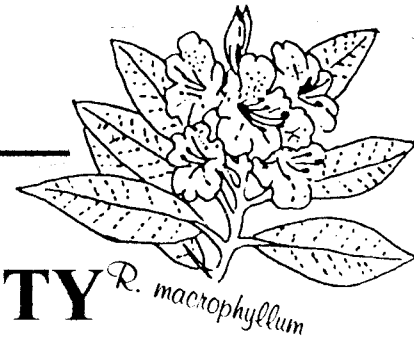


# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



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## 2 March

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Pauline and Dick Bonney**, 2393 Seabank Rd. Drive down Waveland (opposite direction from Comox) and turn left at the end.

## 9 March

**Betty Kennedy** will give us all kinds of interesting information about the Finnerty Garden at the University of Victoria. Did you know that many of the Buchanan Simpson rhodos (those that didn't come to Greig's garden at Royston) were dug up and transported to UVic, the work of many dedicated volunteers. Most of the rhodos survived the transplanting trauma and now give a striking display of colour from January to June every year.

## 9 February

Those who braved the snow that night enjoyed an entertaining evening with **Alan Murray** of the Cowichan Valley Rhodo Society. Alan described several exciting trips to the Botney Valley, in the Lillooet area. What a contrast between that country and the wet coast! Thank you, Alan, for giving us a little respite from the seemingly eternal rain!

## COMOX VALLEY RHODO GARDEN

In between rainstorms and hurricane-force winds, our intrepid garden committee worked to put in a retaining wall around a big tree, moved the sign to a better position, and by 13 Feb., finished the rockery. Drop by to admire the work and watch for rhodo blooms in the next couple of weeks. Many thanks to **Tru-Line Masonry** and **Landscape Products** for the good service - and price - we received on the Desertstone Blocks.

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS! Garden Tour

27 ~~30~~ March, 2-4 p.m. at the home of **Bob Argall**  
387 Wireless Rd, Comox. (Off Kye Bay Rd).  
Bob has an amazing display of flowering bulbs.

At our 13 April meeting, we look forward to an evening with **Carol Dancer** of Victoria, who will give us interesting information on growing rhodos on the East Coast of Canada. You can re-read our April 1998 newsletter, describing a rather famous Canadian rhodo personality, Dick Steele, who has grown rhodos in Nova Scotia for 25 years.

## Bus Tour

1 May. Depart Courtenay 8:00 a.m. Four gardens in the Duncan - Cowichan area. The **Cowichan Valley Rhodo Society** will provide lunch, and our group will take desserts for the meal. Cost - \$25 per person. More details later.

## Western Regional Conference 14-17 Sept. 2000

The Cowichan Valley Rhodo Society will host the conference, to be held at the Inn at the Water, Cowichan Bay. 250 ARS members from around the Pacific Northwest are expected. There will be excellent speakers, a salmon BBQ, a garden tour, and banquet with Frank Fujioka as guest speaker.

## I FORGOT

The Feb. newsletter should have had information on rhodos recently brought up to **Linda Easton's** garden, by Clint Smith of Benjamin Rhodos, Sumner, Wash. Here is a place to buy interesting species rhodos and maple trees which may be difficult to find anyplace else. The address is 4077 S. Island Hwy, Campbell River (top of the Oyster Bay hill, just before you get to York Road). Please phone ahead to view plants, weekends, 923 - 4166. If you have been tied up at Customs, even with all correct papers, you will appreciate being able to buy rhodos from Washington after someone else has handled all the pesky details.

In recent years, **Clint Smith** has been working on creating beautiful rhodo hybrids capable of withstanding droughts and extremes of temperature. He plans to start registering some of these plants in the near future.

## FERTILIZER

This has been the second very wet winter in a row (255 mm rain in the first 14 days of Feb. in my garden this year-that's over 8", folks) and it is

probable any fertilizer given the garden last year will be washed away by now. If you didn't get the dolomite lime around your rhodos during January, do it now. Then, in a week or ten days, add a little fertilizer containing 6-8-6 (more or less) plus added trace elements.

Or you can mix your own organic fertilizer, using (by volume) 4 parts fishmeal or seedmeal, 1 part rock phosphate or 1/2 part bonemeal, 1 part dolomite lime (if you didn't put it on previously) and 1/2 part kelpmeal. Hopefully, the worst of the winter's rainstorms will be finished by the middle of March, and the fertilizer will have a chance to sink in and feed the plants. Mix it with a little soil, compost or double-screened bark and sprinkle it around the plants, being careful to avoid the trunks.

### CUTTINGS

Notes taken from the **Vancouver Rhodo Society** newsletter of Jan. 1999.

Some rhodos take up to 2 years to root. Take cuttings from smaller leaved plants early in the growing season, and those from deciduous azaleas when the new leaves come out. Yellow rhodos root better if cuttings are taken in July. Cuttings from Lem's Cameo will root easier if taken in winter - Dec. to Feb. If the stem snaps when bent, it is probably too late to take a cutting. Having said all this, Harry Wright's perennial advice is "take cuttings when you have time". Peat, perlite and coarse sand in equal parts make a good cuttings mixture.

Another item in that same newsletter informs us that if you need (free) plastic pots, go to the Loughheed Ave. Gardenworks store in Burnaby, and you will find a recycling bin in the parking lot full of pots and trays of all sizes. Help yourself! What a wonderful idea for the next time any member goes to "the big city".

### OLDIES BUT GOODIES

On reading an article by **Dr. Mike Trembath** of the Fraser South Rhodo group, I am reminded of the 'old days' in Campbell River, 40 or so years ago, when Art Knapp used to bring a truckload of plants for sale (local nurseries were few and far between at that time). Now, many gardens in the older parts of the city have huge old rhodos and hydrangeas, name tags long gone. Here are descriptions by Mike Trembath of some of the rhodos which you will probably recognize from the descriptions:

Helene Schiffner (FCC 1893 and still unbeatable). Dark foliage, dark red bud scales, pure white flowers in a neat truss. Another white (prior to 1886) is Chionoides, white flowers with yellow centre, rather coarse and rugose foliage, but very hardy and a reliable bloomer.

Sappho - pre 1887 - very striking with its round white truss and strong purple blotch. Unfortunately she is a rangy plant, tending to sprawl. No use trying to train her - better to let her hang over a more compact plant. Extremely hardy.

Mrs. A.T. de la Mare is a great plant for hiding something unsightly like a shed or garbage can. She is HUGE. She has a big white truss with green markings, and wonderful fragrance. In the same category is Beauty of Littleworth, with its dark foliage and huge Loderi-type truss of pure white with purple throat speckles.

White Pearl (Halopeanum) 1896, another beautiful white flower with red throat whiskers and very handsome dark foliage.

All of these rhodos are white. How about the huge old pink plants in town - are they all Pink Pearl (1897) or Cynthia (previous to 1870)? We will have to do more investigating.

Since they were planted in the late 1940's, we have had every kind of weather, every kind of winter, but nothing seems to bother them.

Then there are the red ones - Jock, Elizabeth, John Walter, Trilby - many of these were grafted onto R. ponticum stock in those days, and we now see the odd plant with half red flowers and half mauve. Eventually the ponticum will override the grafted-on plant, and should be trimmed off.

### WEEVILS IN WINTER

Last July and August, the beetles of the Black Vine Weevil and Strawberry Weevil not only chewed the distinctive semi-circular holes along the rhodo leaf margins, but laid quantities of white eggs on the leaves or on the ground near the plants. The eggs hatched by September, and the larvae burrowed 6-12" into the ground for the winter, eating fine rhodo roots as they went.

When the weather warms up a little, in spring, these grubs can do really serious injury to the plants; devouring fine roots as well as feeding on the bark of larger roots and trunks. They reach full size (1/2") by May or early June, and after pupation of 2-3 weeks, the adults emerge to start the cycle again.

Nematodes seem to be the most successful eradicator of these pests, but they cannot be used until warmer weather arrives. Meantime Isotox can be sprayed around the base of the plants in hopes of discouraging the weevils as they emerge in the next month or two.

### LILIES IN CONTAINERS

Lovely rhodo companions, and in containers, they can be tucked under a rhodo so the branches hold the stems firmly and the lilies peek through to give a second flush of colour to the rhodo bed.

**Nancy Barnum**, writing in the BCLS Newsletter, wrote:

"Have you tried growing lilies in red-wood boxes, or clay, wooden, ceramic or plastic pots? If not, you are missing out on placing that perfect lily in just the right spot to enjoy while it is at its best.

To grow lilies, the spot for planting on your porch, patio or balcony must have a minimum of 3 hours of full sun per day. All containers should have ample holes for drainage and be raised at least 1 1/2 inches from the floor, to avoid over-heating the roots. Allow lots of room - a container 12" wide and 14" deep will hold 1 large bulb or 3 small ones. A minimum height for the container is 11" as the bulbs should be planted 5-6" deep. Larger containers can contain more bulbs.

Soil should be porous and rich in humus. A good mix would contain 1/3 loam, 1/3 humus and 1/3 sand or perlite with a generous sprinkling of bone meal. Make a cushion of sand or perlite and spread the roots. Proper drainage is essential.

Water the bulbs immediately after planting and mulch them with 2" wood chips. Never let them dry out completely in winter as they are never totally dormant. On an uncovered patio or balcony, normal rainfall may be enough. If the temperature goes below 20F for a time, in winter, it would be wise to bury the pots or keep them in a cold frame or greenhouse for a few weeks.

In early spring, move the containers to a sunny spot, and watch for small green shoots. At this time remove the mulch, work in all-purpose fertilizer, replace the mulch and water. Weekly watering (when no rain) and fertilizer every second week will produce strong, healthy plants. Staking may be necessary.

Most Asiatics will bloom 9-12 weeks after sending up shoots. After blooming, the stem and all leaves must be left to provide nourishment for the bulb. Diminish watering, and add a little fertilizer in the fall.

A few magnificent lilies will transform your patio, porch or balcony into a delightful space of glorious colour, allowing you to enjoy their beauty and fragrance".

#### SNIPPETS FROM HERE AND THERE -

ARS Journal Jan. 1986 **Jan Palmer**, Berry Botanic Garden, Portland, Ore.

Winter Propagation of Dwarf Rhodos (these dwarfs include *R. williamsianum*, *yakushmanum*, *floccigerum*, *ciliatum*, *hanceanum*, *chrysanthum*, *forrestii* var. *repens*, and *leucapsis*).

Equipment needed: a greenhouse bench with heating cable set at 70F, a sharp knife and thin gauge plastic (dry cleaning bag). Take cuttings in mid-Feb. Cut just below a leaf node at the base of last-year's growth, remove flower buds, and make two light wounds on either side of the stem.

First, immerse all material in a captan solution 1 tbsp. to 1 gal. water. air dry, then dip bottoms in rootone powder. Use a 60:40 peat and perlite mix, well watered and firmed, insert cuttings, cover loosely with the dry cleaning bag. Weight tucked-in ends to make a loose tent. Don't let leaves touch the plastic.

Once a day, gently lift the plastic to release droplets, and once a week take off and reverse the plastic (leave it off for an hour or so each time). Within 8-10 weeks, most of the cuttings should be rooted.

Gently put the cuttings in small pots, and leave them in the greenhouse for

a week or so before moving them out to a cold frame.

Watch for sunny weather in Feb. and March - cuttings can be cooked in a very short time. Have shading ready to cover the tender new shoots.

This material was originally taken from the "Nursery Stock Manual", by Lamb, Kelly and Bowbrick, Grower Books, 49 Doughty St., London, 1975.

Taken from ARS Journal Jan. 1986. It was adapted from one printed in Berry Botanic Garden newsletter, Summer 1985.

#### PRIMULAS AS COMPANION PLANTS

The 6 Feb. 1999 issue of Amateur Gardening has a lovely article on Primroses and Polyanthus, just in time, as there are plants in bloom at all the nurseries. Have you been confused by the names - primulas, primroses, polyanthus? What is the difference between them? I will quote, and hopefully explain some of the muddle:

"Primroses have been popular garden



*P. polymera* (Sect. *Cortusoides*) (x 1) (p. 41)

plants since Medieval times. Our native (in England) *Primula vulgaris*

(common primrose) exists in a wide variety of subspecies which have been selected over the last 200 years for different flower colours.

Other hybrids combine the genes of the primrose with those of the cowslip and oxslip, together with a couple of other European species, and have been given the name of polyanthus. These produce flowers of primrose size, on a head at the end of a stocky stem which supports the blooms well clear of the leaves.

While many primrose and polyanthus hybrids have a large yellow eye to the flowers, other selections bear blooms which are variously edged, veined and flecked with colours. There are also double forms, and types where the flowers are backed with a ruff of small leaves ("Jack-in-the-green") or another set of floral parts ("hose-in-hose").

Some of the most attractive polyanthus are the Cowichan types which bear blooms of a single, almost solid colour with only the smallest circle of yellow at the centre.

Both primroses and polyanthus are tough plants which also look good in winter containers. The robust leaves are unharmed by cold weather and the flowers appear during mild spells from mid-Feb. to late May.

Although often treated as annual spring bedding, these plants are reliably perennial if lifted and divided regularly. Young plants are best for bedding; after they have bloomed, they can be transplanted into the perennial border. Here they will continue to flower for many years... Among the best of the many forms available are the Barnhaven strains which bear masses of flowers".

Ed. Note: Three items not mentioned in the article are deer and root weevils, which can be serious pests in our

area. If your primroses look rather ill, you may find the weevils have eaten all the roots. Look them over carefully before re-planting - you may find a weevil or two in the roots. As for deer, I have had them eat whole plants, in bloom, straight from the nursery and freshly planted. The only plants they haven't eaten are the candlebra types like *P. florindae*.

The reason, in our area, for lifting and dividing after the plants bloom, is our hot dry summers. These plants will not survive heat and dry roots. Many people plant them temporarily in a shaded spot, for the summer, remembering to water them regularly, then divide and replant in Sept. when new growth appears.

#### MORE MEMBER NOTES

**Herb Spady**, Chairman of the ARS Hardiness Committee, wrote to say "The erratic and episodic cold weather that the continent is experiencing this year should provide an opportunity to collect significant hardiness data on rhododendrons".

If you already have a list of all the rhodos in your garden, it will be easy to make notes and send them in to Herb. In this area, we had only one significant snowfall, and very little frost. But RAIN - wow, have we had rain. If any of your plants are in heavy soil or in an area which floods occasionally, you will likely have damage to report. If you are on the Internet you can get a copy of the criteria at <http://members.aol.com/RandANews/Hardiness.htm> or at the Rhodo and Azalea News website at <http://members.aol.com/RandANews/news.html>

Perhaps it is time to remind you, again, that rhodo roots must have sufficient water (for instance, last summer some plants were lost because the odd sprinkling I was able to

give them should have been directed at the roots rather than the leaves). But anyone with heavy soil should raise their plants so they get the drainage they need when there is excessive rainfall. Just shovel the plant out, add a mixture of sand or fine gravel and bark mulch or compost to the hole, using the opportunity to add a little bone meal, and replant the rhodo on top of the pile. Add more bark mulch and compost to the surrounding area.

#### NOMINATION UPDATE

Good News! **Pauline and Dick Bonney and Ernie Exner** have kindly offered to continue the excellent work they are doing as Membership Committee and Treasurer, but we need a Secretary. This is not a difficult job, but it is fun - and very necessary to the club. Please volunteer - or you might find yourself conscripted!

Don't forget our Rhodo Shows and Sales are coming up soon - 25 April at the Fairgrounds in Courtenay and 2 May at the Willow Point Hall in Campbell River. Volunteers are always needed to help man the display tables, sell tickets, take in memberships, serve coffee, and most important, setting up in the morning. Hundreds of plants to move onto the tables and hundreds of flower trusses to display. This is a great opportunity to offer your artistic talents and learn the names and habits of rhodos you may not have seen before. If you are not available in the morning, then come in the afternoon and help clean up. Of course you need to bring your checkbook too - there is always a little treasure needing a home in YOUR garden.



*R. columbianum*