

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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1 Feb

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Pauline and Dick Bonney**, 2393 Seabank Rd, off Waveland.

8 Feb

Lynn Watts, a long-time member of the Seattle Rhodo Society and now President of the ARS, will be our speaker. Lynn has over the years written many articles on species rhodos for their newsletter, which have been of great help to me. His topic for the evening will be Rhodo Species and their Origins. This promises to be a very interesting evening for our club.

11 Jan

Judy Walker presented many interesting slides of "the old days" of growing alpine and rhodos in **Mary & Ted Greig's** garden and nursery at Royston. She spoke of her connections with the family and the book she is presently working on. The weather threatened more snow, which caused many members to stay home, which was unfortunate. Don't forget to give Judy pictures, newspaper clippings or other information you may have that can be

added to the book.

SPRING 2000 RHODO CLUB SALES

If you plan to attend Rhodo Sales and Shows in other communities this spring, please consider taking our Rhodo picture along, and sell a few tickets. Check with Harry or Ernie regarding addresses and how to get there. Here are names and dates that we know of at this time:

Fraser South Rhodo Society,
Clay's Nursery April 1
Peace Arch, Elgin Hall April 8
Vancouver, UBC Botanical Garden April 29-30
Victoria and MARS April 29
North Island
Courtenay Fair Grounds April 30
Cowichan May 6
North Island
C.R. Thunderbird Hall May 7
Nanaimo and Vancouver May 13

MEMBER NOTES

It is time to consider how you can help the club by offering your services. At the AGM in May, we will be electing people for several offices - why not volunteer for your favorite job instead of leaving all the work to the nominating committee (Dick and Pauline). We need, for two-year terms, a Vice-President. Note: Paul Wurz plans to take on the Presidency if he can depend on solid back-up from a willing VP. Paul lives just about as far north of Campbell River as he could without being in Roberts Lake or Kelsey Bay. We don't have to mention the kind of weather we might get sometime which could prevent him from attending a meeting! A reliable VP

will be a necessary asset.

We also need a Library and PR person or persons, and a Social Convenor. None of these jobs are difficult or time-consuming, so let's hear from you!

The rhodo fertilizer is due at Black Creek Farm & Feed, at a very competitive price. Give your orders to Paul, and pick up your fertilizer at his place or Harry's.

Ernie Exner has made a beautiful garden bench, which he is donating as a prize on Garden Tour day. Do you know of an interesting garden (yours or another's) that would be suitable for a visit? Speak to Harry.

How about a "Buy, Sell or Trade" section in the newsletter. Give the editor a list of whatever you have, so other gardeners can make use of items you are finished with, or plants you would like to swap.

ERNIE'S CHEESE CRISPS

Remember these tasty little crisps at the Christmas party?

Now you can make your own.

1 cup butter
1 1/2 cups flour
1/4 tsp. Worcester Sauce
1/4 tsp. Cayenne pepper (optional)
4 cups Rice Krispies
250 G. container Imperial Cheese

Cream butter, cheese and seasonings. Add flour and cereal, mix well. Roll into small balls, press on pan with a fork dipped in cold water. Refrigerate half an hour. Bake in a 350F oven for 25-30 minutes.

In reference to our recipe for house plant fertilizer:

People have had trouble finding saltpetre at the drugstores. Ask for sodium nitrate. You can buy it at feed stores, in large quantities.

Here's a tip found in the magazine Garden Answers:

Paint the inside and outside of clay pots with clear masonry water repellent. This helps the pot to retain moisture, and because the clay never becomes saturated, there is less chance of frost damage.

BOOK REVIEW

Every once in awhile I find a well-illustrated, useful book that is considerably less costly than most gardening books the past few years. Such a one is *HOSTAS and Other Shade-Loving Plants*, written by Richard Bird and David Tarrant, published by Whitecap Books, 1999, and only \$16.95 Cdn.

This is a soft cover book, with a beautiful Hosta picture on the cover and many exquisite photos of hostas and other shade-loving flowers, trees and shrubs inside. The written content of the book is good too. There are chapters on the importance of shade to a garden, how to create shade, design for shade, and maintain shade. There are lists and descriptions of many plants that appreciate shade, and therefore are great companions for your rhodos. Amazingly, among the hosta suppliers listed, there are 6 Canadian nurseries, two of them on the Lower Mainland.

This is a book that I will go back to time after time, for information on plants and inspiration on arranging plant communities that look well together.

TO CONTINUE THE LIST OF EARLY-BLOOMING SPECIES RHODOS:

I have not listed any plants that are hardy to only 10F - I doubt they would survive in my garden, though often, if they are used for hybridizing, their offspring are hardier than the parents.

	Hardy to(F)
Agastum	5
Argioplum	5
Barbatum	5
Delaveyi	5
Ciliatum	5
Impeditum	-15
Imberbe	5
Lukiangense	5
Leucapsis	5
Parvifolium	-15
Mucronulatum	-15
Pemakoense	0
Moupinense	0
Rirei	- 5
Praevernum	- 5
Sutchuenense	-10
Stewartianum	5

And of course, *Dauricum*, which is hardy to -25
Strigillosum 5
(see January newsletter).

Many of these have been used for hybridizing, and if you read labels carefully or check purchases against Greer's descriptions, you will be able to find many lovely early-blooming hybrids, some of which I will list next month.

GREX OR CLONE?

Why does my *Fabia* look different from my neighbour's?

Further to the whole subject of nomenclature, David Leach in his monumental book 'Rhododendrons of the World' (Charles Scribners Sons 1961) explains very lucidly the "why" and "how" of the naming of rhodos in past years.

GROUP NAMES

The letter "g" denotes a **GREX**, or group of hybrids of similar parentage. These collective names, used by British amateur breeders, have caused endless confusion, at least in America, because all of the progeny from a specific cross, regardless of their quality, have been identified by the same group name. In the case of a primary cross between two species the offspring from repetitions of similar crosses made many years later, even using inferior forms of these species as parents, have taken the same name assigned to the original hybrid group. This custom has not been followed in the US and professional nurserymen abroad have generally shunned it.

Group names have recently been relegated to a position where they are merely a subsidiary convenience for identifying parentage - for those with a retentive memory. But the confusion is bound to persist because "Naomi" for example, may be either a group name applying to all of the hybrids obtained from "Aurora" crossed with *fortunei*, or it may be a clone name identifying a single superior selection which received an Award of Merit from the RHS when it was shown in 1933. This plant should always be designated "Naomi, AM". Other superior selections from the Naomi hybrid group are fortunately identified by the addition of a clone name such as "Naomi Nautilus" or "Naomi Stella Polaris".

"CLONE" - a vegetatively produced progeny of a single plant. If you take a cutting of your "Fabia" the resulting plant will be identical.

Since some careless or unscrupulous nurserymen have taken advantage of the confusion caused by group names, it must be stressed that the group name alone may be no indication of superiority, and many a worthless seedling has been sold

because it carried a distinguished group name. Thus it means nothing to have a rhodo named "Loderi", but it means a great deal to own a "Loderi King George".

FERTILIZING: WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW - IF AT ALL

I found this useful information in the Cowichan Valley Rhodo Newsletter, March 1995. It was compiled by Rosemary Wallbank with thanks to Dave Dougan, Peter Kearns and Andy Zoltay.

"It's time once again to think about fertilizing the rhodos. Or is it? Do all of your rhodos need fertilizing? I've heard at least one member say that if the soil is good, additional fertilizer makes the plants lanky, or have less hardy wood. Others with magnificent displays admit they didn't quite get around to fertilizing this year.

Then there seem to be several plants that are 'fertilizer-sensitive' in that they may be subject to 'burning' if given too much or any additional food. Peter and Dave came up with this list:

Species: *campanulatum*,
cinnibarinum Royalei.

Hybrids: Bow Bells, Creeping Jenny, Elizabeth, J.H. Van Ness, Royston Red, and primary crosses with *R. ludlowii* such as Curlew". Ed Note: I have since been told by "experts" that none of the dwarf rhodos should ever have fertilizer, especially if in pots.

"At the same time, there are some that like lots of fertilizer: these include the *ponticum* hybrids and *Praecox*, which appears to keep its leaves better if well fed. So, fertilizing is not quite as easy as might at first appear. Dave came up with some general words of wisdom:

The safest course is to adopt a regime that eliminates the risk. Use a small amount of fertilizer more often,

being careful to avoid fertilizing too late in the season, as new growth must have time to harden off for the winter. In Dave's view, fertilizing must be considered as a growth control mechanism. If a bush is growing too large for its situation, reduce or stop applying artificial fertilizer to delay the problem of having to move or drastically prune it. On the other hand, some plants may benefit from a little encouragement. Get to know your plants as individuals.

If you are going to fertilize, you need to consider when, where, how much and what to apply.

When? The consensus seems to be two applications, one in spring before the flowers open - but not too early or the fertilizer gets leached out by rain - and one after flowering". Ed. Note: Exceptions such as *dauricum* blooming in January and *auriculatum* blooming in July make for real puzzlement!

"Where? Andy says -around the rim (drip-line) of the plant, where the feeder roots can get it. This means at least 4" out from the main stem, depending on the size of the plant. The same applies to mulching.

How much? One recommendation is a handful per plant. This seems good advice until you look at various-sized hands. Dave suggests a small handful per 1 ft. of plant height - provided the plant needs it."

ORNAMENTAL GRASSES

I go on and on about these plants, don't I? Today, in the middle of January, with snow coming down, I looked at my *Miscanthus sinensis* "Strictus" to see it still has stiff golden stems and golden leaves that glow when the sun shines.

Calamagrostis "Karl Foerster" had stiff golden flowers until recently cut back in order to move the plant.

Many people are terrified these giant grasses will drop seeds and cover the garden with grass. This does not seem to be the case here (perhaps because I cut the feathery flowers off for use in the house).

An article in the Vancouver Sun, July 1994, by Steve Whysall, explains the six basic forms of ornamental grasses.

Tufted: Usually spiky foliage or fine textured with upright leaves arising from the clump. Example: blue fescue.

Mounted: Somewhat weeping, mounding foliage. Top growth covers the lower leaves. Example: black-flowering pennisetum.

Upright: Erect. Foliage covers vertically in uniform or even columnar form. Ex: Cattail (*Typha latifolia*).

Upright divergent: Foliage grows up and out in an erect or stiffly ascending manner. Ex: blue oat grass (*helictotrichon sempervirens*).

Upright arching: Foliage ascends vertically, then becomes fountain-like at the top. Ex: silver feather maiden grass (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Silberfeder')

Arching: Foliage arches up and out in somewhat equal proportions. Ex: palm grass (*Setaria palmifolia*).

Here are a few highly recommended plants. "Fountain Grass" *Pennisetum*. There are various examples, not all hardy here. *P. alopecuroides* from Australia is hardy, *P. orientale* may be hardy in zone 9 (Victoria maybe?), and *P. setaceum*, from Africa, is definitely not hardy. All have handsome bottlebrush flowers.

Blue oat grass (*Helictotrichon sempervirens*) has proved to be hardy in my garden. Beautiful blue leaves.

Tufted hairgrass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*) has bronzy flowers in airy panicles at the top of long swaying stems. Delicately beautiful!

Hakonechloa macra 'Aureola' is a recent introduction from Japan. It makes a lovely 1ft. fountain of bright yellow and green leaves, a little late emerging from the ground in spring, but lasting well into winter before being chopped down. My first plant was expensive, but I now have 3, plus 2 given to friends. A favorite of all who see it.

Grasses make a positive statement of upright or flowing leaves and stems, quite a contrast to the rhodos in colour and shape. All the clumps in my garden expand slowly over years, none are invasive, and none have seeded themselves.

There is a good selection in most nurseries these days, so do try some. You will be delighted!

WINTER WARMTH

Recent issues of *Amateur Gardening* and the *RHS Journal* have reminded me that winter does not have to be dark and dismal. You do have to think ahead a little (though a recent walk around the local nurseries suggests that for those who forgot in the fall, plants are available right now for brightening up the garden or patio). You don't have to plant them out immediately - leave them in pots, close to the house, so you can appreciate the colour and perfume.

"Winter" pansies do bloom most of the winter, if protected from weather - and deer. I had mine trimmed to the ground because "I forgot" just for a few hours. However, I replaced them with a few violas which have bloomed all winter and have not (yet) been nibbled by the deer. Winter-

blooming heathers are looking lovely now, and if your primulas are not in bloom yet, there are hundreds of beautiful plants for sale everywhere. You can even buy a hamamelis in bloom. *H. mollis* seems to be the best for perfume, but there are other colours to be seen, even a bright red, as well as several shades of yellow and orange.

It is wise to plan ahead, and look for some of these winter-blooming shrubs in the spring or fall. Plant them where you can appreciate their colour and scent. Not every nursery has them, but the local ones are improving, probably because of people such as our members constantly haranguing them. Look for *Chimonanthus*, with red-centred yellow flowers, *Lonicera fragrantissima*, a white-flowered honeysuckle, *Sarcococca*, with almost unnoticeable white flowers and a strong perfume, various *Viburnums*, of which *x botanantense* is a favorite because it blooms on and off from September to April, then gives a real show. *Daphnes* are richly perfumed and bloom from January to April or later, depending on variety and weather.

You may have enjoyed the flowers of *Helleborus niger* (Christmas Rose, which often blooms anytime but Christmas), but from February on, many other hellebores give pleasure with their white, green, pink or purple flowers. By then of course, you are enjoying bulbous plants such as *Iris reticulata*, "winter" or species crocus, and many *galanthus* (snowdrops) large and small. Many of these are perfumed also.

Make a habit of buying some plant each year that will give you pleasure in the depths of winter. You will never regret these purchases. That reminds me - I promised some hellebore seedlings and will bring them along as soon as the weather is

suitable for planting them.

LEAF BUD CUTTINGS

In situations where there may be a limited amount of cutting material available, leaf bud cuttings are an efficient way of raising your favorite plants. The principle consists of taking a small portion of stem, with a single leaf attached, in other words a leaf and a bud. It is normally used for evergreen shrubs and climbers and shrubby house plants.

Take cuttings from the current season's growth after it has become firm, but before it acquires hard, grey-brown bark. This state of growth on many outdoor shrubs is reached about July. Slow-growing specimens such as camellias are unlikely to have much growth to use for cuttings. Leaf bud cuttings are the logical method for them.

If you have a rubber plant or weeping fig (*Ficus elastica* or *benjamina*) or umbrella plant (*Schefflera*), try a leaf cutting. Select a piece of current season's growth, with healthy foliage. Cut a stem back to above a bud on the parent plant. Cut the stem into sections, making a slanting cut above the bud and a straight cut about 1/2" or more under the leaf to make a "peg" to be inserted into the compost.

Use a compost of peat and perlite (or peat and sand) and set up trays or pots. Insert the "pegs", leaving the bud and leaf stalk exposed. Leaves can be trimmed. Moisten the compost and cover with lids or plastic bags to maintain humidity, and watch for signs of growth in the bud. Temperature should be around 65 to 70F, and provide light but no direct sunlight. Transplant when growth is apparent.

Information taken from *Amateur Gardening* Nov. 1998.