soil. The colours are stunning - reds to pinks, enhanced by the crystal-like cell structure in the flowers which concentrates the light and gives the effect of glowing in certain lights.

You can buy Nerine bulbs in late spring and early summer, when they are dormant. Specialist nurseries will have them in bloom in the fall, so you can pick the colours you want. Pot them up in very free-draining soil in pots just wide enough to take the

bulbs. Water them, add more soil, leaving just the snouts of the bulbs sticking out. If they are already in pots, plant them pot and all, in a sheltered spot in free-draining soil, or put the pot in a larger ornamental pot for the patio.

Nerines do not like being disturbed, so find a permanent spot for them right away. Bulbs take 5 years to grow to flowering size, so try to pick out large bulbs. Do not bury them - the shoulders should be just under the surface, with the tip sticking out. Once established, frost might damage the flowers, but will not hurt the bulbs.

There are many varieties with fantastic colours like brilliant orange, pure white, frilly pink, brilliant scarlet, and variegated pink and white. There are usually 8-10 flowers on each stem. This is a plant well worth looking for when you visit specialist nurseries - or perhaps a friend has a large patch which needs dividing?

Nerines resent fertilizer. They may produce leaves but no flowers, if given regular fertilizers, but if there are no flowers after 5 years, give them a high-potash feed. Information from Amateur Gardening.

MEMBER NOTES

Don't forget, if you are planning to visit to Seattle area, to pick up one of the visitor cards sent to us by the Rhodo Species Foundation. Of course spring is the best time to see the rhodos in bloom, but the garden is beautiful any time of the year.

HELP WANTED

For some years, Harry Wright has organized bus trips for members of the club, and he would appreciate a respite from this chore. I am happy to be able to report that Linda Easton has offered to take on this job.

Speaking of bus trips, what do members want? Do you prefer to visit private or public gardens, and/or nurseries? There are many beautiful gardens on the Island, which would save the cost of ferry travel, but perhaps a two-day trip to the Mainland should be considered, so we could visit Brian Minter's garden, or Les Clay's garden, as well as Stanley Park, Queen Elizabeth, Van Dusen or the gardens at the University of B.C. Let's talk about it, and let Linda know what you would prefer, so plans can be made for a trip in the spring.

Another spring chore that needs to be organized is the Garden Tour planned for 13 May next year. Perhaps a committee should take it on, for there is a certain amount of detail to be worked out. Please speak to Harry or a member of the executive if you would like to help. These garden tours are a major source of income for the club, as well as a chance to see interesting gardens and learn from other gardeners. Please, don't expect Harry to do it - he needs a break from all the extra chores he has always willingly tackled for the club.

NARCISSUS BULB FLIES

The large narcissus bulb fly is about 9/16 inch long and resembles a small bumble bee. The females lay eggs near the neck of the bulb as the foliage is dying down, and not only *Narcissus* (daffodils) but *Amaryllis*, *Hippeastrum*, *Galanthus* and *Sprekelia* can be attacked. Newly hatched larvae crawl down bulbs and enter by boring through the basal plates. There is usually one larva in an infested bulb, 3/4 inch long when fully grown and ready to go down into the soil to pupate the following spring.

If bulbs contain many smaller maggots, they are likely to be grubs

of a small bulb fly. These are secondary pests that feed in bulbs already damaged by another pest or disease. Large bulb fly attacks sound bulbs and usually kills them by eating the central portion, which becomes filled with the muddy excrement of the maggot. If newly purchased daffs feel soft, don't plant them.

None of the pesticides available to home gardeners controls grubs inside bulbs or prevents eggs being laid. Reduce losses by planting bulbs in shady places where the bulb flies are less likely to locate them. Firming the soil around the necks of the bulbs as the foliage dies down makes it more difficult for eggs to be laid. Valuable bulbs can be covered with horticultural fleece during the egg-laying period but watch for increased humidity which could encourage fungal diseases.

Material copied from "The Garden", RHS Journal, Oct. 1999.

ROYSTON NURSERY

Do you have any photos or printed material regarding the lives of Mary and Ted Greig of the Royston Nursery? Please bring them along to the January meeting, when Judy Walker will be discussing their garden and their lives as gardeners. She is engaged in writing a book about these pioneers of B.C. horticulture and would be happy to add any anecdotes or reminiscences you can offer.

TOO MANY WEEDS? PLANT MORE HEATHERS

Heathers evidently emit a mysterious substance which deters the growth of weed seeds. This has not been scientifically proven as yet, but garden centres in Dorset are convinced this is so. Hundreds of tons of heathers are being chopped down in Yorkshire and shipped all over the world for the purpose of cutting down on bad smells. The tough wiry stalks filter the air, helped

by a bacteria which grows on them when kept moist. Bundles of heather also help remove solids such as green algae from ponds.

Material from Amateur Gardening Oct. 1999

Winter-blooming heathers such as cultivars of *Erica carnea*, give a real lift to the garden during the winter months. The best yellow-foliaged specimen is E.c. 'Foxhollow', which has lavender flowers from January to March. It prefers to be planted in half-shade. Another useful yellow-foliaged heather is E.c. 'Aurea'. The foliage is bright gold in spring and summer, and spattered with red flecks in winter. The lilac-pink blooms appear in Dec. and turn almost white by March.

Others worth trying include E.c. 'Gracilis', a prostrate variety with bright rose pink flowers, E.c. 'Myretoun Ruby' with rose-pink flowers from January to April and dark green foliage. How about E.c. 'Vivelli' with carmine flowers and bronzy-red leaves in winter. The best white is E.c. 'Springwood White', with strong trailing growth and long urn-shaped flowers. There are many others, and you can find them in nurseries now (November) and plant them out in suitable damp weather for a great groundcover show from winter to early spring (snow might cover them but doesn't discourage the flowers).

A bed of mixed heathers and dwarf conifers makes a striking display in a large or small garden. Plant some up in pots which had contained petunias or pelargoniums, and you will admire them on the patio or near the doorway for the next 3-5 months. Material from Amateur Gardening Nov. 1999

DID YOU KNOW planting tulips late in Nov. helps prevent Tulip Fire (*Botrytis tulipae*)? If the bulbs are not infected when you buy them, and if you don't plant them repeatedly in the same area, you can likely avoid the disease. Once it hits, however, avoid planting in the same place for 3 years.

SUPER-HARDY AZALEAS

Next spring, gardeners in England will be able to buy some of these plants, bred in the US during the past 20 years. They are all hardy down to around 21C or 0F, a temperature seldom experienced in that country, and seldom seen on the north-west coast of America. There are four evergreen varieties ready for sale - 'Bruce Hancock', white with a pink ring, 'Peggy Ann', pink with a white outer ring, 'Ben Morrison', red with a white ring, and 'Frosted Orange', white with an orange outer ring.

I'm sorry to say I have already lost 'Ben Morrison' but am not sure if it was last winter's heavy rains, or the deer, that finished it off! It definitely was not frost or snow.

GIANT PUMPKINS

How big were your pumpkins this year? I bet they didn't approach the weight of these monsters. One grown in Derbyshire this year weighed in at 816 pounds. However, a woman in Pennsylvania had one that weighed 1131 pounds. Plenty of room in that beauty for Cinderella! You can learn more about giant pumpkins by calling up on your computer: www.backyardgardener.com/pumpkin.html

Have you seen mildew on zucchnis and cucumbers? A mixture of milk and water, sprayed on the plants, is proving to be a very efficient fungicide. Try it next year.

RECIPE FOR HOUSEPLANT FERTILIZER

Dot Harris has used this formula for 30 years, and has the most beautiful healthy houseplants you have ever seen. **Phyllis Stapley** kindly pried the formula out of her.

1 tbsp. Baking Powder
1 tbsp. Epsom Salts
1 tbsp. Saltpetre (drugstore carries it)
1 capful ammonia
1 multi-vitamin pill

Add the above to a gallon of warm water. For watering your houseplants, use 1 cupful to a quart of lukewarm water.

TALKIN' ABOUT RHODOS

Here is an article from the **Seattle Rhododendronland** newsletter (author not named) which is full of wisdom for rhodo gardeners: "Where do I plant them? Now that you have bought your first 100 rhodos, how do you plant them in your garden to have a pleasing effect all year round? This is a matter of personal taste of course but here are ideas that have worked for some people. The leaf size, texture and colour are some of the most important points to look for first. Remember you see the leaves 11 months of the year and the flowers for only a couple of weeks.

Many gardeners find the "yaks" are hard to blend with other leaf forms - so solve the problem by filling an entire bed with different R. yak hybrids. They will bloom for a couple of months and present another lovely view when the new foliage opens out.

R. augustinii and its hybrids and R. lutescens blend well, with their similar leaf shape and plant shape. The purple and yellow flowers look wonderful together. Other combinations such as white and pink can be made.

A group of deciduous azaleas present a great picture twice a year - once when the flowers and new leaves open, and again in the fall when the foliage turns to shades of gold, red and orange.

You have to keep in mind how much garden you really have. A small lot or condominium garden suggest the use of a rock garden with dwarf rhodos and azaleas. Large acreage with winding paths and large trees can be a natural landscape with larger leaved rhodos added to the trees. A hedge of evergreen azaleas might make a division between your property and the neighbours.

Or consider colour: an entire bed of purple rhodos which bloom over 3-4 months. Or a bed of early bloomers such as R. Lucy Lou, Snow Lady, Bric-aBrac and moupinense to remind you that spring is just around the corner.

These are just a few ideas to get you started. There is lots of advice in books such as "**The Cultivation of Rhodos**" by Peter Cox, "**Success with Rhodos and Azaleas**" by H. Edward Reiley, and "**Rhodos of the World**" by David Leach." This article revised slightly by your editor.

R. GOLDEN COMET

Craig Clarke reports in the Nanaimo Rhodo newsletter that there is a lovely new release from the rhodo Species Foundation Botanical Garden called R. luteum 'Golden Comet', a named variety of R. luteum grown from seed collected in Turkey. The flower is larger than the typical form and is a very fragrant bright yellow-orange with a dark yellow-orange lip and throat. Up to 30 flowers per truss provide an extended blooming time. Flowering season is late March to late April. In the fall, the foliage turns to a brilliant scarlet and is retained longer than the typical form.

It shows resistance to powdery mildew. The plant is hardy to -29C and the flower buds to at least -23C. It sounds like a winner - I wonder when we will be able to buy one?

CARING FOR CHRISTMAS GIFT PLANTS

In general, most of these plants need cool conditions (55-65F), moist atmosphere, and as much light as possible. This is difficult to provide in our generally dark and sunless winter days. A frost-free sunporch or a conservatory is a much more suitable home for these plants, but many people provide extra lighting in a "flower room". Amazingly, they often thrive in less suitable homes, so do your best to provide whatever help you can give them.

POINSETTIA

The new varieties last for many months in the house, and can be planted in the garden for the summer. The temperature should be not less than 62F though a little cooler at night doesn't seem to bother them. Keep them away from cold window panes, but give them lots of light. Give a good watering, with weak fertilizer added, then allow them to dry out a little before watering again. My method is to touch the surface of the soil with a finger - if it feels dry, water the plant.

INDIAN AZALEA (R. simsii)

This is a slightly tender azalea which can spend many months in the garden. Many are sold in a medium which looks like pure peat moss - and is as difficult to soak once it gets dried out. A saucer of gravel filled to the top of the gravel with water under the pot, and a thorough watering once a week, will usually keep the plant happy. Spray regularly also to keep the atmosphere damp.