

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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

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#### 4 Dec

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Marleen & Dave Crucq**, 2301 Seabank Rd., Comox.

#### 11 Dec

The annual Christmas party, with rhodo games and good food. Bring a wrapped gift, value about \$10.00. Food will be provided by the executive, and there will be no revenue table.

#### 13 Nov

**Paul Wurz** brought maps and slides showing the trips he and Lynn made to New Zealand. What a beautiful country! Huge healthy rhodos, lovely gardens, mountains and fjords such as we have in B.C. and Alaska, but with different trees and shrubs growing on the slopes. Thanks, Paul, for giving us a view of "the other side of the world".

Remember! The January meeting will consist of tough questions from members, and thoughtful answers

(arguments?) from the "experts" in the hot seats. Make notes now, in preparation for a fun evening.

#### MEMBER NOTES

Think Spring! It is not too late to plant tulips (if you can protect them from the deer) and even crocuses. I noted sprouts on many that are still in the garden centres. My little species crocus start blooming in January, regardless of snow, rain, wind or anything else the weather throws at them. They multiply like crazy, and are tucked back into the ground by the time you give the lawn its first mowing. What a bargain!

Think spring bus tours! Suggestions include a trip to the Victoria area to view gardens such as **Bill Dale's**, **Dave Dougan's** and the **Weesjes** in Saanich. Another idea is a trip that would include Qualicum (Milner Garden), Tofino (Ken Gibson's rhodos) and the George Fraser garden in Ucluelet.

There are members just aching to go - all we need is a person who will contact the bus company re cost, and work out the itinerary. A **VOLUNTEER NEEDED!**

#### BOOK REVIEW

The Pacific Coast Rhodo Story  
Sonja Nelson & the Portland Chapter  
of the ARS. Binford & Mort 2001.

This is a book describing all the Hybridizers, Collectors and special Rhodo Gardens on the Pacific Coast. Many people helped financially with the publication, and many "old timers" provided pictures and stories

of the first hybridizers. Archibald Menzies, travelling with Capt. George Vancouver in 1792 was the first European to recognize and send samples back to England of the shrub he called "Rhododendron ponticum", which was in fact *R. macrophyllum*. This was the beginning. Other native rhodos and azaleas were "discovered" and over the next several hundred years more and more lovely plants were hybridized by rhodo pioneers in California, Oregon, Washington and B.C.

It all makes for fascinating reading.

The book also contains many fine pictures, black & white of "the old days" and coloured, of rhodos, gardens and people.

There are lists of West Coast hybridizers and hybrids and the photos in the book, all carefully indexed. Copies of the book have been ordered for members who requested them some time ago, and more can be ordered if you speak to the librarian. Meantime you may be allowed to borrow the copy belonging to Harry Wright.

#### GARDENING TIPS

The magazine "**Amateur Gardening**" always contains useful material for our newsletters, and this time I chose some "wild and wacky" gardening ideas to throw in with more serious items.

\*Here is a man who diagnoses plant problems with a pendulum. First he asks the pendulum which way it will swing for "yes" and "no", then he talks to the plants, with the pendulum suspended above.

\*"Why doesn't my wisteria bloom?" It has not been pruned properly. You must wait about 5 years for the first flowers, then start severe pruning. In summer, after the flowers have faded, prune all laterals back to about 6-8". In winter, prune back to 2-3 buds. They always do better in a warm sheltered corner or on a wall. Nitrogen-rich fertilizers produce more leaves than necessary. Restricting the roots sometimes encourages more flowers.

\*Why is Santa a gardener? Because he's always going "hoe, hoe, hoe"!

## EDUCATION OR GROWING THE BRAIN

**Phyllis Stapley** provided this item. Do you have a child or grandchild who loves to help in the garden? Are you planning a trip to Vancouver in the next month? Then this is for you! "Capilano College in North Vancouver has a program of Landscape Design and Horticulture that is a fulltime 8 month program. It is very inclusive in the topics studied and the practical work learned in the gardening-landscaping industry. There are two professors teaching the 32 students accepted each year. Completion of Grade 12 and a genuine interest for a career in landscaping or horticulture and a love of working outdoors are the basic requirements to be offered a space in this program.

Some of the topics explored are Drafting and Landscape Design. Drafting Lab projects are assigned in areas such as on-site measuring, plan reading, design theory and basic design skills. Other subjects covered both in the classroom and with hands-on practical work are: proper use and care of hand tools and power equipment, First Aid, business practises and operations, pest control, Botany, soil science, and

residential and large area turf grass installation and maintenance. Another hands-on part of the course includes the building of retaining walls, fences, trellises, use of paving materials and basic drainage and irrigations systems.

One of the biggest components of the program is the study of woody and herbaceous ornamental plants, including completion of a herbarium collection, mounted on cardstock, and a filecard system of 400 plants, each card giving all pertinent details of each plant.

Greenhouse operations are studied by raising several different crops for sale. In the Fall term, growing Poinsettias and Chrysanthemums and forcing bulbs and in the Spring, bedding plants and perennials.

Many field trips are taken, to orchards, greenhouses and vineyards. There are several practicums to complete that develop the ability to work effectively and efficiently, master basic gardening skills, and develop a professional work ethic.

The main practicums are at Park & Tilford Gardens in North Vancouver, a beautiful 3-acre botanical garen maintained by Mr. Todd Major. Groups of students attend weekly for lectures, demonstrations and hands-on experience and practise with guidance from a master.

The program runs from the end of August to the end of April each year, offering students a very favourable opportunity to train and learn in the field of horticulture. Capilano College is recognized as producing well-trained and knowledgeable students in the field of Horticulture.

So grow your brain, attend school for 8 months and learn all the hows and whys of horticulture."

During December, Park & Tilford Gardens will offer their annual Christmas Display of plants and lights. The public is welcome. Last year over 40,000 people visited the gardens during the holiday season. This is a "must see" destination if you plan to visit Vancouver this winter. Club members who saw the garden last spring were delighted - a return trip will be a special treat!

## SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

**Rose-Marie** has provided us with more of her gardening observations. "This past year has been such a problematical one for most Vancouver Island gardeners because of the unusual lack of rain that has persisted since last winter. While I have been known to lament (only occasionally of course) over the shortage of non-rainy days here in Sayward, I was very grateful for them when I read the piece in our last newsletter, advising on rhodo care in prolonged dry conditions.

Last winter we were drier than normal too, but in our case that leaves a lot of room for gradations of wetness. Summer and fall here have been very wet. When you had clouds in Campbell River and Comox, we had rain. Lots. The rhodos usually need watering here at least in August, but that hasn't been the case for two years.

In fact, since August, I haven't come to a dry bit of soil when digging over the veggie garden or planting a tree. Fortunately, my garden is on alluvial silt from the old floodplain of the Salmon River, so the drainage is impeccable. I might grumble about the rain, but at least the rhodos arn't complaining.

Some plants are simply so good for so much of the year that they move into a class of their own. With winter

gloom approaching, and all the pretty autumn colour fallen and faded, a few such stars are still shining.

The Mountain Ash *Sorbus hupehensis* Pink Pagoda is beginning its third winter in my garden, and does indeed draw the eye as long as there is any daylight to reveal its enormous crop of pink berries. The delight isn't just in the colour and volume of the display, but in the lovely shape of this small tree, an elegant, rounded umbrella. The berry colour changes from pink to near-white to pink again before the fruit drops. Pink Pagoda is a cultivar named and distributed by UBC Botanical Garden; their original tree is in the Asian Garden there.

Another bonus of this species is that the birds don't care for the fruit. In consequence, I have a lot of little seedlings right beside Pink Pagoda. Of course, they are unlikely to be just like the parent, as I have a lot of other Mountain Ash around the place, 3 other species. However, the foliage on these little volunteers looks like *S. hupehensis* all right, so of course I have been potting them all up. If they continue to look good, I'll bring some for the revenue table.".....continued next issue.....

## HARDY CINNABARINUM HYBRIDS

A recent check through Greer's Guidebook has provided me with a list of these lovely plants with dainty hanging bell-shaped flowers. Just how hardy are they in our area? If they are hardy to +5F, only the most severe winter here would affect them. A few are even hardier, so here is a list. If members will observe how well they do in their micro-climate, please let me know so the information can be added to a later newsletter.

**BISKRA** a cinnabarinum *Royelei* x *ambiguum* cross, is hardy to +5F.

**CINNKEYS**, cinnabarinum x *keysii* is also hardy to +5F, whereas **CINZAN**, Cinnabarinum x *xanthocodon* is hardy to 0F.

**CONYAN** and **CONYAN APRICOT**, with cinnabarinum and concinnum blood in them, are hardy to +5F.

**ELENA**, with *yunnanense* added to a variety of cinnabarinum is hardy to -5F, as is **MONICA WELLINGTON**. **FLIP** and **STRAWBERRY CREAM**, flavidum x Lady Rosebery crosses, are hardy to 0F.

Others to look for, all hardy to +5F, include **GOLDEN ORFE**, **LADY BERRY**, and **LADY ROSEBERY**, **REVLON**, and **ROYAL FLUSH**.

Plants hardy to +10F I would not recommend for my garden, but sheltered spots in Comox might be suitable. These include **CHELSEA**, **LADY CHAMBERLAIN**, and **ROYAL BEAUTY**.

What is your experience with any of these? Please let me know.

## DECORATE FOR WINTER

Do you have some empty plant pots sitting idle? Large ones that contained annual flowers during the summer? Buy a few low-growing evergreens to fill them for the winter. If you have a sheltered patio or balcony, add some winter-blooming pansies or heather for a bit of colour. Here are a few suggestions - the Harrisons at Paradise Gardens always have an interesting selection of small evergreen plants:

A dwarf arching Blue Spruce (*Picea pungens glauca procumbens*) is a lovely grey blue. It will eventually grow to 5' with a 3' spread, but that is after you plant it in the garden.

How about a Rheingold Cedar (*Thuja occidentalis* 'Rheingold')

The new growth on this bush is a bright gold colour. It too will eventually grow to 5'.

Look for a *Mariesii* Cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa* 'Mariesii') with green and white mottled colouring which grows to 4'.

Some of these dwarfs will grow to 8-9' eventually. Be sure to ask, or read the labels, and plan to move them into the garden after a winter or two in the pots.

Here are a couple that can be pruned in the Japanese manner - Tempelhof Blue Pine (*Pinus parviflora glauca* 'Tempelhof' and Golden Pfitzer Juniper Pom Pom (*Juniperus x pfitzeriana* 'Aurea'). These will grow to 6-8 ft. in time.

There are many others, in many shades of green, blue and gold. Some change colour in winter. They can brighten up the garden on dark winter days. Water them well when planting, make sure they have good drainage, and brush them off after snow. I have found snow can damage the golden-edged bushes, so remember to move them into a bit of shelter if we get any sharp frost or snow.

## WINTER FLOWERS

**David Tarrant**, writing in the Winter issue of GardenWise magazine (formerly Coastal Grower) reminds us of some of the flowers than can be guaranteed to bloom during the winter in our area. I have more flowers than usual on my *Viburnum x bodnantense* right now, and it will continue to open flowers in suitable weather, all winter, then give a grand show in April. *Viburnum tinus* flowers are also opening up.

He speaks highly of *Rhododendron barbatum*, which blooms in February in mild winters. It may not be easy to

find a plant; it is hardy to about -10 or -15C (plant it in a protected corner) and it will, after about 50 years, grow to 6 metres (around 20 ft).

Cornus mas is a seldom-seen little tree, covered with tiny yellow flowers in February, hardy down to around 0F.

Snowdrops, species crocus and Eranthus we all know about, pushing their flowers through the snow, and don't forget the winter-blooming heathers, varieties of Erica carnea. If you don't have any, you can buy them now, covered with flower buds, in the nurseries.

Edgeworthia chrysantha is not often seen here. Linda Easton has one. It has clusters of lightly scented flowers, but takes 5-7 years before blooming. It is hardy to 15C perhaps. I said "perhaps" because I noted in the Phillips & Rix book "Shrubs" (Random House), many shrubs are listed as being hardy to -15C. I have found some are, some aren't.

Linda lives on the edge of the "salt chuck" so her garden is a 1/2 zone warmer than mine in winter.

One shrub Mr. Tarrant didn't mention is the Mahonia japonica 'Winter Sun' which starts to bloom in October in

my garden, and continues all winter. It is a tall plant, which had to be pruned severely after the huge snow-dump last year, but it wasn't discouraged. New shoots, new leaves, and large flower sprays this fall, as usual.

Another shrub in full bloom at present is Hamamelis virginiana, used usually for grafting stock, but a pretty little plant in its own right, with small (compared to H. mollis) yellow flowers and bright yellow leaves in fall.

# MERRY CHRISTMAS!!

The letters in each column will go into the columns below but in a different order, of course. The quotation is silly but Christmasy.

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