

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



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7 March

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Phyllis Stapley**, 650 Willowcrest R., Campbell River.

14 March

There are many new, flamboyantly-coloured daylilies in the nurseries lately, and to tell us something about them, **Susan Johnson** of Mill Bay will be our guest for the evening. Dare I say it? The deer haven't eaten my daylilies in 20 years! **Harry Wright** will give a short talk on hybridizing rhodos.

8 Feb

We were honoured to have as our guest **Lynn Watts**, now President of the ARS, and always a lover of species rhodos. He presented many beautiful slides of some of these plants, as well as telling us much about how they grow in their native lands. Mr. Watts has a nursery in Belleview, WA, which he plans to downsize in future. A very enjoyable evening

was spent by all present.

Madeleine and and Len

Simmons brought slides of some of the gardens they visited in Sweden last summer. They were a little late for most of the rhodos, but we saw many of the same shrubs and perennial plants that we grow.

MEMBER NOTES

Remember to give Harry information on the "good doers" in your garden, just as soon as possible. **Harry Wright and Paul Wurz** have fertilizer supplies on hand, \$19 for a 40 lb. bag of a good rhodo fertilizer containing trace elements. I did write an article suggesting fertilizer is not always necessary for rhodos, that their own leaves, rotted down, are all they need. I would like to back down on this, a little, for I have noticed it takes several years for those hard evergreen leaves to rot, and not every plant drops very many each year. So - a combination of granular fertilizer and broken-down leaves and bark mulch will do a lot of good for your plants. The lawn mower or weed-eater will break up a pile of leaves very satisfactorily.

EARLY-BLOOMING HYBRID RHODOS

There are so many of these, and "early blooming" is such a vague

term on the west coast, that everyone who reads this will have their own ideas, quite different to mine. For instance, in my garden, *R. dauricum* flowers are finished and new leaves are breaking. *Cilpinense* and *Rosamundi* are just starting to show colour, and *Christmas Cheer* is not. I saw a picture of a *Christmas Cheer* blooming in Victoria weeks ago. Someone is sure to have a *Praecox* or a *Pioneer* blooming somewhere. Anyway, here are some of the early bloomers; perhaps you will want to buy one this spring.

Alpine Glow, *Alpine Meadow*, *Bo-peep*, *Bric-a-Brac*, *Carex*, *Cilpinense*, *Conemaugh*, *Cunningham's* - *White*, *Pink* and *Sulphur*, *Lee's Scarlet*, *Lucy Lou*, *Promise of Spring*, *Snow Lady*, *Snow Sprite* and *Tessa*.

HYBRIDIZING

by **Harry Wright**

We have been asked by the Cowichan Valley Chapter if we could supply a variety of *Rhododendron* seeds so that they could be included in the registration packet at the Western Regional Conference in Sept. So I will explain just what is involved in this process in hope that many of our members will take an interest and have some fun.

HYBRIDIZING is creating new plants from existing plants, by

ertilization of one plant with pollen from another - this is called crossing and the plant produced is called a cross.

As in most unions we have a male and a female; the plant receiving the pollen is the female and the donor is the male. When listing a cross it is always ladies first (seed plant x pollen plant).

The female reproductive organ is the pistil in the centre of the flower; the pistil consists of three parts (1) stigma (2) style (3) ovary.

The male reproductive organ is called the stamen, which consists of the anther which has two chambers, each having a hole through which the pollen is dispersed. The anthers are carried on tubes named filaments. Pollen is not a dust, but rather a long, sticky, stringy substance.

Now we all know the basic construction of the flower, next is timing for the fertilization. When is the plant ready?

The pollen is ripe just before the flower opens, so at this time, remove the anthers with tweezers or just by using your fingers. Pollen can be stored.

Next step is to prepare the seed plant. Conditions are ideal when the stigma is sticky and this condition can be seen by checking some of the first flowers to open on a plant. When a flower has been selected, remove all the petals and stamens, being careful to ensure that no pollen touches the stigma.

I prefer doing several flowers in a truss and removing all other flowers nearby, to prevent insects being attracted to the area. If insects do the fertilization, the cross is called "open pollinated" and we would only know the seed parent.

At the March meeting, I will do a short presentation on the subject, with a follow-up in April. For this project to be successful I will need your support.

A "NEW" RHODODENDRON

The January newsletter from the Species Foundation has a very exciting article by **Steve Hootman**. In 1992, the year he started working at the RSF, he noted a particularly fine example of a *Ledum palustre*, "a perfect mound of evergreen foliage covered with round trusses of small but numerous, pure white flowers. It was easily the finest specimen of *Ledum* that I had ever seen, about 3 ft. high by 5 ft. wide with attractive indumented foliage." This plant was propagated for sale, and by that time, it was decided that ledums are in fact rhododendrons. Now this lovely little plant, *R. tomentosum* "Milky Way" is listed in the RSF catalogue and we can hopefully look forward to being able to purchase one next time a member goes down Seattle-way.

QUICK TIPS FROM HITHER AND YON

We may be finished with "winter" for this time, but remember this for next time you have an icy sidewalk: Don't use salt, use fertilizer (46-0-0 is good), so when the granules are washed

onto the lawn or flower beds, they will not harm the plants. (Nanaimo Rhodo Society newsletter)

Slugs and deer - our favorite hates! There are always new and/or different methods for removing them - every gardening magazine can be depended on to have an article soon. Ask at Art Knapp's for a pamphlet on plants that are deer resistant. A good way to keep deer from your favorite plants is to grow things they don't (usually) like, such as anything with fuzzy or strong-tasting leaves. There are new products on the market or you can mix up your own brew of ground-up onions, garlic, eggs, water and cayenne pepper, which works quite well between rain storms. This winter, alas, they have been sharpening horns on the rhodos planted at the UBC Research Farm. There, the only answer is an 8 ft. fence if rhodos are planted in that garden again.

As for slugs - I am going to continue spreading ground-up egg shells and oyster shells around the hostas and other favorite munchies. They haven't attacked the rhodos - yet. Here's where our friends the snakes come in. If they have cool shaded places to hide in, and water to drink, snakes will be happy to live in your garden and munch on slugs. They are great mosquito catchers too, if you have mosquitos.

Helen Chesnut, in her Colonist column, advises that Safer's has a non-toxic Slug & Snail bait out this year. The active ingredient is iron phosphate, a naturally occurring soil element that

overloads the slug's digestive system. The product has no metaldehyde in it, and presents no harm to pets, insects, birds or other wildlife.

HELLEBORES

Amateur Gardening recently had a lovely article on Hellebores, and as they are just starting to bloom and are showing up in the nurseries, it is time to talk a bit about them. I will quote, "Hellebores are one of the prettiest, toughest and longest lasting flowering perennials you can grow, putting on a show of subtly coloured blooms from winter to late spring, when most plants are still dormant".



Helleborus atrorubens

They are happy in shade - mine are in deep shade all summer, with no watering except rain. The deer, slugs and weevils have never touched them. "The secret of their ability to flower for months lies in their unusual flower structure. The five colourful 'petals' of each bloom are in fact tough, resilient sepals

(protective sheaths for the petals)." If we have snow or frost when they are blooming, the flowers lie on the ground until the weather moderates, then continue with no apparant damage.

The only one that gives trouble is *H. niger*, the 'Christmas Rose'. I have learned to give it a glass tent for the winter, as the petals become blotched with rain. It blooms any time from July to March, not at Christmas. Quoting again from AG "One to avoid, unless your are a hellebore fanatic, is *H. niger*. It is a miserable performer in most gardens, and although named the Christmas rose, it rarely flowers until spring - and only then if you are lucky."

However, there are two new crosses (if/when we get them in this country) *Helleborus x nigercors* and *H. x ericsmithii*, now listed as *H. nigerstern*. These are much more floriferous, also very expensive at present.

"Hellebore species can be raised from your own saved seeds. Hybrids almost never come true, and even the species tend to diversify, but you should get at least half looking like the parent plant.

The secret is to sow the seed as fresh as possible, and expose the pots to cold weather. Set the seeds in a pot of loam-based seed compost, and put the pot in a cold frame; germination can take several weeks. Prick seedlings out into individual small pots and grow on in a cool, shady spot for a year before planting out.

Hellebores can be propagated by division but the process is tricky. Wait until after flowering then lift one and cut the crown into very small "noses" - small shoots with a root attached. Be warned - it is a hit or miss affair. On the other hand, large hellebores can be transplanted during the winter months with no ill effects".

I have had no luck so far, planting seeds, but can dig up dozens of "babies" from around the large plants. It will be three years before you have flowers from these small plants. I think the best way to get that "special" hellebore is to buy one when you see it in bloom at a nursery. If you are a "hellebore nut", look for *H. argutifolius* "Pacific Frost", with greenish flowers and leaves heavily speckled with white. Note: all quotes from AG - the rest of the article contains my own opinions and experiences.

Further dates to remember:
Our annual tour of some 6 local gardens will be held 13 May, and volunteers are needed to help at the gardens. The annual BBQ will be held 17 June at the Kitty Coleman Woodland Garden.

Do any members wish to sell plants, gardening books, tools etc. at the Truss Shows and Sales? If so, speak to Paul.

WINTER ACONTITES (ERANTHIS)

These are dainty, bright yellow members of the Ranunculaceae family, which includes buttercups, anemones and clematis among many others. Eranthis usually start to bloom in early Feb. in this area, and make a brilliant patch of sunshine in the woods. When happy, they seed and spread all through a woody area. What makes them happy? A spot under deciduous trees or shrubs, so they get sun and rain in winter when they flower, and dry shade in summer when they are dormant.



Eranthis ciliatica

Buy plants "in the green" in Feb. or March, or tubers in the autumn. As they don't like to be disturbed, you may have to wait a couple of years for flowers. You can dig plants up just after flowering. Seeds must be sown immediately the pods split open. Put them in pots of seed compost in the cold frame. Pot on, and grow for a couple of years before planting out. It may take 5 years before they bloom.

If you have the right kind of shady spot for them, they are worth the initial trouble you must take.

BAD NEWS

According to Amateur Gardening, the mild winter (in England as well as here) will result in vine weevil grubs overwintering more successfully than usual. The grubs may damage roots during the winter, but damage will not become apparent until April, when weevils will be seen feeding on foliage. **Andrew Salisbury** an assistant at the entomology dept in the RHS garden at Wisley advises "the larvae and adults are capable of surviving temperatures of -3C for 90 days". In our area, the temperature rarely went below -3C so unless we get really severe weather in the next month, we had better be on the lookout for these pests.

ARE YOU AN AGATHA CHRISTIE FAN?

You might be interested to learn that Greenway Gardens, near Brixham, Devon, owned for many years by Mrs. Christie, is about to be passed on to the National Trust. She bought the 30 acre estate in 1938 and it has since been known for its magnificent displays of rhodos and magnolias. The National Trust is encouraging gardeners to donate a million pounds which are needed for restoration work.

'ENCORE' AZALEAS

An article in Flower & Garden, April 1999, tells us all about these plants and the man, **Robert Edward Lee** of Louisiana who started in 1980 with the goal of breeding azaleas that bloom in summer and fall as well as in spring. He crossed various spring-flowering azaleas with a rare summer-blooming plant, *Rhododendron oldhamii*.

So far, there are two series of

'Encore' azaleas - the 'Autumn' series, suitable for Zone 7 or warmer, and the 'Southern' series, for Zone 8 or warmer. The 'Southern' series are especially good in the Florida panhandle and the Mississippi and Alabama gulf coasts. Both types need winter protection against extreme temperatures. If you live in a cooler climate, you could plant one in a pot - at least 2 ft. in diameter - and bring it in for the winter.

After they flower in spring, these evergreen azaleas grow new shoots and set new buds, which flower in mid-summer. Then, when the weather becomes cooler, in fall, they offer another round of flowers.

These plants should be treated the same as other evergreen azaleas - acid soil, filtered shade, protection from the afternoon sun. Add organic matter to the soil, and mulch heavily to keep the plant moist in summer and insulate from cold weather.

It seems to me that these plants should do well here, with a little winter protection when temperatures go down to -10 or -15C. Perhaps a year or two in a pot would be a good idea.

So far, all the 'Autumn' series have names that start with 'Autumn' and are probably the safest to try here. The 'Southern' series with names such as 'S. Beauty, Blush and Glory' are probably not quite as hardy. I know we always think we are in Zone 8, more or less, but so is Seattle. And our climate is totally different from that in the Florida panhandle. Caution and good sense is needed in buying one of these!