

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4

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## Oct 3

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Ernie Exner**, 2160 Stadacona Dr., Comox. Turn off Ryan Rd. at Lerwick and drive on until you find Stadacona on the left.

## 10 Oct.

Our speaker will be **Ken Gibson**, who plans to tell us all about his recent trip to Scotland. This is sure to be an entertaining evening, especially for those of us who have been privileged to travel in that lovely country and see some of the glorious rhodo gardens there.

## 12 Sept.

**Gerry Gibbens** showed us lovely slides of some of the rhodos and companion plants in the Van Dusen Gardens, in Vancouver, and at the Valley Gardens in Windsor Great Park in England. He invited our members to visit the garden next spring, and a bus trip is being considered. Speak to **Phyllis Stapley** if you are interested in joining a

group of interested gardeners in a trip to Vancouver next spring.

I made note of several useful garden hints. It seems we have two kinds of powdery mildew which might attack the rhodos, caused by either dryness or wetness. Many members have complained that their R. Virginia Richards have been badly attacked this year, and the reason may be a combination of a cold wet spring and poor air circulation.

If we mulch heavily, buy rhodos which are resistant to weevils, and encourage birds such as towhees which love to scratch in the mulch, they will eat most of the weevil larvae.

## MEMBER NOTES

**Harry Wright** has kindly donated to our library a copy of his book describing some 3500 rhodos that do well in B.C. He plans to continue this list until he reaches 5000, so tell him about any new rhodo that does well. There are so many new ones on the market each year, this should be an easy job. Last time I counted, 450 had been registered (1998) and there are many more not registered but equally as beautiful.

**Ernie Exner** explained our financial position - it is not good, for two reasons: Our dollar is worth so little in the U.S. that for every \$35 we collect in membership fees, we send about \$52 to the ARS (this varies a little from week to week). This means we must make up the difference in any imaginative way we

can think of. Hence the \$1 dollar table is now the Revenue table. Donations gratefully received will be sold at more sensible prices. Plants, tools, garden vegetables etc. (Please, not more than 6 - 3 ft. zucchinis at each meeting!)

The second reason for our poor financial showing is that people are no longer quite as enthusiastic about garden tours (too many in June and July) or plant sales and shows. Please support and encourage your friends also to attend these endeavours, and if you have more money-making suggestions, share them with the club.

If you buy or renew a subscription to the B.C. Gardener (formerly Coastal Grower) magazine, be sure to tell them you are a member of the NIRS, for they will donate \$10 to the club for each new sub., and \$5 for each renewal. This is a good magazine, full of information of use to us living on the coast. There are only 2 "western gardens" magazines, and though Gardens West is also full of interesting articles, it covers a much larger territory, including Calgary and Saskatoon.

## GOOD DOERS

Several people have recently turned in their list of "good doers". Here are some that do well in Sayward, according to **Rose-Marie Silkens**. Sayward is far enough north of Campbell River to often be in another climatic zone, especially in winter.  
Mrs. Furnival White Gold  
Yaku Sunrise bureavvii

Hoteli

Loder's White

**Ernie Exner** (in tropical Comox) extolls Lackamas Spice, Peeping Tom and Nancy Evans.

**Betty Percy**, also in Comox, praises Christmas Cheer, Nancy Evans, Etta Burrows, Lem's Cameo and tricanthum.

**Harry Wright's** favorites this year include P.J.M., Susan, Hallelujah, kiusianum and auriculatum.

### SEEDS

If you have any further seeds, let Harry know the names, and save them, when dry, in paper bags in the frig until next spring, when they will be taken to the local "Seedy Saturday".

### GARDEN TOURS

I admit I love touring other people's gardens, so have seen several interesting gardens in the Comox/Courtenay area this fall. There was a beautiful little greenhouse, complete with comfortable chair, on 3d. St., a large koi and goldfish pond on Mallard, and the best was the last - one of our members' gardens (**Evelyn Wright** on Beaufort Ave) where we not only toured her lovely garden, but had coffee and cookies and a concert by the **Ripple Rock Chorus** (Sweet Adelines). What a lovely way to spend a sunny Sunday afternoon.

### FALL COLOURS

Not too many of these as yet, but some maples and dogwoods, the cercidiphyllum trees, and some shrubs have changed colour. We have had such lovely warm weather this month, the trees think it is still summer. If you plan to buy a tree, the next few weeks are the time to tour the nurseries and see just what colours "your" tree will produce.

### ARS MEMBERSHIPS ARE DUE

Enclosed with the newsletter you will find a small envelope in which you can put your \$35 cheque, ready for mailing - or take it to the Oct. or Nov. meeting of the club. If you pay after 1 Dec. there is no guarantee you will receive the January Journal.

### ROOT WEEVILS

I read they had a wet summer in England, resulting in more root weevils than usual eating the rhodos. Here are some rhodos guaranteed (by the Washington State University Co-op Extension Dept.) to be resistant to weevils. Keep it in mind when purchasing plants, for we too may have a wet summer one year. We certainly have had many wet springs! PJM, Jock, Sapphire, Rose Elf, Cilpinense, Exbury Naomi, Virginia Richards, Cowslip, Vanessa - these hybrids are at least 80% resistant. Species rhodos include heliolepis, impeditum, scintillans, all 100% resistant, dauricum, intricatum, minus, ferrugineum, henslyanum and cuneatum are all over 90% safe. Fastigiatum and yakushmanum are 90% safe from weevils, and many others of the small and tiny-leaved rhodos are 80% ignored by weevils. The complete list is in the pamphlet "How to Identify Rhodo and Azalea Problems" published 1984 by the above-named university.

### COWICHAN RHODO SOCIETY CONFERENCE

About 250 people from 35 chapters of the ARS attended this 4-day meeting of rhodoholics, including members from Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Toronto, North Carolina, and many from all the Pacific Coast chapters from California north. There were several outstanding speakers. When **Clint Smith** described some of the difficult adventures of **George Forrest** in China, you could have heard a pin drop in the large hall. **Judy Walker**

showed many pictures of the early days at the Greigs' Royston Nursery and described the work she is doing on her book, and **Bill Dale** described some of the rhodos, rhodo hybridizers and gardens on Vancouver Island.

**Allan Murray** had lovely pictures and descriptions of the magnolias he has planted in his rhodo garden. **Drs. Irving and Hebda** gave very interesting explanations of changes in climate and vegetation over the past 10,000 years or so. **Carmen Varcoe** was asked to speak, at the last minute before the conference, because of an emergency in the life of the scheduled speaker, and she showed slides of many rhodo companions in her large garden of perennials and shrubs. She too was an inspired speaker and kindly passed out a list of all the plants pictured, along with names of several nurseries.

These speakers and their subjects were inspiring. Afternoons were spent touring gardens, and the evenings were taken up with a salmon BBQ and a banquet. The hotel provided room for a plant sale, and many interesting rhodos were on display at moderate prices. There were books for sale also and I will review the two purchased next month.

### SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

by **Rose-Marie Silkens** will be a welcome addition to the newsletter.

### NARCISSUS TIPS

When the new spring-flowering bulbs are available in the fall, there are always several new varieties of narcissus that look too good to resist. Having collected daffodils for many years, I have a difficult time finding a spot for yet another variety, so I plant them in containers. These overwinter in the compost box, covered with autumn leaves until new growth begins to show. In the spring, I place the containers on or

near porch or patio to enjoy the flowers, and decide where best to place this variety in the garden. When the foliage has almost died back in June, I plant the container-grown bulbs, avoiding the risk of damaging an existing planting because I can still see its foliage.

### **BIRDING NOTES**

A highlight of the late summer was the appearance of a juvenile Virginia Rail in my Sayward garden. The bird wandered (well, probably scampered) into the garage when the door was left open, and we closed it before noticing the visitor. That gave time to make a positive identification. We had a killdeer nest in the back field this year, so my first thought was that one of the young had wandered here, but the size of feet and bill on this bird soon sent me to the field guide. We released the young rail after only a few minutes, watching in delight as it raced to the undergrowth across the driveway. We haven't seen it again, but I like to remember it has parents and siblings, and hope that these furtive birds might be sharing our home even though we don't see them.

### **MORE BIRD NOTES**

Reading Rose-Marie's notes regarding the rail reminded me that it is time to remind you to start filling the bird feeders and watering dishes on a regular basis (if you don't do it year-round). All our wintering birds will be looking for a safe, comfortable home for the next six months. Once you start feeding them, do not fail, but ask a neighbour to help out if you must be away for a few days.

The black oil sunflower seeds seem to be the most readily accepted by all the local birds - purple and house finches, towhees, juncos, song sparrows, jays, white - and golden-crowned sparrows. I save bacon and any other kitchen grease all year, and

in October melt it, mix with cracked corn, and stack little dishes of this (cottage cheese containers are fine) ready to put one out daily in the cold weather. Jays and flickers are particularly fond of this. Pine siskins greedily eat black niger seeds, which are quite expensive, but these birds do not come regularly to the feeders in winter. They turn up about March or April by the hundreds, and eat like horses until July or August, when most of them leave to practise their flock-flying.

Birds in the garden not only entertain us with their singing, but they must eat vast quantities of bad bugs, for I haven't sprayed fruit trees for years, nor needed to. Now if only our feathered friends would eat slugs!

### **FALL FERTILIZING**

A useful hint from Mystic Woods Nursery.

Trees and shrubs can benefit from a fall application of fertilizer low in nitrogen and higher in phosphorus and potassium. Potassium is the main nutrient that helps harden off plants to prevent winter injury and phosphorus promotes healthy roots. Go easy on the nitrogen as it promotes leaf growth which could be damaged by winter cold. A blend like 9-3-27 helps prepare the lawn for winter.

Ed. Note: I think it is unwise to fertilize in the midst of a long dry spell such as we are experiencing this fall (and most falls). If you cannot give the plants a really good drink of water immediately after spreading the fertilizer, wait until after a heavy rain - or wait until Feb-March.

### **NORTH TO ALASKA**

**Bernie and Gloria Guyader** joined some friends to make a circle trip to Alaska this summer. During the next few months, we will read all about it.

We departed Courtenay on the 13th of June for an overnight stop in Port

Hardy, where next day we took the B.C. ferry to Prince Rupert, leaving early in the morning and arriving PR at 10:30 p.m. On arrival in Rupert in the pouring rain, we found a campsite for our overnight stay. Next morning, in the sunshine, we were off to Kitwanga, north of Terrace. This campsite was very nice, with lots of trails to explore. Views of the Seven Sisters Mountains to the south were awesome. We spotted many flowers, the most interesting of which were the many drifts of the mountain lady's slipper on an old abandoned road.

Next morning we headed to Stewart B.C. and Hyder Alaska at the head of the Portland Canal. Just north of Kitwanga is the village of Kitwancool, formerly known as Gitanow. Here is a super display of old totems in very good condition. It is only a few kilometers off the highway and well worth the trip. Then - on to Stewart. You turn off the Cassiar Highway at Meziadin Jct. and shortly after the turnoff you arrive at Bear Glacier. The lake is right beside the road, and the glacier about 100 ft. away. What a sight!

We stayed in Stewart for two days, with side trips to Hyder. There are lots of facilities and the scenery makes the 64 km trip worth while. Beyond Hyder on the road to the Grand Duc mine, you can get right to Salmon Glacier, 16 km from Stewart. We were unable to go further because the road was still covered in snow. We departed early on the third day and saw many bears, black and grizzly, along the road. (End of first installment).

### **OH VIRGINIA!**

After discussing "the problem with R. Virginia Richards" with several others, I checked a plant which has looked more and more scraggly over the past 6 months. At first I thought the deer had chewed leaves off and

dropped them on the ground, but when several dozen fell off when I touched them, I decided there was something seriously wrong. The undersides of the leaves looked exactly like the illustration on Greer's Guidebook of powdery mildew. I cut the whole plant down to 6", with the idea of digging it up and moving it to a place with better air circulation. The plant in almost full sun has no sign of the mildew.

Then I read an article in the MARS newsletter of May/June by **Diane Pertson**. I quote: "Having toured a number of gardens this spring, and in the course of reading about the problem and discussing it with rhodo growers, it seems that one plant in particular is most commonly affected by powdery mildew. R. Virginia Richards is not the only rhodo most frequently affected by powdery mildew, but seems often to be

- the first one in a garden to be affected
- the only one in a garden to be affected
- the one most seriously affected
- one that does not recover from it

Some species are known to be more prone to the disease than others, including R. barbatum, campanulatum, cinnabarinum, campylogynum, eclectum, griersonianum, succothii, thomsonii and R. wardii.

It would seem that poor Virginia has an inherent problem in her genes. Her parentage includes hybrids composed of two of the 'prone' species - wardii 1/4 and griersonianum 1/8.

Other hybrids prone to powdery mildew include Anna Rose Whitney, Conroy and other cinnabarinum hybrids, Elizabeth and Naomi. Another commonly affected plant is R. Purple Splendour, a hybrid whose only known parent is R. ponticum.

Powdery mildew fungi infect plants via airborne spores. It is the only fungal disease in which the fungus grows on the surface of the plant. The fungus affecting rhodos is *Microsporaalni*.

The symptoms vary, some rhodos lacking the typical white powdery growth on the leaves that is associated with the disease. Leaves may be stunted, chlorotic, or show diffuse yellow or purple spots with discoloured areas on the lower surface. Infected leaves drop prematurely.

Flower buds may be infected. The fungi often survive the winter tucked in the scales of buds. This is why the first symptoms are often seen on new shoots. Minute balls, the size of a grain of sand, are filled with microscopic spores. They sit on an infected leaf or bud, ready to be blown onto uninfected leaves in midsummer."

#### WEEVIL NEWS

A new product in Britain, **ARMILLATOX**, has received approval from the Min. of Agriculture there. We will have to find out if it is available in Canada. Unlike other pesticides or the nematode biological control, this is not aimed at the larvae or adult beetles, but is used to kill the eggs. Adult vine weevils are active during spring and summer and lay eggs throughout much of that time. This product is to be sprayed on the soil surface every two weeks between late March and the end of October. It is also useful against honey fungus, club root and moss control.

#### -AND WE THINK WE HAVE PROBLEMS?

A super breed of grasshopper is moving from Spain and France to Britain. This animal is 6" in length and has a voracious appetite. Up until recently it has not survived the

winters in England, but changing climate patterns could enable it to live year-round. Imagine what a swarm of these creatures could do to your garden in one night! Hopefully, our climate is too cold in winter. But we have had two warm winters. Yikes!

In Scotland, plans have been approved for a "northern Wisley", funded by Scottish Enterprise and the Horticultural Trades Association. The 27 acre garden will be part of a 78 acre development near Perth (Peter and Kenneth Cox country). The national Heather collection, now part of Bell's Cherrybank Gardens, will be included. These items from recent copies of 'Amateur Gardening'.

#### MOSAICULTURE IN MONTREAL

This summer a derelict canal basin in Montreal was transformed for a remarkable festival celebrating the art of mosaiculture or floral sculpture. There were 40 exhibits from 14 countries and the photos in "The Garden" Sept. 2000 show them to be an amazing sight, with plants forming swans, van Gogh's sunflower picture, temples etc.

#### WINNER of RHODO PICTURE NORMAN TODD Victoria



"Come on Rose, stop making fun of my rockery!"