

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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President Paul Wurz 287 4301
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Nov 7

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Dave & Marleen Crucq**, 2301 Seabank. Drive down Waveland to Seabank, turn right to 2301 on the corner of June Rd.

Nov 14

Al Murray will tell us all about growing Magnolias as companions for rhodos. He showed marvellous slides of many of his magnolias in full bloom, added here and there to his display of rhodos in his hillside garden, at the conference in Duncan. Bring your magnolia questions to the meeting. For instance, just how hardy are Magnolia grandiflora varieties in this area?

Oct 10

Always welcome, **Ken and Dot Gibson** came to visit, enthusiastic as always about rhodos and companion plants. Slides showed various gardens visited this spring, in Cornwall and Devon. Hillside of massed rhodo and azalea plantings,

huge trees covered with large trusses of red or white flowers - a wonderful sight. Discussion on powdery mildew and poor Virginia Richards gave some insight into Ken's methods of discouraging the pest. Ken is convinced that moisture (heavy winter rains on our coast) do not produce the mildew; it is carried by the wind. He has found that moving a plant from a western to eastern exposure often solves the problem.

In a recent issue of Amateur Gardening I read that **Wagner Bettiol** at an environmental lab in Brazil has found that fresh milk, diluted with water, was as effective as chemical controls on mildew on curcubit plants such as cucumbers and squash. Maybe we should try that mixture on rhodos?

Ken thoroughly enjoyed the trip to the UK this year, with a group headed by **Clint Smith**. Clint has another tour lined up for next May, to Scotland this time, and Ken recommended Clint as an experienced and enthusiastic tour manager. I have seen many of the gardens on the Scotland tour and I would love to go along. The 16-day tour leaves from Seattle, and the cost will be about \$4000 US, and includes all breakfasts and dinners, a comfortable deluxe motorcoach, and a portfolio of about 100 pictures of the trip. Knowing the cost of hotels and meals in the UK, I feel the price is not exorbitant. I have a copy of the preliminary itinerary - ask for it if interested.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD by Rose Marie Silkens

Gerry Gibbens' slide of the beautiful Paulownia tree (*Paulonia tomentosa*, Empress or Princess tree), thriving at the Van Dusen gardens compels me to share my experience with this fabulous plant here at the northern limits of the coastal zone. I have long maintained that there are two cardinal laws in gardening, fundamental to any attempt to grow anything.

The first is that if one puts a plant in a spot that is too small for it, it will grow and thrive. The second law is that if one has decided one doesn't like a plant, doesn't care about it, or doesn't want it, that plant will grow and thrive. Both laws are well illustrated by my Paulownia tree.

I was given a small Paulownia by **Hart Wellmeier** of Wrenhaven Nursery in South Surrey. He advised that its chances in Sayward were negligible, but that I might like to try it anyhow. After reading up on the tree, I thought I might have more luck growing it as a houseplant, but planted it outside anyway, next to a path, near an arbour, where there was scarcely room for even this infant. However, as this is the coldest part of my garden, I reasoned the Paulownia wasn't going to make it through fall let alone winter, so room to grow would not be an issue. It made it through 5 winters. Yet here was no cause for joy, as each year it died back to the roots and then sent up a myriad of shrubby shoots which required a lot of pruning.

The tree could never reach blooming size, even if we did have a spring mild enough to allow survival of its splendid blue blossoms. So I decided I didn't want it and resolved to prune it entirely away the next spring. But the following winter, the Paulownia did not die back. It leafed out in the spring and has since assumed a handsome tree-shape with characteristic immense leaves. I'm thrilled, even though I have to move the path through the arbour.

Of course, that means that this winter, it's doomed. Which brings up a third law of gardening.....

MEMBER NOTES

I'm sure we can all tell stories about those almost-hardy plants we cannot resist buying. Next spring I will have the second part of a continuing tale of the *Datura* (now named *Brugmansia*) that I bought as a scrubby bit of root and stem, last spring. In a pot in the unheated greenhouse, it finally leafed out the end of May. Now, 15 Oct. it is a monster, 10 ft. high, loaded with 15 huge pumpkin-coloured blooms, with more to come. Will it survive the winter? How much and when should I cut it down? To be continued.

SPRING GARDEN TOURS

Where would you like to go? There are many interesting places on Vancouver Island, for instance a day visiting **Ken Gibson's** garden in Tofino then to **George Fraser's** memorial garden in Uclulet. Another would be to the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific then another visit to **Bill Dale's** and **Dave Dougan's** interesting gardens in the Victoria area.

The Cowichan Rhodo Society is planning a trip to Whidby Island in the spring, home of Meerkerk Gardens and Frank Fujioka's fabulous garden. Speak to **Phyllis** if you are interested in further information.

The trip to Van Dusen Gardens planned for the 2nd or 3d week of April, next year, will cost members about \$30 plus meals.

Phyllis has a sign-up sheet-nothing finalized as yet.

According to the Times Colonist of 17 Oct., the school at the Hort Centre of the Pacific has just been given a first class rating by the Private Post Secondary Education Committee. This validates the work and commitment of staff and qualifies students for 2nd year courses at other institutions.

The school has been very selective in admission policies. There is room for 20 students at a time, and they are carefully screened in the hope that they will not only do well but are able to get along with other students in the small space provided.

The moderate climate in Saanich allows a broad range of plants to thrive. Also, there are many gifted amateur gardeners and retired professionals at hand to demonstrate and give advice.

OUR BLACK, SCURRYING BEETLE FRIENDS

Some of us are startled when we see one of these creatures in the garden. Remember they are our friends. Any "bug" that moves fast is sure to be a predator - not of your plants, but of other creatures such as vine weevils and slugs.

SEEDS

Don't forget to save seeds of plants that you think others may be interested in. The Comox Valley was populated 100 years ago by keen gardeners from England and other countries. They brought with them seeds of many of the interesting shrubs and trees we see in older gardens now. These varieties need to be saved for the future, so do your bit - collect seeds. For instance,

Rose Marie Silkens has just told me of a fabulous *Helleborus Niger*, brought many years ago from some far-away place. It is fully hardy in Sayward, and blooms prolifically every Christmas, not like my sad example which blooms in July, sometimes. Seeds of her hellebore are priceless!

Dry the seeds (even pick branches off plants if you have left it this late, hang them in paper bags, with one end open until the seeds drop out. Put seeds into marked paper bags and keep them in the frig until spring, when they can all be slipped into tiny paper envelopes and taken to Seedy Saturday in March.

NORTH TO ALASKA

Bernie and Gloria Guyader
We proceeded north on the Cassiar Highway and stopped for a lunch break at Hodden Lake, a pleasant rest area where we could even do a little fishing.. We stopped for the night near Iskut at Shadow Mt. campsite. The lake had some great rainbow trout. You had to hide behind a tree to bait your hook. Seriously, we were true conservationists and it was strictly catch and release. A great time was had by all. On the way out next morning, we were accompanied along the road by a beautiful red fox.

Our next stop was at the junction of the Cassiar Highway and the Alaska Highway west of Watson Lake on the Liard River. The river was very high but the land, very dry. The only flowers spotted were small Jacob's Ladders.

Now it was Westward Ho. A short stop at Rancheria Falls, a recreation site with a boardwalk along the river, enabling you to get a close-up look at the falls. A very pretty place for a break..

We stopped at the Yukon Hotel in Teslin. They have a Northern

Wildlife gallery. It was the best display of these animals and their habitat that I have seen. It is, I think, better than the displays at the Royal BC Museum in Victoria. Further on is the George Johnston museum. The most interesting feature is the 1928 Chev which he bought and had shipped in, then he built 3 miles of road because the highway had not yet been built. The car was restored recently by General Motors and is on display. Our stop for the night was at Mukluk Annie's, where if you had the BBQ dinner your camping was free. After dinner we took a houseboat ride across Teslin Lake to view the bears.

Next morning, after a stop for gas at Jake's Corner, where there was quite a display of many antique vehicles and machinery, we headed south for Carcross and Skagway. The road was lined with a great display of flowers - penstemmons, Jacob's Ladder, purple Vetch and Mountain Avens. At the top of the grades you could see snow-capped mountains, quite a sight.

Unfortunately the road was so narrow you didn't dare stop to take pictures. We stopped in Tagish for coffee and for all you Elvis fans, he was there as well. Carcross, formerly an important stop on the White Pass & Yukon Railway, has many interesting things to see, one of which is an old locomotive, "The Duchess", which was once used on Vancouver Island.

We continued on to Skagway. On the way we stopped at Bove Lake where there are very interesting rock formations. One called Tormented Valley is a rocky moonscape of stunted trees and small lakes. At Summit Lake we found some white mountain heather poking blossoms through the snow along with other spring flowering plants and small junipers. Because of the

altitude and cold drying winds they were about 1/4 the size of the plants in Paradise Meadows. The trip down through the canyon was breathtaking. Again the pullouts were few and far between. I think Skagway was the biggest disappointment of the trip. The campsite was terrible and with 4 cruise ships in port, you couldn't move in town. A tourist trap if I ever saw one.

BOOK REVIEWS

While at the rhodo conference in Duncan last month, I purchased two books and am finding they were very good buys.

"The Flowering Shrub Expert", author **D.G. Hessayon**, Expert Books, 1997. This is one of a series of informative, reasonably priced books including "The Bulb Expert", "The Garden Expert", "The Fruit Expert", and many others, written by the same author. This book covers many of the flowering shrubs that do well in our gardens.

The first thing I noticed and appreciated is that each shrub is illustrated with a drawing and a photo, making identification very easy. The book is smallish, making it easy to carry with you to gardens or nursery. There is a useful page of sources of supply, pointing out advantages and disadvantages of buying plants in various places. There is a picture dictionary showing descriptions of various flower-heads and leaf shapes, brief explanations of how to plant, taking cuttings, flowers for every season and plants for various soils, fragrant shrubs and those that encourage wildlife. Other features include a pronouncing dictionary and pictures of many common diseases and how to overcome them. There is an amazing amount of useful information in 128 pages. Everyone should have a copy!

The other book I bought is "Mr. Menzies' Garden Legacy"

by **Clive Justice**, a B.C. landscape architect who has been a guest at several of our meetings. Publisher Cavendish Books, 2000.

This is a book to be treasured for it describes the joys and difficulties of any plant hunter, sent to an unknown part of the world to take plants home to England. **Archibald Menzies**, Scottish-born, travelled with **Capt. Vancouver** and with several other expeditions to the West Coast of America, and sent seeds and plants back to Kew Gardens.

This book describes many adventures and problems of travel in those days, the difficulties of getting live plants to England after months spent in sailing ships. The book is a "good read" at any time. There are dozens of line drawings of the plants that were discovered and named at that time.

A copy of this book is in our library for members who don't buy their own copy. It too was very reasonably priced.

ANOTHER FASCINATING BOOK

I picked up a copy of "Weather in the Garden", **Jane Taylor**, author, Sagapress, 1996, publisher.

This book is one to keep on hand and delve into at various times of the year. Weather and climate around the world are not only explained but there are useful maps showing climates and zones. There is a chapter on understanding weather, then descriptions of the kinds of plants that can thrive or barely exist in various temperature zones.

This is another useful book for our library, for there is a great deal of fascinating information about various climates and their plants, including a chapter on "The Rhodo Heartlands of Asia".

All this got me checking my records

for information on local microclimates, and to answer people who say "This is the driest summer since..." or "It has never rained this hard before!". Rainfall records for Oyster River are at hand, and I know they are not the same for Black Creek, Courtenay, Campbell River, or Cumberland, all just a few miles away, still it gives an idea of how, over a few years, the summers are very similar - a long dry spell is the norm in this area.

The average rainfall over the period

	1951-'80	'81-2000	2000
April	61.6 mm	95.1 mm	67mm
May	47.4	71.7	74
June	41.5	70.5	102
July	34.5	49.6	46
Aug	45.1	46.5	18
Sept	58.5	54.5	38

These figures are not completely accurate, for I did not take into consideration, for instance, that in June 1990 we had 183.9 mm rain, and in July 1985 there was nothing but a trace. But I think we can safely say we usually have 5 or 6 months of drought in the summer in this area.

HOW DO I PRUNE MY RHODOS?

Here is a useful article taken from the Fraser South Newsletter, June 2000. This is part of an article written by the late **Robert Furness** of Crystal Springs Garden, Portland.

How to prune?

The usual answer to this frequently asked question is "Very little. Remove the dead and sickly branches and let the plants grow naturally". Sometimes this is good advice. It applies to small bushy-type rhodos and to rhodos in woodland and mass plantings but it is not the whole story. At times it is inadequate, even misleading.

Definition: Pruning is the removal of parts of a plant to control growth.

More an art than a science, it is adaptation of natural process to achieve horticultural objectives. Broadly, pruning includes the removal of any unwanted parts of the plant, including flowers, buds, soft wood, hard wood, basal sprouts and sometimes roots. Pruning is not a routine treatment applied cookbook style. Nor is it a substitute for requirements for vigorous growth, such as fertilizing, watering, controlling pests and planting properly.

Objectives: Pruning is for some cultural purpose. Before plant surgery, the grower should decide what pruning is intended to accomplish. Is the grower trying to revitalize treasured old plants, to produce plants for sale, to stimulate maximum number of highest quality flowers, to enhance the year round appearance of the plant, or to achieve some special landscape effect? Has something gone awry that needs correcting? The kind and amount of pruning depends upon the planting and purpose of the grower.

Pruning can accomplish a lot: It can start early in the life of the plant, as in the heading back of nursery stock

to achieve compactness. As the years roll by after planting, many fine rhodos decline, become leggy, or develop into brush heaps for lack of attention. Such plants often can be revitalized and improved by judicious pruning and training. Of course there are limits. Medium sized "Elizabeth" cannot be forced to grow tall by pruning, and giant sized "Loderi King George" cannot be dwarfed. Most rhodos respond well to pruning. Some that do not sprout readily from old wood cannot be much improved. Others that sprout abundantly should not be opened excessively to light. If in doubt, proceed cautiously or seek expert advice.

When to prune: Pruning of hardened wood can be done at any time except periods of freezing weather. Early spring generally is best because the new growth then has a full season in which to develop and mature. Pruning immediately after the blooming period is standard practise. However, some rhodos that bloom very heavily should be pruned prior to blooming to reduce the number of flowers and thus maintain the vigor of the plant. Thinning the flowers also can improve the quality and placement of the ones that remain.



R. pemakoense