

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4 Vol.15 No. 1 September 1999

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## 7 Sept.

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Gwen and Harry Wright**, 769 Chaster, Courtenay. All members of the new and retiring executive are invited to attend.

## 14 Sept.

The start of another gardening season! **Harry Wright** will be our speaker, subject "Four Seasons at Haida Gold Gardens" Harry has a large collections of rhodos, big and small, also propagates and sells plants, also has a garden which includes various shrubs, perennial and annual plants, plants in tubs and pots, spring bulbs - there are interesting plants to be seen every season in Harry's garden.

## 12 June

The annual BBQ was well attended, the weather co operated (it didn't start to rain until the puzzle was finished and everyone was under cover with the food). And what food - lovely hot dishes

and salads and desserts! The chocolate cake was to die for. I would be pleased to put the recipe in the newsletter! Thanks, Gwen and Harry, for again offering your home and lovely garden for this event.

**Pauline and Dick Bonney** were presented with ARS Bronze Medals, in thanks for the years of work they have done for the club. They were among the first members and have never said "cannot do" when a job comes up. They have always graciously shared their lovely garden and their gardening expertise. Thank you, Dick and Pauline.

## 12 Oct

**Norm Todd** will be our speaker. Norm is a rhodo buff from Victoria and is always busy propagating interesting varieties. This time, however, his subject will be "A Tale of Thailand", which is an intriguing title, to be sure. October is time for renewing membership in the American Rhodo Society, so remember to bring your cheque book.

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Spring was slow in coming, but because of it we experienced one of the best rhodo blooming periods seen for many years. Summer is upon us now and the

cool moist weather we have experienced is resulting in maximum growth and good bud set.

Summer will soon be drawing to a close and it is time for us to all get involved in our meetings. Make a point of bringing a friend to the meetings - she/he will hopefully become interested in joining the club.

Our sales and tour of gardens went well in the spring, and it is time to line up gardens for next spring. The tour date has been set at May 13 and we would be delighted to tour your garden. Please speak to Harry for further information.

The Rhodo Garden has grown by two beds in the last year, and the City has installed two new picnic tables, making the garden area a really enjoyable stop for the public. There is a constant line of walkers and joggers on the trail through the garden, so it is being seen by more people all the time. Did you see the photo of our handsome sign in the ARS Journal?

## MEMBER NOTES

Talking of garden tours, your editor went to the Quadra Island Garden Tour, and had a very pleasant day visiting many fascinating gardens, as well

as studios of several talented painters. I loved the garden full of people (all made of driftwood) sitting or dancing on the grass. One garden grows and sells healthy veggies and has a couple of acres of grape vines. Another had many varieties of perennial geraniums, and many have big rhodos, 50-80 years old I would guess. Roses do well over there also. Every garden seemed to have children and a big friendly dog, all playing happily. Our last stop was to the Home Hardware building where they not only sell hardware and lumber but they have a large and very well kept garden centre.

We are sorry to have to report the death of one of our members - Dewiss Brown, who passed on this summer.

### SEEDY SATURDAY

The Comox Valley is about to have its own Seedy Saturday, next March 4, and to this end we would like to suggest you save seeds from various plants, for trading next spring.

Remember to dry seeds thoroughly, and store them in paper bags or envelopes, NOT PLASTIC, and label them carefully.

For further information about the Comox Valley Growers and Seed Savers, phone 339-4784 (Echo) or 337-2223 (Marian).

Watch for information at the Fall Fair.

Additional copies of **Greer's Handbook** are on order.

Are you having trouble with weak flower stems this summer? Some of my gladiolas are flopping over

- and the latest copy of *Amateur Gardening* has the answer.

"Take a close look at the pedicel (flower stem) and you will probably see a slightly shrunken and discoloured patch just beneath the flower bud. The condition is known as pedicel necrosis and is caused when the plant makes rapid, soft growth. It can be the result of too much high nitrogen feed..." I bet it can also be caused by a long wet spring such as we had, followed by sudden sunny weather such as we have had this past month.

"As the affected flowers never perform properly they should be cut out immediately, to prevent any secondary problems such as grey mold. In spring and fall, dress the soil around perennials with a little sulphate of potash, to help strengthen the flower stems."

Many of us have visited **Princess Abkhazi's** beautiful garden in Victoria, and will be saddened to hear the property is for sale and will likely be turned into some kind of housing development. Before she died, the princess tried to no avail to have the city, province, churches or horticultural associations oversee the garden. No one could promise the princess the land wouldn't eventually be sold. Information from the *Times Colonist*.

**Helen Chesnut**, writing in the *Times Colonist*, answers a question regarding a rhodo growing in a half-barrel which has some leaves turning yellow and others with brown tips. Her reply has some very good

tips for us to follow. First, keep rhodos in large pots in a spot with filtered sunlight. Yellowing of a large number of leaves may indicate root rot resulting from poor drainage. In pots, rhodos must have very good drainage - cut large holes in the bottom of barrels - and loose-textured, humusy and acidic soil.

Dry tips on new foliage can indicate wind damage. Overdoses of fertilizer salts can cause leaf tip scorch on older leaves. The sudden bursts of heat and strong sun after months of cool wet weather, experienced this year, can also cause leaf scorching.

A good organic fertilizer mix for rhodos includes 4 parts (by volume) of canola seed meal, 1/2 part each dolomite lime, epsom salts, bone meal and kelp meal. Dust a handful of this blend over the soil surface in early spring and early summer, and cover with a fresh layer of planting mix.

Be sure rhodos in containers have an even, adequate level of moisture in the soil throughout the summer, and protection from soggy conditions during the winter. Remember, rhodos in their native habitats receive copious amounts of rain in summer, and low levels of precip in winter. In fact many of them are covered with several feet of snow all winter, under which they remain warm and dry.

### Colchicums vs Crocuses

It is almost time for the Colchicums to start blooming. These interesting members of the lily family bloom in fall, with no

leaves in sight. Leaves start to grow in December and expand to the size of huge tulip leaves. By the end of June they are yellow and ready to be trimmed off. They do take a lot of room and the leaves are often considered messy, but the flowers are lovely, pink or white. There are several double forms. They are rather weak-stemmed though and you should consider letting them grow up through other plants that will hold them up. I have found this to be the only good reason for growing variegated Bishop's Weed (Aegopodium) for its leaves can be chopped off at the same time the colchicum leaves are removed. By the time the colchicum flowers bloom, a fresh supply of Bishop's weed leaves are ready to support them.

Autumn crocuses, on the other hand, have smaller, more delicate flowers and the usual thin grass-like leaves that may sprout out before, during or after the crocus flowers. They belong to the Iris family. Colours include rosy lilac (C. zonatus), lavender-purple (C. sativus), which also provides saffron from the dried bright orange stigmas, and lilac (C. speciosus). These flowers bloom at various times between October and December here. The only problem is the heavy fall rains, which can bash them down.

Colchicum bulbs are usually for sale in late August (no other time) and you don't need to buy many, for they multiply like crazy. If you don't plant them IMMEDIATELY they will bloom on the window-sill, which doesn't seem to hurt them. Fall crocuses

come in with the other fall bulbs but should also be planted as soon as possible. They also spread into large patches.

### TALKING OF BULBS

The Dutch Bulbs will soon be in the nurseries (if there is an end to the Truckers' Strike) and you should consider some of these small spring beauties for planting near your rhodos and hostas. Hosta leaves will hide all the yellowing crocus leaves, for instance.

Species crocus are among my favorites. There are crocuses in many shades of purple and blue as well as pink, white and yellow. They start to bloom in January (depending on weather and snow-cover) and continue until the huge Dutch Hybrid crocuses open in March. Snowdrops start to bloom in early January, closely followed by winter aconites, Iris reticulata, anemones, then early species tulips and daffodils. By March, unless we have a severe winter, there are many bright flowers joining the first early rhodos such as R. empiditum.

### BIRDS IN THE GARDEN

The best way to avoid having to use pesticides in the garden is to encourage birds. We can have wild birds in our yard year-round - not always the same ones, which makes for variety, and excitement for the family when a "new" bird is sighted.

Trees at the top of the list are Alder and Birch. Both provide food throughout the fall and winter when seeds are released. Insects on foliage provide food for insect eating birds, trunks are

drilled by sapsuckers and other woodpeckers find food in rotting branches. By allowing these trees space in the garden you attract, in winter, juncos, pine siskins, chickadees, kinglets; warblers, vireos, flycatchers, goldfinches, pine siskins in summer, and jays and woodpeckers year-round.

Shrubs at the top of the list are those that provide shelter, nesting places, nectar and berries. Pyracantha, cotoneasters, berberis and the native snowberries attract hummingbirds, robins and other thrushes, grouse, waxwings, linnets (house finches) and purple finches.

Fir, spruce and pine trees provide shelter with their dense foliage, networks of branches offer nesting sites for robins, finches, grosbeaks, tanagers, flycatchers and jays. Disintegrating cones provide food for jays, juncos, chickadees, towhees, finches, nuthatches, grosbeaks and crossbills.

Other useful trees include maples - good shelter, nesting sites, seeds for the finches, pine siskins and grosbeaks, and insects for chickadees and their pals the golden- and ruby-crowned kinglets, warblers and tanagers. Cornus and Arbutus provide berries for many birds as well as insects on branches and leaves. Crataegus (hawthorn) provides seedy fruit for many birds and nesting sites for hummers. Larix (larch) provide seeds for finches, pine siskins and nuthatches. Malus, prunus and pyrus (apples, plums and pears) all provide fruit and insects as well as excellent nesting sites. Populus

(cottonwood) and salix (willow) provide insects for warblers, winter buds for grosbeaks and cotton for nesting hummers.

Many native shrubs provide shelter, nesting sites, and food for many small birds. Amelanchier (Saskatoon Berry), Holodiscus discolor (Ocean Spray), Pysocarpus (Ninebark), Gaultheria shallon (Salal), Sambucus (elderberry), Vaccinium (Blueberry and Huckleberry) and Rubus (Thimbleberry and Salmonberry) are all popular with birds though a bit messy for a formal garden.

Many purchased shrubs are pleasing to birds. Buddleias, Single-flowered Fuchsias, and Weigelias are favorites of hummingbirds. Skimmia and Aucuba provide berries if you purchase male and female plants. Prunus laurocerasus (Cherry Laurel) has huge black berries, a favorite of robins travelling south in the fall. Ribes (Flowering currant) has flowers which open in time for the first rufous hummers in spring, and berries for the robins. These last can still be found in the wild, in this area, but do not transplant well. Best to buy one. Lonicera (Honeysuckle) wild and tame are great favorites of the birds. Insect-eaters find food, hummers sip nectar, and small birds find nesting-sites.

Mahonia, wild and purchased, provide year-round shelter and fruit. Wild roses and shrub roses such as rugosa provide hips for fruit eaters as well as nesting sites and insects. These never seem to get various rose diseases and the

deer never touch them! Hollies provide nesting sites as well as berries much enjoyed by travelling banded pigeons, cedar waxwings and robins. If you can provide some of the trees and shrubs mentioned - there are many others - you can expect to have birds in the garden year-round.

By September the birds are on the move, either down from the mountains or heading south from more northerly summer homes. If you start to put a little food out by 15 Sept., but no later than 1 Oct., the birds will come and stay for the winter. These include juncos, towhees, white-crowned, golden-crowned, song and fox sparrows, Stellar's Jays and flickers. They eat all the weed and grass seeds they can find, with cracked corn as a supplement. As autumn advances, they eat more and more at the feeders. Sometimes strays such as white-throated or Harris' Sparrows drop in for a few days. "My" birds do not care for the seed mixtures which include millet - most of it is wasted, so we buy cracked corn (chick scratch is too finely ground at present for our wet winters), black oil sunflower seeds, and thistle for a treat.

Silo feeders are kept full of black oil sunflower seeds (more popular than striped) and are visited regularly by pine siskins, purple finches and chickadees. Once the leaves are off the deciduous trees, one can spot many "visiting" birds, who don't usually eat at the feeders, but check the trees out for insects and berries. Watch for pileated woodpeckers, red-breasted

sapsuckers, golden- and ruby-throated kinglets checking the property every few days.

Depending on the severity of the winter, occasional or regular visitors such as purple and house finches, cedar waxwings, robins, varied thrush come for sunflower seeds or crab apples. Usually by February, Brewer's Blackbirds and Red-winged blackbirds are back, and are grateful for a meal.

In severe weather we chase crows, starlings and cats, hopefully to save ground feeders such as juncos, towhees and fox sparrows. It is necessary to place the feeders where there is instant protection from predators such as cats and hawks, in the form of dense bushes.

Most years, the first of March sees the juncos and varied thrushes heading off to the hills. But towhees, white-crowned- and song sparrows and jays are around nearly year-round, and we put out a little food all summer. Always have fresh water for drinking and bathing on hand, especially in hot weather. The main point is consistency. Once you start to feed the birds, you must keep it up. If you are going away for a time, arrange with someone to continue putting food out on a regular basis, especially in winter.

Bird watching is a fascinating and popular hobby, which one can enjoy whether physically active or house-bound. Get yourself a decent pair of binoculars and one of the guidebooks for Western North American birds, and you will soon have a new and exciting avocation.