

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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 editor.

## 2 May

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Harry & Gwen Wright**, 769 Chaster, Courtenay.

## 9 May

Annual General Meeting will be held at the United Church after a tour of the garden where **Kirsten Emmott** and **Rod Ptak** live. Turn off Comox Ave. or Beaufort St. to 170 Ellis St.

As at the time of writing, we are still short a Vice-President. No club can prosper without members who are willing to take a turn at accepting a little bit of responsibility. "Let Joe (or Josie) do it" is just not fair. Our society is made up of dozens of well-educated, dedicated gardeners. I am sure one of them can take on an interesting job for 2 years. Speak up!

## 11 April

**Jim Cadwalader** was our guest, and gave us an interesting tour through the Milner Garden at Qualicum. There are many acres of

old-growth forest for Malaspina College students to work and learn in, and many beautiful old rhodos and other shrubs and trees, as well as the house and other buildings to be maintained. The garden will be open to the public on a regular basis, next year, meantime membership in the garden society is welcomed.

**Judy Walker** told us of plans for the garden show at Filberg Lodge Apr. 29 and 30. There will be guest speakers as well as many displays of garden equipment, furniture and plants. Our society will have a booth and members are reminded that our own Truss Show and Sale is on April 30 at the Fair Grounds. Plan to attend both if possible, and plan to give some help at the booth or the Truss Show.

## 17 June

Our annual BBQ will be held at Woodland Gardens. Go to Left Road, off Kitty Coleman Road, and follow the signs. Mark your calendar now - more details next newsletter. The Cowichan Rhodo Society will be joining us for the afternoon.

## MEMBER NOTES

There was a work party at the Rhodo Garden on 14 April and the beds look very neat (I checked on the 15th). Soon the main bulk of rhodos will be in bloom. Any time you drive down that way, take a few minutes to check the plants, and pull any weeds you see.

The hybridizing session at Haida Gold Garden on 16 April was very

successful. 10 members learned how to pollinate rhodos and partook of goodies and coffee provided by Gwen. We look forward to some interesting results.

**Harry Wright** wrote the following article which should have been in an earlier newsletter, but was misplaced.

## 1999, A YEAR TO REMEMBER

Spring was slow to arrive in 1999 and this certainly retarded the blooming period of the Rhodos. My garden usually peaks about 20 May but last year, with the wet cool weather, it was set back 10 - 14 days.

One rhodo that really enjoyed this setback was R. Golden Gate. This plant in the past has always been hit by frost, leaving very few blooms to fully open, but last spring was its turn to impress, and it certainly did. No frost damage and covered in bloom, and due to the weather, the flowering period was longer than normal. All rhodos were late to open and had an extended bloom period.

Another twist to 1999 was the fall season, when several plants such as R. Elizabeth and R. Cheer, will almost always throw out a few blooms, but not this time! The only colour seen was on a very few of the small-leaved ones such as R. glomeratum and R. intricatum.

To continue into 2000, here it is 19 Feb. and R. Olive (under plastic) is still in tight bud. Its usual flowering time is 1 Feb. Will 2000 carry on

with more abnormalities or will it be normal? What is normal?"

### **COWICHAN 2000** 20th ARS Western Regional Conference

This is a special invitation to join the Cowichan Rhodo Society for Cowichan 2000, to be held at the Cowichan Native Village and the Village Green Inn, in Duncan, B.C., on Sept. 14, 15, 16 and 17, 2000.

After many problems it was decided to change hotels. The Village Green Inn (76 rooms) is where registration, plant, souvenir and art sale as well as the hospitality room will be located. There are several other hotels within easy walking distance, including the Silver Bridge Inn and Days Inn. There are motels, B&Bs and trailer parks within a short distance.

The committee is working hard to make this an enjoyable and educational occasion. Plan to attend. Much of the new Island Highway is now finished, so that it is possible to drive down, spend the day at the conference, and return home before midnight. However, it would be better to plan to stay at least one night - there will be many interesting speakers as well as an opportunity to buy plants, books and garden sundries. Much of the pleasure of these conferences is in meeting with new or old friends and catching up with the latest garden lore. We don't often have the opportunity to attend a conference on the Island, thus saving extra transportation costs, so take full advantage whenever possible!

### **DEER - OH DEAR!**

We, in concert with thousands of other people these days, are continually complaining about the damage deer do in the garden when they are in the mood. I picked up a brochure at Long Lake Nursery a few weeks ago which lists some new

products which are available and said to discourage these four-legged pests.

**BAMBI** a mild and effective spray - 50-100 ml to 1 litre of water, sprayed on every 2-3 weeks unless there is heavy rain.

**PANTHER P2** is strong - spray a small area first in case it burns some plants. There are also sachets which can be hung 6-10 ft. apart on fences.

**PLANT PRO-TEC** is another new product still being tested. Ask at the nursery - read the labels. Maybe one of these will work in your garden.

Meantime, I have tried this recipe, which smells horrible and is effective to some extent: Mix chopped onions, and garlic, a whole egg, water, and cayenne pepper in your blender. Strain, add soapy water and spray onto plants. This has to be renewed after heavy rain.

Did you know frogs eat large quantities of slugs? We have no fish left in our pond, but are looking forward to large quantities of tadpoles, judging from the number of frog eggs in the pond (usually eaten by the fish). There should be large numbers of frogs, if they are not all eaten by the snakes. We mustn't scare the snakes, because they eat the mosquitoes which will be produced in the pond because there are no fish left to eat the mosquito larvae. An ecological puzzle - who will win?

### **BOOK REVIEW**

I picked up a little book "The Complete Book of Violets" Nelson Coon, pub. 1977 A.S. Barnes & Co. and was absolutely fascinated by the amount of information regarding these plants. Mr. Coon included a great amount of historical information. Imagine, a book written

in Arabic in A.D. 904 (translated from a much earlier book) gives valid cultural directions for growing violets. There are chapters on culinary and medicinal use of violets, explanations about various members of the botanical family - pansies, violas and violettas, descriptions of hardy varieties and those which need the protections of a cold-frame or glasshouse.

There are many line-drawings, some photographs, lists of varietal names, and descriptions of pests and diseases. This is a very informative and easy-to-read book, probably out of print, but certainly worth getting from the library.

Violets and violas make dainty ground-cover for rhodos. We have several yellow natives growing in the woods. Perfumed purple ones, alas with very short stems, once established in your garden will spread into a lovely ground cover. The deer browse the leaves all winter but that doesn't discourage the flowers in April. Johnny Jump-ups seed themselves modestly and brighten the garden year-round. And I have found the violas were untouched by deer this winter (in such a mild winter they bloomed continuously). I have had to give up on pansies for the deer eat the whole plant.

Do you read the magazines "Gardens West" and "Coastal Grower"? I hope so, for they contain large amounts of useful gardening information every month, and they are written for western gardeners. There is such a proliferation of gardening magazines lately that you can easily spend large amounts of money, and become disappointed because the soil, climate or plants referred to are not possible here. For instance, if you can grow a lilac you are lucky, whereas in Vernon or Penticton, where the soil is alkaline, the winters cold and the summers hot (no four-month rainy period) these plants are huge and

stagger under the number of blossoms.

Rhododendrons are another item. If you live in one of the afore-mentioned towns, and buy a super-hardy Finnish rhododendron, you still have to combat the alkalinity of the soil.

I have had a subscription to Amateur Gardening for many years, and though most of their advice is sound for us on the "wet coast" I have to keep in mind that much of the coast of Britain is mainly in Zone 9, and they have magnificent roses that grow on almost pure chalk.

If you want to see beautiful photos of wonderful gardens and handsome plants, buy any or all of the gardening magazines. If you want sensible advice for our part of the country, stick to Coastal Grower. My advice is - read the magazines you can borrow from the library or a friend before spending any money.

### EUPHORBIAS

Some of these are weeds, some "thugs" in the garden, but most are quite spectacular. There are more than 2000 varieties of this plant, including annuals, biennials, subshrubs and shrubs both deciduous and evergreen. Our favorite Christmas plant, poinsettia, belongs to this tribe.

There are more of these plants in the nurseries every year. Look for: *E. characias* - Grows to 4 ft in height and width. There are dozens of tall thumb-thick stems covered with whorls of blue-green leaves. *E. c. wulfenii* is a handsome plant. *E. griffithii* has red stems and orange inflorescences, but it is a wanderer. Maybe it should be in a large pot. It also grows to about 4 ft. Variety 'Fireglow' has tomato-coloured flowers, and 'Dixter' has orange stems and is about 3 ft. in height.

*E. amygdaloides* 'purpurea' has purple stems and lime green flowers. *E. polychroma* - my favorite - with bright yellow bracts on top of 18" stems covered with bright green leaves. This is a compact plant, always looks neat, never wanders, and blooms in earliest spring. The yellow fades to solid green during the summer.

Always wear gloves when handling these plants - the milky sap is irritating to the skin of many people. Common names for the plant are spurge and milkweed. Caper spurge is said to repel moles.

These plants seem to be happy in any soil, and will take almost full sun.

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE RHODO?

The one in bloom at present, according to one of the experts. I feel very proud, at present, to have a lovely *R. wardii* covered with flowers. The plant has neat round leaves, orange buds, and bright yellow bell flowers. After 10 years, it is a neat plant, 4' high and wide. According to **Peter Cox** (The Larger Rhododendron Species - Timber Press 1990) "An exceedingly common and widespread species in the wild, occurring over wide areas of Yunnan, Szechwan and south-east Tibet where it has a long flowering season and the colour varies from ivory to sulphur-yellow, sometimes flushed pink. **Kingdon-Ward** called the Doshong La plant "Yellow Peril" on account of the impenetrable thickets it forms... (It grows on) open hillsides, rocky slopes, open or dense conifer, mixed or oak forest, among bamboo, by streams, in swampy ground, rhododendron thickets and limestone cliffs."

It grows in mountains at the 9,000 to 14,000 ft. level. Amazing that it seems quite happy at sea-level!

**HERE ARE SOME RHODOS THAT DO WELL** in gardens on central and Northern Vancouver Island. Remember, plants become hardier after several years in the garden; flowers are less hardy than roots - shelter early flowers from sharp morning frosts - and hardiness ratings in the books are not always correct for a specific garden or area. Temperatures are in Fahrenheit, as listed in Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons.

### SPECIES RHODOS

Auriculatum - 5      Fulvum 0  
Impeditum -15      Keleticum -15  
Luteum -15      Rubiginosum 0  
Russatum -15

### HYBRIDS

April Rose -25  
Aunt Martha -10  
Blaney's Blue - 5  
Boule de Neige -25  
Cosmopolitan -10  
Cotton Candy 0  
Cunningham's White -15  
Etta Burrows + 5  
Grace Seabrook - 5  
Haida Gold 0  
Halfdan Lem - 5  
Hallelujah -15  
Hill's Bright Red 0  
Hotei + 5  
Kiwi Magic + 5  
Lem's Cameo + 5  
Lem's Monarch - 5  
Lem's Storm Cloud -15  
Loderi King George 0  
Lori Eichelser - 5  
Lucy Lou + 5  
Maureen 0  
Moonstone - 5  
Nancy Evans + 5  
Nepal -25  
Newcombe's Sweetheart 0  
Ooh Gina 0  
Paprika Spiced 0  
Percy Wiseman -10  
Pink Jeans - 5  
PJM -25  
Point Defiance - 5  
Praecox - 5

Pridenjoy 0  
 Purple Splendour - 5  
 Red Wood -20  
 Rosamundi - 5  
 Rubicon -10  
 Sea Tac 0  
 September Song 0  
 Snow Lady - 5  
 Snow White 0  
 Songbird 5  
 Susan - 5  
 Taurus - 5  
 The Honorable Jean Marie  
 de Montague (full name) - 5  
 Unique - 5  
 Virginia Richards 0  
 Vulcan -15  
 Wigeon -10  
 Wild Affair - 5  
 Yellow Pages 0  
 Yellow Petticoats 0

### WEEVIL NEWS

Last July and August, the beetles of the Black Vine Weevil (or perhaps Strawberry Weevil) not only chewed the distinctive semi-circular holes along the rhodo leaf margins, but laid quantities of white eggs on the leaves or in the ground near the plants. The eggs hatched by Sept., and the larvae burrowed 6-12" into the ground for the winter, eating fine rhodo roots as they went.



When the weather warms up a little, in spring, these grubs can do really serious injury to the plants; devouring fine roots as well as feeding on the bark of larger roots and trunks. They reach their full size (1/2") by May or early June, and after pupation of 2-3

weeks, the adults emerge to start the cycle again.

Nematodes seem to be the most successful eradicator of these pests, but they cannot be used until warmer weather in June. Meantime Isotox can be sprayed around the base of the plants in hopes of discouraging the weevils as they emerge in the next month or two.

### MAGNOLIAS

There are many spring-flowering magnolias in bloom right now in this district - *M. stellata* is probably the most common, and the most hardy and reliable. Some, especially the evergreen kinds, can be damaged by early fall or late spring frosts.

Varieties of *M. grandiflora* have been on sale in local nurseries for some years, though they come from the south-east U.S. (Mine, for instance, is losing all its 1999 leaves, even though we had a very mild winter). Roots must be protected in very severe weather. Deciduous varieties seem to be hardier.

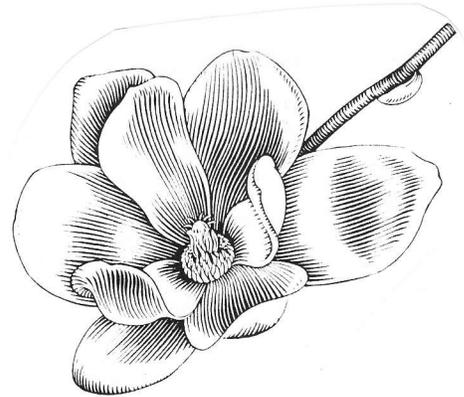
So why do we take a chance and buy these plants? Because they are so beautiful when they are happy. There are many varieties growing in Stanley Park, Vancouver, part of the Ted & Mary Greig garden there. They are near the waterfront, in the pitch & putt golf course area, where it is much warmer in winter than in many of our gardens.

A recent copy of *Amateur Gardening* gives information about "new" magnolias from China. These are stunning, deciduous spring-flowering varieties. Some will be available in Britain this season. They are thought to be *M. denudata* hybrids, but little is known about them so far.

Eric Boeve, who runs a plant import business in Holland, says of the new magnolias "Along with 'Fei Huang' (Yellow River, with yellow buds and

leaves) and 'Dan Zin' (Fragrant Cloud) we have varieties 'Red Lucky' 'Chameleon', 'China Town' and a grafted form of the denudata species with double white flowers. 'Red Lucky' and 'Fragrant Cloud' seem to have the ability to flower twice a year, in spring and fall.

'Fragrant Cloud' is good for small gardens as it produces very short, thick stems and has deep pink, goblet shaped flowers in mid-spring. Another, 'Chameleon', grows to only about 12 ft."



*Magnolia denudata*

Because the distance from China to the coast of Western North America is much shorter than from China to Holland and Britain, we should be seeing some of these plants very soon.

There are new Jury hybrids coming from New Zealand, which have been bred to flower at a much earlier age than most of the older plants. Many modern varieties are grafted onto a different rootstock to improve vigour, keep plants compact, and encourage flowering at a young age.

If in doubt, plant a new purchase in a corner protected from cold winds and hot mid-day sun.