

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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Jan 2000

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Hilda Fawcett**, 6514 Poulton Rd. This short road makes a half-circle from Merville Rd., (turn at the Merville Store, first road left on Merville Rd.), to where it comes out at the Contract Equipment yard opposite Coleman Rd). 6514 is part-way along Poulton Rd. From the south, turn on Poulton Road and drive north to 6514. Because of holidays this week, for the editor and the postal system, it is possible no one will receive the newsletter in time to read the instructions above. Sorry - a map will help!

11 Jan

Judy Walker, one of the original members of our club, and a landscape architect, will be our guest speaker. She is engaged in writing a biography of Mary Greig and her life in the rhododendron world. Don't forget to bring to the meeting any

photos or other memorabilia you may have regarding the lives of Ted and Mary Greig.

14 Dec

Wasn't that a party? The food, the game that **Bill Rozel** invented, the gifts! I was recipient of a lovely bag of daffodils, and was grateful that I had a mild rainless day in which to plant them. The pink pig (now a glowing gold) is going to grace the Campbell River Hospital until gardening time in the spring.

Barb and Bill Rozel were presented with ARS Bronze medals in appreciation for the work they have done for the club over the years. They have always been willing and enthusiastic when asked to perform any tasks. Reliable in keeping track of membership, full of innovative ideas for rhodo games, and persistent sellers of books, T-shirts, gardening supplies - you name it, Bill does it.

MEMBER NOTES

As is usual, we are having a very weird winter, if you can call it winter. First, 6 weeks of heavy rains, then a foggy period which has not finished as I write. A great time for moving rhodos and planting bulbs. Last year we planted daffs very late, and found the leaves and flowers had shorter stems than usual, and they

bloomed late, but bloom they did. Now is the time to buy more at 1/2 price and broadcast them in the lawn or along the road-side.

BOOK REVIEW

I borrowed a copy of the 3d Ed. of Richard Jayne's book *Kalmia* (pub. Timber Press 1997) from our library and soon found it to be full of interesting information which often applies as well to Rhodos as to *Kalmias*. They seem to call the plant mountain Laurel, shortened to Laurel, in the eastern US where they grow naturally, and I find the term confusing, because we have a very different idea of a Laurel.

The book contains many pages of beautiful photos of various *Kalmia* flowers, both close-ups and in landscaping, and one can see immediately they would make wonderful companions for rhodos, especially as they prolong the season by blooming at the latter end (June) of the rhodo season. They are handsome plants, with their small but brilliant flowers and shiny evergreen leaves.

I am going to quote a few paragraphs which will be of use when planting any shrub.

Transplanting:

"Early autumn and early spring are the best times for transplanting laurel, although with certain precautions they can be

moved any time that the ground is not frozen. Fall transplanting has some advantages over spring transplanting if the move is made early in the season. Fall plantings put in at least one month before the ground freezes will have well-established roots when spring shoot growth occurs. Despite the dormant top, the roots will remain active as long as soil temperatures are above 40F (4C). Nursery people and experienced gardeners have long taken advantage of this phenomenon to give their plants a head start on establishing prior to the spring growing season. To prevent frost heaving, choose a site with well-drained porous soil and use wood chips or other mulch.

All plants suffer some degree of shock from transplanting, since no specimen, whether field or container grown, can be transplanted without some disturbance to the roots. Container-grown plants suffer less root loss, but they must adjust to a greater difference in the texture of the mix within the container and that of the soil in which they are placed. Such differences between mix and soil inhibit water exchange and root growth.

To facilitate the outward growth of the roots and the assimilation of water, several shallow vertical cuts should be made in the root ball of container-grown plants before placing them in the planting hole. "Mutilate the roots!" is the headline instruction in the catalog of Oliver Nurseries, one of the premier retail nurseries in Connecticut. Action just short of this statement is a hard and fast rule when planting pot-grown plants. Failure to do so may well

result in the death of the plant.

Slice the roots with a knife or scratch and tease them with the fingers in order to give the roots a head start in growing out of the container medium and into garden soil. Liberal amounts of peat moss or aged pine bark mixed with the soil should then be placed surrounding these exposed roots. Water well and you are home free.

Well, almost. The media of container grown plants generally contains no soil, is very porous, and dries out rapidly even if the surrounding soil is moist. So the watering needs of newly transplanted container-grown plants requires more diligence than if the plants had been field grown."

I would like to add to this the importance of giving regular thorough soakings to the root area during the very dry summer period we always suffer on the West Coast, even if it comes, as in 1999, in Sept-Oct. I can guarantee plants will die at this time if you don't follow this advice.

RHODO SPECIES FOUNDATION

Have you looked through a copy of the new catalog, which has mouth-watering descriptions of many plants, but some lovely photos also. Due to the difference in US/Can. currency, and annoyances in arranging to get plants through the Customs Service, it is no longer an easy task. But arrangements could be made for a shipment, if a few members would like to make up one order, and share the extra expense. Please speak to the Editor or to Linda Easton if you

are interested. And don't forget, if you plan to travel to Seattle, to pick up one of the free passes to the garden.

THOUGHTS FOR THE NEW GARDENING YEAR

For rhodos and rhodoholics, the year starts in January, when it is time to start feeding the plants. If you sprinkled a little lime around the plants a year ago, on top of the snow, they probably won't need it this time around. Sometime during January you can give 1 tsp. per foot of height of a rhodo blend fertilizer, superphosphate or bone meal. When the weather is suitable during Feb., give fritted trace elements or seaweed, and a foliar spray of 10-10-10 to encourage new growth.

In March, another tsp. per foot of height of fertilizer, superphosphate or bonemeal. Depending on whether winter is in Dec., Jan., Feb. or March, all these chores can be done during Feb., March or April. Less is better than more, and older rhodos need no more fertilizer than their own dead leaves with added mulch of bark or a mix of sawdust and animal manure.

WHAT NEXT!

According to **Amateur Gardening** magazine, wool has been found to be a better mulch than peat moss. Word from the Editor of the Northern Fruit Group newsletter (Harlow Carr gardens in Harrogate), is that "wool gives good winter protection, suppresses weeds and rots down into the soil." Wool prices have plunged so there is no lack of supply. People in Britain are concerned that the supply of

peat is dwindling, and various substances, such as coconut fibre, are being used instead.

WINTER FLOWERS

I admit it - I am always on the lookout for plants that bloom in the depths of winter.

Hamamelis (Witch hazels) are so reliable, regardless of the weather. I can count on **H. Jelena** blooming for Christmas, and **Pallida** and **H. mollis** are never far behind. Several *Sarcococcos* have fat buds, and the *Mahonia lomarifolia* "Winter Sun" is covered with bright yellow flowers.

Rhodo dauricum, I have often complained, insists on blooming in January in my garden, irregardless of weather. I decided to look up and list some of the earliest bloomers, with the plan of "keeping an eye out" for just one more. I found there are many species and hybrid rhodos which bloom early in the season, anywhere from January to April in this area, so I started a list of plants related to *R. dauricum*.



Cyclamen hederifolium

EARLY BLOOMERS (most material from Greer's Guidebook)

When I think of early-blooming rhodos, I think of my silly *R. dauricum* which insists on blooming in January. Flowers look sick after two days of snow, but - never mind, when the snow leaves, there are more flowers. I decided it would be interesting to list and consider other rhodos that bloom in January-February in our area.

Let's consider *R. dauricum*, her varieties, and some of the hybrids derived from using her as a parent. *R. dauricum* is hardy to -25F, a native of Siberia. It can be deciduous or evergreen, depending on weather and/or variety.

Peter Cox, in his book *The Encyclopedia of Rhodo Species*, Glendoick Publishing, says " *R. dauricum* is a very useful species for its hardiness and early flowering. Many fine selected clones are now available with white or double flowers although some of these are rather subject to root problems if drainage is not perfect". Because we are subject to weeks of heavy rain during the winter, please take heed of his note about root problems and drainage.

Some interesting varieties of *R. dauricum* include album - pure white flowers, 'Arctic Pearl', opalescent white flowers,

'Madison Snow' profuse bloomer, 'Mid-Winter', bright rose purple flowers, and var. *sempervirens*, evergreen.

There are many hybrids derived from *R. Dauricum*. I cannot list them all, but here are enough to keep you busy looking around the nurseries. These are

all hardy to -20 or -25F.

Many names start with "April" - April Dawn, April Gem, April Love, Mist, Reign, Rose, Snow, Song. There are also Arctic Dawn, Glow and Pearl. PJM is a wonderful little plant, with bright rosy flowers and dark red winter leaves. There are 6 varieties of PJM, also several plants with PJM as a parent - look for *R. Ebony*, Laurie, Lucy, Thunder, and Weston's Crescendo.

Look also for the *R. dauricum* hybrids Bellvale, Colts Neck Rose, Hudson Bay, Ivory Coast, Karin Seleger, New Patriot and Pillow Party. They may not all be available in this area, but are all hardy, compact, reliable plants.

There are many other early blooming species and hybrids, and I'll list some of them next month.

THANK YOU

Many thanks once again to all the newsletter "helpers", including **Jane Drown**, **Bill Rozel**, **Dick and Pauline Bonney**. I couldn't do it without you, particularly as I am still ignorant of the ways of any computer less than 10 years old.

LEAVES

Katherine Thompson, writing in the *Seattle Rhodoland Newsletter*, reminds us that the leaves of rhodos give us year-round beauty, whereas the flowers give a spectacular show for just a few weeks. "Leaf size usually depends on the location that the original plant comes from and the niche it plays in the landscape.

R. paludosum has tiny leaves of only 1/2 inch and the

plant comes from 12,000 feet elevation and is an undergrowth plant. *R. sinogrande* has leaves up to 30 inches long and this plant grows at 10,000 ft. It prefers a warmer location and is a tree growing up to 30 ft.

There are at least 9-10 different leaf shapes - linear, lanceolate, oval, oblong - the best thing to do is to keep a picture of leaf forms at hand while you read descriptions of species.

Note also that some leaves hang straight down, or lay flat outward or stand upward. Don't panic when some leaves curl into little "cigars" on a cold morning - they will flatten out again when the temperature goes up.

Look for leaves of different colours or shades of green. The deep green of *R. fictolacteam*, the blue green of *R. campanulatum*, the soft green of *R. orbiculare* make your eyes move around the garden."

Some leaves change to shades of red or purple for the winter, and of course the new growth on many forms of *R. yakushmanum* and hybrids derived from it is often a startling fuzzy silver, as bright and sparkling as the flowers.

This past month has been an ideal time to wander around the garden and appreciate the colours and shapes of leaves. Rhodo leaves are looking quite happy with drops of "liquid fog" dripping from them.

THANK YOU!

To **Madeleine and Len Simmons** for the handsome punchbowl donated to the club

MORE SHRUBS COLOURFUL IN FALL, WINTER OR EARLY SPRING

Joy and Phil Paull, writing in the November issue of the Nanaimo Rhodo Society Newsletter, remind us again of some of the colour we can have in the winter garden. *Parrotia* has autumn leaves of many colours, *Disanthus* has leaves which turn to claret red, purple and orange in fall. *Corylopsis* has pendant yellow flowers in late winter and golden yellow leaves in fall. There are many willows and cornus that have yellow or red stems in winter. The willows have catkins in very early spring. *Daphne mezereum* has fragrant pink or white flowers, usually in January. *Stachyurus* has creamy white bells and deep wine red bark. *Garrya elliptica* has grey-green catkins. These last two are real treasures but hard to track down in the nurseries.

Among the evergreen shrubs there are *Photinia*, *Camelia*, some *Viburnums*, *Sarcococca* with tiny perfumed white flowers, *Pieris* with brightly coloured flower buds most of the winter, and don't forget variegated-leaved *Aucubas* (which the deer keep neatly trimmed down in my yard) to brighten a dark corner. Some of the yews and junipers have interesting yellow or blue leaves.

CYCLAMEN

There are two fairly common cyclamen that are perfectly hardy in this area - *C. neapolitanum* or *hederaefolium*, and *C. cuum*. The first flowers from late August until Oct. or Nov., and the second flowers from late January to March, depending on the weather.

They have beautiful leaves, often shaped and blotched with white like variegated ivies, and the flowers, coloured white to pink to magenta, rise on thin stems well above the leaves. Neither plant likes heavy waterlogged soil, or hot dry borders. They love leaf mold or bark mulch.

The leaves open out before or after the flowers, but for many months are not visible, so you have to remember where you planted them. The corms seem to grow larger and can become the size of a saucer. I have not tried to divide them by cutting them in half as some writers recommend. If you watch carefully you may find, on top of the plants, a few months after the flowers have faded, fat brown seed capsules with tightly curled stems. When these capsules begin to split, during the following summer, take the seeds out, and soak them in warm water with a bit of dishwashing liquid added, for 12 hours.

"Sow the seeds in pots filled with a mixture of seed compost and sharp grit, half and half, and be sure to cover with compost. Water, allow to drain and seal in plastic bags until seeds germinate. Keep them at about 60F in a lightly shaded spot and transplant once they are large enough to handle." This information from *Amateur Gardening* Dec. 1999.

Starting from seed is a much more reliable method of obtaining plants than by buying the corms in a nursery. They dry out and often never recover. Beg a plant from a friend, then sow your own seeds in order to have a nice patch of these dainty and beautiful little plants.