

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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1 June

Executive meeting at the home of **Ernie Exner**, 2160 Stadacona Dr., Comox.

12 June

The Annual BBQ will be held at the home of **Gwen and Harry Wright**, 769 Chaster, Courtenay. Bring chairs, food, plates and utensils. The club will provide meat - just bring a dish of your delicious salad, pasta or a dessert. BYOB if you wish; tea and coffee will be provided. **Bill Rozel** is working on another puzzle to sharpen members' brains.

11 May

The Annual General Meeting was a well-attended affair. Members spent some time admiring the rhodos and other plants at the home of **Marleen and Dave Crucq**, then adjourned to the porch for coffee and goodies while business including elections was conducted. **Pauline and Dick Bonney** were elected by acclamation to continue their good work as Membership chairmen; **Ernie Exner** was also elected by acclamation to continue as Treasurer. **Phyllis Stapley** was elected Secretary. Thanks to everyone on the Executive for your enthusiasm and reliability, sometimes

for years. Thanks, Marleen, two years of good work, and thanks also to Phyllis, for taking on the secretarial duties.

1 May

A busload of about 48 happy people from the Rhodo Society and the Horticultural Society travelled to the Duncan area on a rather cool and windy day (but it didn't rain!) to wander over several large (read very large) gardens. **Mr. & Mrs. Anderson** have a well-established large garden, with many perennial plants as well as rhodos. The hillside leading to the creek has been planted with suitable items such as rhodos and azaleas, hostas, ferns and many "wild" plants have been left. A lovely calm place to walk or work.

Did you notice how the huge old fir stumps were planted with many wild plants instead of blasting them out?

Alan Murray has indeed acquired large quantities of deciduous magnolias and nearly all were in bloom.

They add an interesting dimension to the hillside rhodo garden, which is full of large, well-established plants.

Tucked into crannies in the rocks are small irises, and tiny rockery plants.

The garden is an impressive sight.

The Cowichan Valley Rhodo

Society provided a lovely lunch and everyone had a very enjoyable time.

I wonder how **Ernie Exner** and his lady wife both managed to win rhodos?

The next garden - really a large estate - owned by the **Cooks**, was impressive to say the least. Rhodos at least 25 years old, many other interesting

shrubs, a huge pond, newly planted rhodos, and daylilies, peonies - and what caught my eye were several "Japanese stone lanterns" tucked here and there in the shrubbery, covered with moss. They looked just right in those settings. I liked the Japanese style plank bridge over a boggy section, with lots of skunk cabbages and primulas. A very interesting area. Again, a peaceful setting, with horses in a nearby field.

The **Jackson's** garden, on the hillside above Cowichan Bay, was comprised mainly of well-established rhodos,, with many other interesting plants also. I saw mats of celandine in bloom, just as I remembered it from Scotland. What a wonderful ground-cover. There were several cinnabar-inums, not only healthy but 20 ft. in height. That area must be in Zone 9.

One of the most appreciated parts of the trip was the fact that we were in a very comfortable bus, considerably higher in the air than most cars, so we saw much more of the trees and shrubs than usual. Leaves were just opening out on many trees, with myriad shades of green, and ornamental cherry and plum trees were in full blossom. What a sight - street after street of pink blossoms, in each little town that we passed through.

Many householders and businesses along the highway, from Merville to Duncan, have planted quantities of daffodils along the verges of the highway. How lovely they all looked!

HOT OFF THE PRESS

At the ARS conference recently held in Bellevue, Wash., **John Lofthouse** of Vancouver was awarded a Silver Medal, and **Allyne Cook** a Gold. Both of these men have worked industriously for many years to promote rhododendrons in this country and abroad.

MAGNOLIAS

After admiring all the magnolias in Alan Murray's garden, I felt it was time to browse through the magnolia books and learn a little more about these spectacular large shrubs or trees. **Magnolias**, written by **Dorothy J. Callaway**, and published by Batsford and Timber Press, 1994 is a good reference book. There are chapters covering culture, propagation, keys explaining the genera, subgenera and sections of Magnolia and a key to cultivated species. Breeding is explained thoroughly. There are many line drawings and beautiful photographs.

I will quote from this book " One reason magnolias are so highly prized as landscape plants is that they are easy to grow and relatively pest-free. Once established, they require a minimum of attention and are forgiving when occasionally neglected." That sounds like the right kind of plant to accompany our rhodos!

Another useful magnolia book is **Magnolias, their Care and Cultivation**, written by **J.M. Gardiner** and published by Cassell in 1989. This book is also full of general and specific information about these beautiful plants, and many beautiful photographs.

I noticed that all the magnolias in **Alan Murray's** garden were deciduous. I have also noticed that large quantities of *Magnolia grandiflora*, an evergreen species, are sold in our local nurseries. This plant, "native to moist woods in the coastal plain from

central Florida, north to North Carolina, and west to Texas...In the wild, trees may reach 100 to 120 feet" (Callaway). According to Gardiner, the minimum temperature range in its natural home can be between 43F to 10.4F. It should survive all but the most rare severe winters that we have. However, it must be protected from severe gusts of wind, and perhaps that is why Alan Murray does not have one of these. The roots should also be protected from severe frosts.

As with rhodos, there are probably new hybrids coming along at an increasing rate. There are 76 cultivars of *Magnolia grandiflora* listed in Callaway's book, but the one I bought recently (Pocono) is not listed. So - will it survive in my rather cold garden? Time will tell.

WILD RHODODENDRONS

We have several species growing wild on Vancouver Island, and members of the Nanaimo chapter are planning visits to both of them. June 6 a picnic at Rhodo Lake, and a visit to the *R. macrophyllum* plants growing there. The group will leave the parking lot at Mac & Blo Northwest Bay Div. at 10:00 a.m. The road is usually very rough - a 4-wheel drive vehicle is best. Contact **Ward Porter**, 758 - 2494 for further information.

R. albiflorum is usually in bloom in Strathcona Park in late July or early August. Spring is sure to be late this year because of the extraordinarily heavy snow pack, but a trip is planned to Paradise Meadows to see these plants, by **Craig Clarke** of the Nanaimo chapter. Phone him if you wish to join the group, at 390 - 4090.

R. albiflorum is a dainty plant which looks lovely up in the park, but is very difficult to grow successfully in gardens. There are plants for sale at the Streamside Native Plant Nursery

in Courtenay if you want to "have a go". Bernie Guyader has (had?) a struggling example of this plant and knows how difficult it is to keep it thriving.

CAMPYLOGYNUM

Do you have a small garden? Do you love to wander through the nurseries - especially those that specialize in rhodos? Then here is the plant for you.

This little gem can be dwarf or semi-dwarf, depending on the form or clone. It usually has tiny evergreen leaves and large (considering the size of the plant) thimble-shaped flowers held on long stalks above the plant. The flowers can be any colour from purple through to white, and they often have a "bloom" of lighter colour on the outside of the petals, which are joined about half-way.

This plant is easy to root and very free-flowering from an early age. It cannot stand too much hot sun and dryness at the roots. Last summer in this area was hard on plants that were not in part shade.

Here are some forms to look for: *Leucanthemum* - not as vigorous as most, creamy white flowers; *Celsum* - taller than most; *Charopoeum* - the biggest leaves and flowers of a plum colour; UBC form has very dark flowers; *Cremastum* has leaves with green undersides (the others are silver), and "Bodnant Red" AM has red flowers. *Myrtilloides* is the lowest growing and has the smallest flowers, variable in colour, and is the most tender of the lot.

Quoting **Peter Cox "Encyclopedia of Rhodo Species"** - "*R. Campylogynum* is one of the finest dwarfs and a popular species where it grows well. We have collected different forms over the years and now have at least 15. It is variable in hardiness, some forms suffering in a hard winter

at Glendoick, and it dislikes high summer temperatures and dry soil. Introduced 1912, re-introduced 1981".

Greer's Guidebook lists these plants as being hardy to -10F but I think other factors can be a problem, such as dry soil and late spring frosts. Glendoick suffers from these frosts, as some of our colder gardens do, so be sure to give some thought to where in the garden you intend to plant your little gem.

Material taken from "Cox's Guide to Choosing Rhododendrons", Peter & Kenneth Cox, published by Batsford 1990, and "The Encyclopedia of Rhododendron Species", Peter & Kenneth Cox, Glendoick Publishing 1997.

DON'T PINCH ME (OR MINE)

I am copying this article, written by **Mike Trembath**, in the Fraser South Rhodo Society newsletter, in its entirety, because, from sometimes sad personal experience, I agree with her wholeheartedly.

"Wherever did this pernicious belief arise? - that rhodies require hands on picking, pinching and constant "shaping"!!- well, keep your blankety-blank pinching fingers off MY rhodies.

To be reasonable (after all, some of my best friends are commercial growers) I concede that the nursery trade seems to expect to have bushy, budded little dears in 2 gal. pots - to sell to the uninitiated and uninformed public in large quantities. But we rhodoholics should know better, surely. After all, not every person has a 'perfect' shape or form, and I say "Vive la difference".

I wonder - when I read of landscape or garden designers who dislike using many rhodies in their designs - complaining that they form heavy, dull,

uninteresting blobs of green when not in bloom - if this isn't the result of the "pinch it" syndrome.

Far from making a stronger plant, it is my feeling that plants forced to branch at a very early stage in their life, produce a skeletally weaker shrub. Breaking out the young plants sends growth shoots flying out from the starting stem at a wide angle - and leaves the plant wide open to being split down the main stem if subjected to heavy snow (or an inadvertent foot).

No doubt, if pinching is religeously continued, the plant can be forced to send some twigs back toward the centre, but often these "well branched" offerings from the nursery - in a few years - wind up like a ton-sure - an outlying fringe (of leaves and blossoms) and a bald centre - not a pleasant sight, and very prone to damage.

If, on the other hand, you stay those itchy fingers, and allow the plant to develop a spine, it will indeed branch on its own, certainly as soon as it blooms if not before, and these branches appear to me to be at a narrower angle to the stem, and so are more resistant to heavy pressure from above, such as a heavy rain or snow load.

I like to see differences in my garden - from those lovely mounds of "willie" and "yak" hybrids, to the stately tree-like growth that 'Sir Charles Lemon' should have, to the almost uncontrollable whippy sprawl of 'Sappho' and some of the older R. griersonianum hybrids.

I feel strongly enough about the hybrids - but I am adamant about the species - they really should be left alone to develop their own unique form.

If all of your afficianados agreed with me, I would say we need to educate

the gardening public. Since some of you are avid pinchers yourselves, I can only try to convince my own small circle!!"

MORE MEMBER NOTES

Please bring library books to the BBQ on June 12, so they can be checked off and put back into the library for the summer.

GARDEN TOUR

Did you join the tour of several interesting gardens in the area on May 16? We often saw black clouds but luckily managed to avoid the showers. There was a great variety of gardens, including a new one (how can two people do so much in just 4 years?), one being constantly added to, and several well established gardens - always with a few new rhodos added.

I decided, after seeing several absolutely beautiful ones, that I MUST have a bright yellow rhodo. I noted R. Yellow Petticoats, Hotei, Lila Pedigo, Morning Sunrise, all with large butter-yellow flowers, and small-flowered Goldilocks and Yellow Hammer. Many rhodos are in full flower at present, and, because of the late season, many daffodils and tulips are still looking handsome. All the gardens were a treat to visit, and we must thank most sincerely the people who kindly opened their gardens to the public. Many thanks also to the members who kindly spent the day in these gardens, welcoming visitors.

There were over 300 tickets sold, even though many people were probably held back by the iffy weather. Altogether a most successful and enjoyable day. Many thanks to all concerned, including the providers of delicious cakes and cookies which were available at **Gwen Wright's** garden for tired and hungry visitors.

Do you read the "Coastal Grower"

magazine? There are always interesting and instructive articles which pertain to gardening on Vancouver Island. They are happy to receive tips from readers so if you have a favorite idea or recipe for success, don't be shy - send it down to them (but how about a copy to the editor of this newsletter so we can share the information).

HOSTAS AS RHODO COMPANIONS

There are two really useful books on Hostas, and I will browse both of them and add remarks of my own.

The **Hosta Book**, by **Paul Aden**, pub. Timber Press 1988, and **The Gardener's Guide to Growing Hostas**, by **Diana Grenfell**, pub. Timber Press 1996.

Both books have marvellous photos of a great variety of Hostas, many of which can be purchased locally, as nurseries are responding to customer demand for these plants. Both have articles written by various "Hosta Experts" and discussions on the original home of the plant (mountainous areas of Japan), cultivation, companion planting, and lists of the best, the biggest, the most colourful. I can't say which book is the better - I am glad to have both.

Hostas do exceptionally well in all areas of Vancouver Island. They like a cool, damp root-run, but will put up with an amazing variety of soils and locations. I have seen them in large pots in full sun, and they look just as happy as those in shade. They slowly expand into large plants, and can be dug up, chopped into halves or quarters (often an axe is the only possible implement), and replanted or shared with friends.

There is a great variation of size, from tiny 2" leaves to those 12" across, thick or delicate in texture, straight or wavy edges, and colour

combinations which include shades of blue or green, often with centres or edges of white, cream or yellow.

These plants make a fabulous groundcover, if large, or edging to a border if tiny. If spring flowering bulbs are planted among them, the hosta leaves, by the time they expand, can hide the yellowing leaves of the daffodils or crocuses. They certainly take up so much space that weeds don't have much of a chance. In fall, the leaves turn yellow for a week or so, then the plants disappear for the winter. At that time you can pull the odd grass or weed that dared to entrench itself.

There are two problems with hostas - well, not really problems. Some people complain that the flowers "arn't much", but really, they have bell-like flowers, attractively placed on tall stalks, sometimes perfumed, in shades from white to purple, in mid-summer, when the rhodos have nearly all finished blooming.

The other problem is of course slugs, not only the crawly ones, but also the deer, (which are called giant slugs by your editor) at times. I have tried various ways of deterring slugs, and am presently happy with the combination of dried egg shells and ground oyster shells that encircle every plant. Needless to say, I won't have to give the rhodos extra lime next winter! I don't know the remedy for deer, having tried everything except an 8 ft. fence around the entire property. This would be extremely expensive and anyway they don't do any damage in the woods.

I will quote from Grenfell's book and article "Hostas in North America" by Warren Pollock. "According to trade information, the genus *Hosta* is now the most favoured herbaceous perennial in the United States....A prime reason for their popularity is that hostas can solve the problem of find-

ing a perennial to grow in the shade. Hostas will tolerate shade; in fact almost all of them need a degree of shade in the US.

Hostas can grow in all but the semi-tropical and extremely frigid regions of North America, a vast geographic expanse extending from the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 7 in the south to Zone 2 in the north... It seems their only requirement is a period of dormancy during the winter months. Beautiful specimen clumps can be found in Birmingham, Alabama ...Portland, Ore., Toronto, Ont. and though the season is short, in Anchorage, Alaska.

Low maintenance gardening is fashionable today, especially with busy young homemakers and senior citizens, and hostas are a relatively maintenance-free plant."

Well, that all explains why I have so many hostas in my garden. They help brighten up the borders when the rhodos have finished flowering, and they keep out the weeds. I can stand the odd chewed leaf if a slug manages to crawl over the oyster shell!

I feel sure you will not be able to resist begging or buying one of these lovely plants, once you browse through either of the books mentioned. It is hard to resist them once you see the bright yellow edges of "Wide Brim" or puckered blue leaves of "True Blue" or the frilly yellow edges of "Lights Up".

I could go on and on, but a visit to a local nursery right now will give you many ideas.

**HAPPY
RHODODENDRONS!**
SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER