

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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Scotia. She showed slides which demonstrated that people in that far-off part of Canada grow the same plants we do, with great success. Rhodos, hostas, hellebores, roses - their gardens looked just like ours. Why was I surprised? Same reason that some Seattle people think they will be knee-deep in snow as soon as they cross the 49th parallel (in June!)

Nothing else does, and I never have enough egg shells for the job.

Touring nurseries is one of my favorite relaxations and what a pleasure to roam around the **Native Plants Nursery** up the road from the pole-yard in Courtenay. All plants well laid out, easy-walking paths, a bench by the pool (bring lunch if you like), easy to read price lists - what a lovely cool place to go on a hot summer day. There is a good supply of plants native to B.C. (some native to California too, but we need variety).

## 4 May

Executive meeting will be at the home of Lynn & Paul Wurz, 4367 Gordon Rd., Campbell River. A map is enclosed. It is a few miles north of Campbell River, and you may find there are detours as the new highway is being built in the area of the bridge over the Campbell River.

**Bill Georgeson** brought information and a plan of the proposed Therapeutic Garden at Anderton Nursery. Some of our members are taking an interest in this venture, and more information will be forthcoming in the next few months.

## WHY ARE WE RHODO NUTS?

**Helen Chesnut**, writing in the Times Colonist, hit it right on the head. I quote "Probably no flowering shrub is more well loved here on Vancouver Island than the rhododendron. Given congenial growing conditions, rhodos are faithful and flamboyant garden performers. Even in the dark of winter the lush, leathery-leaved shrubs hold in their fat buds the promise of spring, when the gradual colouring and opening of the blossoms is a much anticipated and treasured pleasure".

## 11 May

The Annual General meeting will be held at the home of **Marleen and Dave Crucq**, 2301 Seabank. Drive down Waveland to Seabank, turn right to 2301 on the corner of June Rd.

## MEMBER NOTES

The bus tour of Cowichan Valley gardens is all set for 1 May. We will meet at the usual bus stop on McPhee Ave., across from the school yard (park your car there). Bring a yummy dessert - we expect a total of about 100 people.

From the Campbell River end, turn off the highway and drive east on Kitty Coleman Rd., continue on until you get to Waveland. From the Courtenay or Comox side, up Ryan, down Anderton to Waveland.

The annual BBQ will be held at the home of **Gwen and Harry Wright**, "Haida Gold Gardens", 769 Chaster, Courtenay. For new members - drive up Ryan Road to Back Road, turn right and drive along to 10th (red blinking light), right again, down the hill to Chaster - turn right (road ends in Harry's yard). The date is 12 June - there will not be a regular Tues. meeting in June.

Who could say it better?

Plan to arrive early in order to tour the garden before the meeting starts. Remember to bring a garden chair - of course it will be a warm sunny night - Harry said so!

## COMPLAINTS

This is the time of year that I prefer the garden to the computer, so you may find long quotes from experts, or articles copied from older issues of our or other newsletters. If you dare complain, you will be condemned to writing an article for the next newsletter.

## 13 April

We all enjoyed the evening with **Carol Dancer**, who told us something of gardening in Nova

On reading about the ultimate slug bait, I rushed down to Black Creek Farm & Feed for a big bag of crushed oyster shells, and spread them thickly around each hosta. I hope it works.

## FERTILIZERS

Here is good advice on organic vs inorganic fertilizers, also taken from a recent copy of the Times Colonist.

"Natural fertilizers, made of bone meal, blood meal, feathers, seaweed, fish byproducts, bat droppings, ash from sunflower seed hulls, and a variety of other substances are becoming increasingly popular. Most of these packaged fertilizers also include nitrogen-converting microbes.

The primary difference between conventional, inorganic fertilizers and organic fertilizers is that inorganics exist in a ready nitrate state. The moment you add water, the nutrients can be absorbed by plant roots.

Organic fertilizers, in contrast, must first be converted by microbes in the soil from an organic to an inorganic state. The microbes actually produce the nitrates. As this process takes place deeper in the soil, the nitrates are not as exposed to surface runoff. Because nutrients are released slowly, organics can be applied any time throughout the year.

The one disadvantage is that organics are generally more expensive. You may be able to beat the system, however, by buying the ingredients in bulk and mixing your own. Look to blood meal for nitrogen, bone meal for phosphorus and sunflower seed ash for potassium."

After all that, it might be easier to go to Black Creek Farm & Feed and get a BIG bag of rhodo fertilizer at a special members' price. Green Valley Rhodo & Azalea Food contains the usual 10-8-6 plus various trace

elements such as sulphur, magnesium, iron, boron, etc.

## BOOK REVIEW

I found a lovely little book "BULBS" by Sunset Books Inc., 1998, in the local library, which is worthwhile borrowing. There is a comprehensive overview of kinds of "bulbs", where they occur naturally, how to give them a happy home in your garden. There are very good photos and descriptions of every kind of bulbous plant you are ever likely to see, complete with history, place of birth, climatic zones in which they will grow. The zone map is different to what we are used to in that it goes up to zone 45, but there are careful



*Virginia Richards*

descriptions of climate and temperatures in each of them. (We live in their zones 4/5).

This small book is so comprehensive I think it would be a good one to add to a "Birthday or Christmas" list.

## THE RHODODENDRON - A PLANT FOR ALL SEASONS

Karen Shuster wrote, in the April 1992 newsletter of the Vancouver Rhodo Society,

"RHODODENDRON - a plant for all seasons, a plant for all locations. But which plant?

When you are no longer satisfied with buying something on the basis of big red flowers, when you have joined the Rhodo Society and feel it's time to start being selective, consider the following helpful hints:

### Rule #1

Flowers last only a few short days, but you will be looking at the plant

for many years. Go for good-looking plants.

You can't go wrong with a yak or any of it's hybrids. They all have terrific flowers as well as fascinating foliage.

Others worth considering are "Unique", pseudochrysanthum, and campanulatum var. 'aeruginosum'.

### Rule #2

Keep it simple. Don't set your heart on a plant not available locally. There are so many others which will make you happy.

"PJM" is a doer - a

medium sized plant with aromatic foliage and bright flowers. "Dora Amateis" is a vision in white. If you want a larger plant, try "The Honourable Jean Marie de Montague" with its vibrant red flowers. Something small? R. impeditum is a tight little bush covered with bright blue-purple flowers.

### Rule #3

Do some research. A combination of walks in a well-labelled garden and book browsing should do the trick.

When in Vancouver, Van dusen Garden and the Asian Garden at UBC are essential stops. Make use of the club library and the local libraries.

#### Rule #4

Choose a plant which is at its best when you are in the garden. If you spend every June in Arizona, don't buy late blooming auriculatum and Exbury azaleas. If you need a winter pick-me-up, choose early bloomers like "Snow Lady" and R. moupinense, and plant them in a protected spot under a window so you can see them blooming in the rain.

#### Rule #5

Ask the experts. Rhodo society members like to talk about plants even more than growing them, so use the social time at the meetings, or beg for a garden tour.

#### Rule #6

Indulge your fancy. There is no ultimate criterion. If you like purple, plant every shade of it - there are many varieties of R. augustinii which offer every shade of blue/purple. If fragrance is your desire, look for Loderi hybrids, or one of the many deciduous azaleas.

#### Rule #7

If something does well in your garden, get more like it. If you have nothing but sun, go for deciduous azaleas. If R. williamsianum does well, it has so many friends and relations (Wilbrit, Linda, Bow Bells, Karin, Moonstone for instance) that you can appear to have lots of variety while staying within a narrow range.

#### Rule #8

Don't ever be discouraged. The experts as well as you will lose plants occasionally. These are not losses, but opportunities to acquire replacements.

#### Rule #9

Don't throw good money after bad. If "Purple Splendour" dies on you twice, forget it.

#### Rule #10

Take a chance. Buy young, inexpensive plants at the club sales and grow them on. They have a better chance of making it if they grow up in your garden. If they don't do well, you haven't lost much; on the other hand, one may turn out to be the love of your life!

### COMPANION PLANTS

The hellebores (Ornithoglossum hybrids) are making their usual spectacular showing in woody places, which reminds me to dig up "babies" for club members in early Sept. according to the books. Seeds tried last year came to nothing, perhaps the very long hot summer followed by a wet wet fall/winter caused them to give up, but I have many self-sown plants in the woods. The hostas are just poking their noses out, and so are the slugs, so let's hope the combination of egg shells and oyster shells make a good deterrent. I'll keep you informed. Many hardy geraniums were evergreen, or almost so, this year, so the plants look lovely now and are spreading into wide mats under the shrubs. I am looking forward to the flowers. Unfortunately the deer have a taste for some varieties, though they never touch macrorrhizum, probably because of the strong smell of the leaves. I shouldn't say "never" - they ate the species crocus leaves this winter, for the first time.

We made another trip to **Bob Argall's** wonderful garden recently, and saw hundreds of varieties of daffodils in bloom. They make wonderful companions for rhodos, and according to the experts at Amateur Gardening, you can have daffs 9 months of the year if you choose carefully between all the

species and hybrid varieties. Deer "never" eat daffodil leaves, well, hardly ever. If you plant daffs and other bulbs near the hostas, the larger hosta leaves will hide the dying daff foliage. It is a mistake to cut or tie the leaves - the bulb is counting on healthy leaves to build up flower buds for next year.

### MY FAVORITE RHODO

Probably, in general, whichever one is in flower. For instance, this year I have a good show on Unique and it is lovely. Last year it had two trusses, hardly noticed it.

There are many buds on Loderi King George this year - he will be my favorite in a few weeks. I love little R. impeditum - it always blooms in March, except this year - two or three flowers at the end of April? What's going on?

But after all, he was blooming in Oct/Nov.

### QUICK NOTES FROM AMATEUR GARDENING

The latest copy includes several items which should interest all gardeners.

There has been a great deal of discussion lately on genetically altered or modified crops. The latest "a research team led by Dr. Nicholas Birch, at the Scottish Research Institute at Dundee, has found that altering the genetic make-up of plants to resist aphids could have a serious effect on ladybugs. Altering the food chain could cause the lifespan and fertility of ladybugs to fall dramatically".

There are so many things for us to worry about. Unfortunately for us, genetic engineering has gone on for years, and it may be many more years before we know the final results, good or bad.

**Blooms of Bressingham** has been sold. A management buy-out team has purchased four plant centres,

including Bressingham. I wonder if Alan Bloom has decided to retire? Did you know he came out to Vancouver Island in the 1940s and tried to start up a nursery at Fanny Bay? He didn't stay very long. 50 years ahead of his time, alas.

Which are the biggest flowers in the world? *Rafflesia* from the rainforests of Borneo and Sumatra has a 36" flower with 5 orange petals. It smells of rotting flesh.

*Amorphophallus titanum* (Titan Arum) grows in the Sumatrum rainforest and has flower spikes of up to 9 ft. This one smells of rotting fish. Ugh!

### DES KENNEDY LEADS A CRUISE IN SEPTEMBER

Are you interested in the "Nature lovers" cruise to Alaska, Sept. 17-24. Rates start at \$745 US per person. The ship is the 5 star "Galaxy" and Marleen has a folder of further information. You can also phone Aji Fliss at 334-3323 or 1-800-665-2780.

Talking of tours, **Donna Dawson** in Nanaimo (Internet address [donna@icangarden.com](mailto:donna@icangarden.com)) lines up several tours per year to Britain (Chelsea and Hampton court Shows) and gardens in France and Germany. More information via Internet, or ask the editor for the Nanaimo Newsletter containing information.

### R. RACEMOSUM

Here is a dainty little rhodo that should have a place in every garden. It seldom grows higher than 1.5m in height, and grows best in a sunny spot, where it will remain neat and stocky. The chief characteristic of the subsection *Scabrifolia*, to which this plant belongs, is the axillary flowers, in other words, it flowers all up the stem instead of just at the ends. It blooms late April/early May and the flowers can be white to many shades of pink.

Young stems are red, adding to the spring display, and the leaves are small and grey-green in colour,

So if anyone wants to order from the USA, beware".



*R. racemosum*

glaucous underneath. It is a hardy, reliable little plant.

**HARRY WRIGHT** would like to start up a hybridizing group. If any members are interested, please phone him.

### YOU PAYS YOUR MONEY, YOU TAKES YOUR CHANCES

Here is a report from **Ernie Exner**. "As many people know, I am a collector of fragrant rhodos. In the winter issue of the *ARS Journal* there was an ad for fragrant rhodies from Singing Tree Gardens in California.

I e-mailed him and asked if they shipped to Canada, and he said no problem, so I ordered 4 rhodies costing \$57.80 US.

Well, a couple of weeks later he phoned and said the order was ready and with the shipping cost, and phytosanitary certificate the total was \$94.15 US, which is subject to exchange of about 54%, which we put on VISA.

When they got to my home U.P.S. had another surprise - there is GST on the \$94.15, plus Broker's Fee plus GST. Anyway, the total cost for my 4 one-gallon rhodies was \$189.36 Can.

Golly, Ernie, we can only hope the plants are healthy and grow like crazy. Then you can sell us all cuttings at a high price, and try to get some of your money back.

### PLANTING TIPS

When a rhodo has been dug out of the ground, it may have had a few roots cut, and this will initiate new growth. But a plant which has been in a pot for six months or a year

will not be disturbed by the removal of the pot. Roots may be hard packed or grown round and round in the pot.

I have noticed that recently plants from nurseries seem to be growing in pure bark mulch - no soil, with a sprinkle of Osmokote on the surface. How well these roots will settle down in the garden is problematical.

I find they often need to be sawed quite severely with an old bread knife, even to the extent of sawing off an inch of solid roots in the bottom of the pot. I hope they survive this harsh treatment, but it is essential to convince the roots they must grow out into the surrounding soil.

These plants will need lots of tender loving care for the first two summers in your garden. Dig a big hole for them, and add lots of compost or bark mulch and a handful of bone meal before placing the rhodo in the hole, or on top of a pile of compost if you have heavy, poorly drained soil.

Try to give the plants 1" of water per week, by rain or hose, and be sure to soak the root area, not just the leaves.