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NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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2 Nov

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Marleen & Dave Crucq**, 2301 Seabank. Drive down Waveland to Seabank, turn right to 2301 on the corner of June.

9 Nov

Dave Dougan will bring us up to date on plans for "Rhodo Conference 2000" to be held in Duncan next fall.

12 Oct

Bob Lofthouse told us how easy it is to root rhodo cuttings. He has a "new" method, which involves a large glass case (an old goldfish tank is ideal for the job), perlite only for the medium, and a constant temperature of about 65F for a few months. You can see the new roots through the glass, and start transplanting them about Feb. or March from an Oct. start to the job.

Our main speaker, Norm Todd showed us lovely slides of Thailand and entertained us with many stories of his eventful trip to that far-away land. Not many rhodos, to be sure, but a host of beautiful buildings and scenery quite different from anything we see in our country. A large

crowd of members really enjoyed the evening.

MEMBER NOTES

The November meeting is the last chance to pay membership dues for the next year and still receive your January copy of the ARS Journal. If you can't make the meeting, mail a cheque in the envelope provided, or phone **Ernie Exner** to make arrangements to pay.

What's going on in your garden these days? I'll tell you what I have been working at. Tall 25 year-old azaleas were chopped down and removed (finding that they don't have compact roots!). To fill the empty space I moved in some grasses, some hostas, some dwarf rhodos along the edges and lots of crocuses.

How to save \$25 - and spend \$40!

Helen Chesnut described the planting up of a wooden half-barrel with a layer of daffodils on the bottom, tulips in the middle, and crocuses in the top few inches, with lots of fertilizer and compost. We have on hand a blue plastic half-barrel, acquired at the dump and painted green, and we went back to the nursery for more bulbs. No tulips - the deer eat them, so there are daffs and narcissus in the bottom, hyacinths in the middle, then large crocuses followed by winter-flowering crocuses.

That should make a nice showing for a couple of months.

I am always pleased to be able to use or re-use something considered a terrible weed, and I have mentioned

how pretty the colchicums look poking through a mass of variegated Aegopodium (Bishop's Weed). You can help control the Bishop's Weed by cutting it to the ground at the end of June when you trim off the colchicum leaves. By the time the flowers open, there is a flush of new growth on the B.W. If the whole mass is in full sun under a tree, you have a striking display in the fall, especially in a fall such as we have this year, with almost no rain to bash the flowers down.

On reading the book "Bamboos", Recht & Wetterwald, Timber Press 1992, an excellent book, beautifully illustrated, I found my latest plan for using unusable material. Bamboos don't need much in the way of fertilizer, but they do need silica to strengthen their long stems. Where can we get silica? Why, chopped-up horsetail, of course. We have about an acre of horsetail, so the next job for the chipper will be to make a nice bagful of silica for the bamboos.

Talking of books, I would like to recommend "Tree Pruning" by **Alex Shigo**, published by Shigo & Trees Associates, Durham, NH. This book, a copy of which is in our library, is full of marvellous photos of the right and wrong way to prune trees. Slices of trunks and branches have been photographed to show how mistakes by the pruner turn into disasters for the tree. Before you do any more pruning, be sure to borrow this book and learn the correct way to do it.

CYMBIDIUMS

Do you ever look longingly at the beautiful orchids displayed at Art Knapp's Nursery (and at probably many other outlets) and think "Oh, I'd love to have one of them but I don't know how to look after it".

One of the easiest orchids to grow is the Cymbidium. They are large plants, not suitable for a windowsill, but they are much hardier than most, grow outside year-round in California, and are quite happy outdoors here from June to the end of September.

They grow well in cool conditions, positioned in light, frost-free conservatories, porches, or cool living rooms. Water once a week in winter by plunging the pots in tepid water for an hour, leave them to drain, then return them to their growing positions. Don't water from the top, as the growing medium does not absorb water easily. They are usually potted up in rockwool, foam and or bark, which provides maximum aeration to the roots.

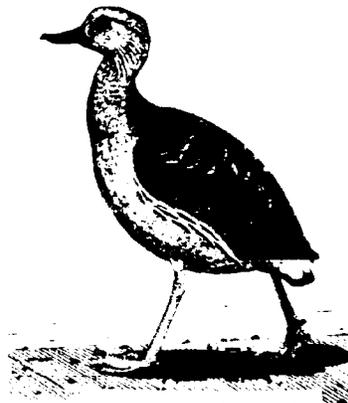
The flowers last for months. Remove faded flowers individually, cut off the stem when it has shrivelled, and give the plant a summer holiday in a sheltered spot in the garden. Fertilizer? A tiny bit of 10-10-10 or 20-20-20 in the water every time they are watered, is sufficient.

AUTUMN COLOURS

As I write this, we are having a fantastic October. One day of heavy rain gave everything in the garden a good drink and wash, and encouraged gardeners to get out there and move the plants that need repositioning - or heaving out! Two inches down the soil is still bone-dry, so the hoses are still in use. Meanwhile, though we have had almost no frost, leaves are changing to fantastic colours and I am again grateful for some of the lovely trees

and bushes that are glowing in the low Fall sunshine. The Cercidiphyllum has been beautiful for two weeks, with the added smell of burned sugar to draw admirers; various maples are rapidly changing from green to gold and orange, to reds and purples. Viburnum trilobum "American Cranberry" has been a mass of brilliant red leaves for a month! The hostas are all turning to gold, and the colchicums, usually bashed down by rain, have been standing straight up for many weeks

I refuse to complain about this year's weather. Sure, we had a cold wet spring - but look at the berry crops we can admire now on the cotoneasters and berberis. Summer came late, but better late than never, and if it lasts until the end of October, that's a month less winter to look forward to! Meantime, enjoy a lovely warm Fall and hope for an interesting winter



Not Cox's Goosander

COX'S BIRDS

Kenneth Cox, following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, is busy working with and writing about rhododendrons. The following notes are highlights of an article he wrote for "The Garden", the RHS Journal for July 1993.

In the long history of rhodo hybridizing, lepidote species had been considered the best for the

purpose, until the 2nd World War, after which the huge gardens owned by larger landowners were changed to suit the labour market. Many people with small gardens were looking for compact plants. R. yakushmanum was obtained from Japan by Lionel de Rothschild and became the parent of many beautiful lower-growing hybrids. Soon most of the major nurseries in Britain were propagating and selling these popular plants

Euan Cox and his son **Peter** decided to explore the potential of even more dwarf lepidote species, and as we all know, the resulting 'bird' rhodos are useful, beautiful and extremely hardy in Scotland as well as in our part of the Pacific Coast. They are ideal for rock or peat gardens or any other small space. Many people are building collections of these bright and dainty plants

Here are some that Kenneth described. The first cross with R. ludlowii and R. rupicola var. chryseum was 'Chikor', the second 'Curlew' and these two dwarf yellow-flowered plants have been sold by the thousand ever since. Experiments were then made with various other species rhodos to provide white, pink and mauve flowers. 'Ptarmigan' was the first white, followed by 'Phalarope', 'Snipe' and 'Wigeon', all pink, then 'Teal', 'Chiffchaff', 'Goosander', 'Wren', 'Wagtail' and 'Woodchat', all yellow, and the white 'Eider'. These were released over the next 25 years. Evergreen azaleas produced by the Cox family are named after animals such as 'Panda' and 'Squirrel'.

A new bird hybrid comes on the market almost every year. The most important parent is the dwarf R. keiskei 'Yaku Fairy', which Warren Berg introduced about 20 years ago. His hybrids 'Ginny Gee' and 'Patty

His hybrids 'Ginny Gee' and 'Patty Bee' give the Glendoick birds a run for their money in terms of popularity. Another new parent, *R. dendrocharis*, recently introduced from China, has great potential with its large white or pink flowers.

A list of the newer plants to look for include 'Arctic Tern', a cross between a ledum and a rhodo (ledum is now thought to be a rhodo), a reliably hardy plant with tiny white flowers. 'Egret' also has masses of tiny white flowers, almost like a heather, on a dense bush with small shiny leaves.

'Merganser' has nodding, thimble-like flowers like those of *R. campylogynum*, but in yellow. Easy to please and reliable. 'Pipit' is a natural hybrid raised from seed obtained in Nepal. The charming, flat-headed pink flowers appear to have little faces. However, it needs to be treated as a high-altitude alpine and abhors winter wet.

'Razorbill' provokes the most comment as it is so unusual, with its clusters of deep pink tubular flowers, standing upright like little candles. 'Swift' is the latest member of the family, with yellow flowers similar those 'Curlew' but as it flowers later, it avoids late spring frosts.

Consider some of Cox's birds for a small garden, or for edging your beds of taller rhodos. You will be delighted!

R.PONTICUM

John Bond, writing in the RHS Rhodo, Camellia & Magnolia Group Newsletter, explains how this rhodo has become such a pest in Britain. (Ed. Note: On the last trips we made to that country, we saw bulldozers chewing at huge hedges of the plant).

He says (your editor rearranged a few sentences) "While observing great plantings of *R. ponticum*, I

thought of the excitement which must have occurred when it arrived in Britain in 1763. Until that date, the two Alpen Roses and a few deciduous azalea species from Eastern N. America were in cultivation so *ponticum* would have been the first rhodo with a large truss. Nurserymen found it was easy to propagate from seed and thousands were produced for hedging, screening and shelterbelts.

R. ponticum grows wild in the harsh exposed mountains of Asia Minor, so England and Scotland provided a much cosier place to live. The plants seeded themselves and layered, and soon provided an almost impenetrable evergreen cover for birds and animals.

From 1820 onwards when the Himalayan species *R. arboreum*, *R. griffithianum*, and others joined *ponticum* and *catawbiense* in our gardens, nurserymen soon realized how easy it was to produce hybrids from these few species. So the legions of lovely old hardy hybrids took the stage but in the main they would not root from cuttings and layering was too slow so grafting was resorted to. Where did the grower look for stock? *R. ponticum* of course.

It had vigour from its excellent root system, and most of all it was easy to raise by the thousands required, in addition it was compatible with everything. A really good egg. Well, no. Sadly, it was prone to suckering and the suckers soon took over if not removed. Even professional gardeners seemed unable to deal with the matter. Then came a war, a depression, another war - many gardens were abandoned for years, and many plantings became a sea of *ponticums* instead of the lovely hybrids."

HOW TO PRUNE HYDRANGEAS

Helen Chesnut, writing in the Times Colonist, says "Not all types of hydrangea are pruned in the same way. That could be the cause of apparent conflict in advice.

Prune the most commonly-grown big-leaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) in late Feb. or early March, when the worst of winter weather has passed. Remove the old flower heads at this time, cutting the stems down to a point 1/4" above the first fat pair of buds below these old flower heads. Take out any weak branches at the same time. Leaving the old flowers on for the winter provides some protection for next year's flowering shoots.

Peegee hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata Grandiflora*) can be pruned more severely, down to a woody framework 12-24" high, leaving just 2-4 growth buds on the newer, previous year's wood. For a greater profusion of smaller flower clusters and a taller plant, cut back last year's growth by a half.

Cut back Hills of Snow hydrangea (*H. arborescens*) by a half. Prune these last two in late winter, and at the same time remove any dead, weak, crossing or crowded branches."

CAPE HEATHS

Look for *Erica hyemalis* and *E. gracilis* in the shops during Nov.-Dec. Both have beautiful little rose-pink flowers in great profusion. *Erica caniculata* has white flowers with black anthers which protrude beyond the flowers.

These plants, though they must be considered house plants here, do not like a dry warm living room. They prefer a cool place where the temperature stays around 50F. Water carefully, for if the roots dry out even for a day, the leaves will fall

off and they may not recover.

When pruning is necessary, do it immediately after flowering is finished. If repotting, use a mix of 3 parts sphagnum peat, 1 part silver sand. From mid-summer to mid-autumn, stand the plants outside in a very sunny place to ripen the wood and help set next year's flowers. They need to be back in the greenhouse or a cool room by mid-Sept. Cuttings may be taken in June, using small, soft side-shoots. Place in pots of sandy peat in a closed propagating frame with the temperature at 61F. Once rooted they can spend the rest of the summer in small pots in a shaded cold frame. Ted Sheppard, writing in *Amateur Gardening*, Nov. 1997.

PLANTING BULBS - a hint for people who DO NOT have deer in the yard: Mark the position of bulbs such as tulips and narcissus by planting grape hyacinths, alliums or Dutch Iris near them. They produce leaves in the fall (which are relished by our little friends).

ANOTHER GREAT RHODO MAN HAS DIED

Lynn Watts, President of the ARS, has sent word that **Dr. Gustav Mahlquist** of Storrs, Connecticut, passed on at the age of 93. He was born in Sweden and emigrated to the US in 1927.

As a member of the ARS, Connecticut Hort. Society and Nurseryman's Association, he published many scientific papers. He was well known as a plant breeder and lecturer, and several of his rhodo hybrids have been distributed commercially in recent years.

Harry Wright's Good Doers

Harry says:
Several years ago I was interested in finding out how many varieties of

rhodos we have in District 1, and many of you helped me by sending your inventory of rhodos - species, hybrids and known crosses that do well in your garden. Over the years, 102 gardeners have responded, for a total of 3435 varieties.

With the Western Regional Conference being held in our district in 2000, I feel it is a good time to update existing collections, and to hear from gardeners that I don't already have listed. I have received useful information from everyone who has responded, and I feel sure you have information useful to others that hasn't yet been recorded. Large or small, your garden is of interest to me.

Make a list, hand it in at a meeting or mail it to me at 769 Chaster Rd, Courtenay, V9N 5P2.

UPCOMING GREIG BIOGRAPHY

Judy Walker, who will be our guest speaker in January 2000, is a landscape architect living and working in the Comox Valley. She has lived in Comox for 18 years and met Mary Greig in 1982 while she was a full-time gardener. In 1988 Judy returned to UBC to enter the landscape architecture program and continued on to the University of Washington, Seattle, to complete her Masters in Landscape Architecture in 1992. Judy was one of the founding members of the North Island Chapter and was given a bursary from the Chapter to continue her studies.

Ted and Mary Greig's names are synonymous with the history of rhododendrons on the West Coast and their lives connected to a great many people. Countless valuable rhodo species were introduced to America through their perseverance, energy and knowledge.

Judy says that she was fortunate to

have been Mary Greig's friend and gardener for the last 8 years of her life. Delightful hours were spent on her porch facing the sea, our dogs at our feet, while we talked of life in general and plants in particular. I started to garden less and listen more!

I wish to honour her life by writing her biography. I have begun collecting information on the plants, places and people that make up this fascinating story. To this end, I would appreciate any information, photos and anecdotes about the Greigs, their plants and gardens, people I should contact, books and journals to track down. All information would be greatly appreciated. I can be reached by phone (250) 339-1146, fax (250) 339-2132 and by email - jrwalker@mars.ark.com



R. trichostomum