

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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

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Oct. 2

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Bernie and Gloria Guyader**, 1965 E 6 St., Courtenay (up the hill on 6th off Back Road).

Oct. 9

Kristi O'Donnell will be a welcome guest again. Kristi is in charge of **Meerkerk Gardens** on Whidbey Island, and is an enthusiastic and knowledgeable rhodo expert (see article in the June newsletter re a trip to that area by some of our members last spring). Kristi will be telling us about the Rhodo Test Garden at Meerkerk.

Sept. 11

The club was happy to welcome **Ken Gibson** and his wonderful slides of some of the gardens in North Wales. What a happy surprise he must have had, to find **Peter Cox** also browsing around one of these lovely gardens.

MEMBER NOTES

First, you will find in the newsletter the usual extra little envelope in

which you can put your renewal of membership in the American Rhodo Society. Be sure to pay before 1 Dec. to avoid missing the January Journal.

It has been decided to email newsletters to members who can and are agreeable to receiving them by this method. We will start in November for all who have given us their email addresses by then. Alas, Bernie has had computer problems (join the club, Bernie) which caused the demise of EVERYTHING, so please give him your email address again.

We have signed up several new members in the past few months, and we would like to welcome **Dorothy Manser** and **Robert Sutherland**. Have I missed some? Blame Bernie's computer!

Our executive committee has settled down for the year. Thanks and welcome to **Marleen Crucq**, Secretary, **Bonnie Steele**, Librarian, and **Kirsten Emmott**, Publicity. **Dick Bonney** has kindly offered to continue manning the Revenue Table.

If you have a 2002 calendar on hand, make a note of the following dates:
May 5 Rhodo Show and Sale
May 5-6 Filberg Garden Show
May 11 Tour of local gardens

WORK PARTY

Can you spare a few hours occasionally to tidy up our Rhodo Garden on Cliffe Ave? Which day of the week is the most suitable? Friday has not been convenient for many

people.

We have lost several hardworking members in the last month. **Ernie Exner** died suddenly while helping prepare for an exhibition of flowers and plants. We appreciated all the work he did keeping the finances of the club carefully and reporting regularly, cheerful even when the bank balance was very low. He will be sadly missed by all of us.

Barb and Bill Rozel, after threatening for some time that they planned to move to Victoria, suddenly departed, so that we had no chance, at a meeting, to say "thank you" for the years of work they gladly donated to the club. Bill tried hard to make money by selling sweaters, hats, books and garden tools when in charge of Ways and Means. He and Barb worked hard as Membership chairmen for some years, and for many years Bill made up mailing labels for the newsletter. The rhodo games Bill invented for Christmas parties and BBQs kept members busy for hours. Yes, the Rozels are going to be missed greatly.

To Bill and Barb, best regards and hopes for your future life in the "big city". Join the Rhodo Society there and you will never be lonely!

BILL DALE is working on plans for a **George Fraser Memorial Garden** somewhere on the Wet West Coast of the Island. Every club has been asked to donate 20 rhodos and several trucks are needed for a day, to take the plants over. Who can help? Paul is making local arrangements for this

project.

Don't forget to bring something for the Revenue Table - plants, jams or jellies, excess garden tools - whatever another member can use - it all helps to keep the bank account in the black!

GARDENING TIPS

Have you wondered about mosses and lichens on your rhodos and other shrubs? **Mervyn Kessell**, in his book "Rhodos and Azaleas" (Blandford Press, 1990) says "Rhodos, in common with many other trees and shrubs, can suffer from mosses and lichens. Lichens are a sign of a clean atmosphere, and are seldom, if ever, seen growing to any harmful extent in polluted city atmospheres". That's nice, but do they do any harm? I have noticed it growing quite thickly on branches where there is poor air circulation. We cut some of these off a large plum tree and hope more air will get in to the centre of the tree.

I recently read in "**Amateur Gardening**" that if you have green tomatoes that look like never ripening, late in the season, put as many banana peels around them as possible. Banana gives off a gas that will help ripen the tomatoes.

Have you noticed how dry the soil is after a year of dry months? Especially if you are on a well, and trying to conserve as much water as possible. The usual digging and transplanting is not being done in this garden at present. We had about 1" of rain in July and 1" in August, and now, nearing the end of Sept. there has been only 8mm (about 1/4").

I have noticed a few rhodos (especially those related to *R. wardii*) have to be watered regularly as the leaves droop and curl up very quickly in hot sun. Many others don't seem to care, though they don't have many flower buds for next year. No doubt, we need rain.

RHODOS ON A WESTERN SHORE

Continuing **Leslie Drew's** article in the RHS Rhodos 1991 journal.

Soon, however, with the opening of the West, American and Canadian, everything changed. The fur trade faded. The B.C. of today was defined geographically and politically and was finally joined with populated eastern Canada through the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The city of Vancouver, as the western terminus, was created in the process. Linked with ocean liners, the railway was part of an Empire-girdling commercial network stretching to the Orient, Australia, India and Africa. Investment and land settlement schemes, of which the CPR was long the prime agent, brought the desired results - a flow of British and American capital along with immigrants willing to set permanent stakes in the province's future.

From the late 1880s, as timber resources and mineral finds were exploited, new Vancouver and older Victoria, originally a fur-trade post, grew and prospered. Each strove to emulate the style of larger European and American cities of the period. In landscape architecture no better example can be seen than The Uplands, the residential suburb of the Victoria area (Oak Bay) which was developed after 1909 and designed on the garden city concept then popular in Britain and the U.S. Merchants and manufacturers lived up to a new age of affluence, building big houses, planting gardens. Some of the newcomers were retired or semi-retired, with the time, money and education not only to garden, but also, if they wished, to lose themselves in the engrossing study of one plant genus or more.

By the time Evans and his workmen were grappling with his wild land on the Charlottes, the population of the province had risen to 400,000, mostly

clustered in and around the two south-coast cities. Far off though he was, Evans had one thing in common with his contemporaries to the south - a climate comfortably similar to that of the British Isles. The summer months were usually sunny and warm, the rest of the year rainy, misty and mild. What induced many coastal settlers to stay would also be auspicious for the growing of rhododendrons. (to be continued)

SAWDUST and various other soil additives and mulches

Over the years, many arguments have been made for various products to be used as mulch. **David Leach**, in his book "**Rhododendrons of the World**", Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961, covered the subject quite thoroughly. His advice still stands, and I will try to incorporate much of his material into this article. Some of the wording is his, but in places I have abbreviated his writing.

The ideal soil for rhodos is a medium loam, rich and deep. If you spread 4" of coarse peat moss onto this and churn it into the top 12", you have perfect soil.

However, most of us do not have medium loam and coarse peat moss is becoming more and more difficult to obtain. All sorts of vegetable debris can be used to provide the soil aeration and moisture retention which rhodo roots demand. Coarse sawdust, leaf mold, rotted wood, shredded corn cobs, spent hops, peanut hulls (if you live in an area where any of these are available), compost, old cow manure etc.

If any of these are in the process of decay, available soil nitrogen is used up very rapidly so you must replace this with quantities of ammonium sulphate.

If sawdust is used, "there are exact quantities of ammonium sulphate to

be used as a nitrogen supplement for each pound or inch of sawdust layer incorporated into 100 sq. ft. of earth. BUT sawdust from forest sawmills ranges from very old and thoroughly rotted to fresh, and the intermediate stages are often hard to estimate in their degree of decay". Sawdust from some kinds of trees rots faster than others; the weather can have an effect (heavy rain or very hot weather).

"I think sawdust can be more successfully used solely as a mulch, but if it is used that way after it has already served to modify the texture of the soil, then when mulch is renewed in the spring nitrogen must be added to compensate".

You have to watch for pests and diseases also. "Sawdust piles are sometimes havens for grubs which are ruinous to young rhodos, quickly girdling them". Sometimes Rhodo Wilt (phytophthora cinnamomi) has turned up in fields where sawdust has been used to improve the texture. Some nurserymen feel a White Pine (Pinus strobus) sawdust is injurious to rhodos. "I feel that the risk of failure is great enough, and the penalty heavy enough, that sawdust is better reserved for commercial growers who can incorporate it into the soil, then let it decay undisturbed for a year or two. Other waste vegetative by-products which are not already rotted offer the same problems to a lesser degree.

The use of coarse sawdust in the Pacific Northwest is widespread and there are few reports from that area of injurious results. Apparently the climate or the sort of trees sawed into rough lumber make its use there much safer".

Fast forward forty years. Various people are using bark mulch, coarse and fine, and sawdust from many kinds of trees

as soil amendment and mulch. All are recommended highly by one user or another, and many people have a good reason why they consider some other sawdust bad. I have noted, the past couple of years, that nurserymen are putting plants in 1 or 2-gal. pots with no soil at all, just something that appears to be black, chopped bark mulch. The plants look healthy so I presume this material has had ammonium nitrate added to it.

Several people have asked for an article on what to use for mulch and soil amendments. It seems to me you have to use what is available in your area, at the least cost, remember to add nitrogen, and watch the plants carefully for a year or two. If/when you use fertilizer, be sure it has trace elements added. If leaves turn yellow, add epsom salts (1 tbsp. to a gallon of water). Soil on the Pacific Coast is deficient in boron, so 1 tbsp. of this (Borax at the grocery store) to a gallon of water, poured around each plant once every two years, should help. Rhodos seem to like seaweed, which is full of trace elements. Pile it on the compost pile for the winter, cover it, and use the material for mulch when it has all rotted down. And remember, don't use nitrogen fertilizer around the rhodos after about 15 July. It would be a waste of ammonium nitrate to add it to a compost pile after September, for the fall rains would soon wash it all away.

All the above should be useful information if you have the kind of light sandy soil most of us deal with in this area. If you have heavy clay soil, let me know and I'll write a different kind of article.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

Rose-Marie Silkins has kindly supplied us with more of her wit and wisdom.

Flower arrangers looking for an attractive filler might consider the **Southernwood, Artemisia abrotanum** (sometimes called "Old Man"). This silver-green perennial with soft, finely-cut foliage grows to an upright 4-5 feet, harmonizing well with bright colours in the border. In arrangements, the stiff stems of dahlias and the rigidity of gladiolas are softened by sprays of Southernwood, which is at its best when these popular flowers are ready for cutting. Pruning in April and again in July keeps the plant shapely. A bonus is its refreshing fragrance.

Earlier this year I wrote about a cardinal rule of gardening, learned at great pain: plant something where there isn't enough room for it and, even if it sickly, difficult and completely out of its range, it will grow and thrive. I'm happy to report yet another proof of this axiom. Rhododendron 'Unique'. I had two mature plants near the front entrance to the house. While indescribably beautiful in bloom, here in Sayward they are almost always spoiled by a late frost that turns the delicate flowers into brown mush. So, at least one of these plants simply had to be moved, and as we all know, moving rhodos is not at all difficult. Normally.

What became apparant as I began to dig up 'Unique' #1 was that all its lovely dense top growth was matched by an extraordinary root mass. I won't commit to print the sad truth of how U #1, loaded with several hundred flower buds, ended up sitting on the lawn, a sawed-off stump consisting of a round woody mass not unlike a burl, devoid of roots, leaves, stems. I was about to wheel it to the brush pile when I remembered that I had already

prepared the planting hole in the intended new home, so there it went.

I felt silly planting such a brutalized mess, so I didn't even bother to water (this was before the spring monsoon began). Six weeks or so later, the stump was still just that; not a sign of life. I had brought home a R. 'Elmer's Orphan' from Paul Wurz's, and decided to plant it in the spot where U #1 would have grown, had I not killed it.

However, rather than dig up that stump again, I planted the new rhodo right beside it. Some visitors arrived while I was at it, and I can still hear myself saying to them, after explaining the aforementioned cardinal rule, "I'm planting this here so that the stump will come back to life". Yes.

Not quite the next day, but soon, U #1 had a leaf. As I write this in early August it is a handsome mound of rich, healthy foliage, entirely gorgeous. Come autumn rainy season, 'Elmer's Orphan' will move to another spot, with my thanks for a job well done.

ALL ABOUT R. AURICULATUM

Lynn Watts, writing in the Seattle Rhododendronland newsletter, gives an interesting description of this beautiful rhodo.

"If you have room in your garden for only one or a few of the larger rhodos, seriously consider R. auriculatum. It is one of the latest in the genus to flower. The sweetly fragrant blooms, which can appear as late as August, are a most welcome sight. As an added bonus, the scarlet ribbon-like bracts of newly emerging foliage provide an interesting contrast to the bright green leaves.

First discovered by Augustine Henry in western Hupeh Province of China in 1885, it was introduced into

cultivation in 1901 by E.H. Wilson. In its native habitat, it is found at altitudes ranging up to 7500 feet, between latitude 30 and 32 north. Despite this relatively low altitude/latitude locale, it has proven remarkably hardy in the British Isles and the Pacific Northwest, reputedly to -5F.

R. auriculatum is a tree-like, upright, spreading rhodo which will reach heights of 33 ft in the wild but is much more subdued in cultivation, seldom growing taller than 15 ft. The very distinctive 8-12 inch long leaves provide sure identification of this species. On the upper surface of the leaf there are stipulate-glandular hairs with spherical glands on the tips. The undersurface of the leaf is a lighter green, with scattered villous hairs having no glands on the tips.

Flowers are fragrant, in clusters of 6-15, 7-lobed, funnel shaped and creamy white to rosy pink with greenish colouring in the throat. Flower buds of this rhodo help provide quick identification, being large, conical and tapered to a definite point with bracts or outer scales distinctively long and sharply tipped. Because of its late flowering, this rhodo should be planted in a location protected from the midday sun during its blooming period."

Here are further pertinent remarks by **Allyne Cook**, writing in the Vancouver Rhodo Society newsletter.

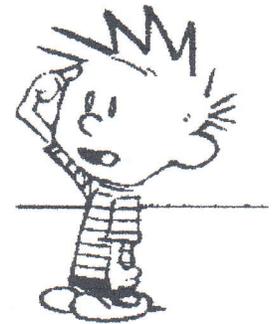
"With regard to the successful growing of R. auriculatum, the following should be considered. By the end of May, all surplus soil water has been drained away. From then on, the soil gets steadily drier. Moisture can be replaced by (a) rain, and (b) watering. As most people sprinkle ineffectively, there is no replacement of soil water. The quantity of water needed by large-

leaved plants such as R. auriculatum and its hybrids is considerable. It will be seen that by July there is only sufficient soil water to produce flowers for a very brief time. Because of the profusion of insects, flowers that open for 2 or 3 days will be fertilized, and as soon as this happens, the flowers can die.

The success of the R. auriculatum hybrids in and around the Stanley Park Pitch and Putt is only because they are all sited on top of swamps where surplus water from the greens accumulates. This ensures that (a) they are not sitting IN water, but above it, and (b) they have unlimited water during the flowering period. Because growth takes place during the period of longest and brightest light, there is always a good bud set. Finally, in 35 years there has never been a full season where the new growth is damaged. To claim otherwise comes from reading too many foreign books!

If there is a relation between heat and soil water, there must be also a relation between cool and soil water. The early flowering rhodos have lots of the latter, but cool day temperatures restrict the movement of insects and therefore the fertilization of flowers. This is the reason why the early bloomers stay open longer - if their blooms are not destroyed by the elements".

That's all
for now
folks,
see you
next
month!



Bill Watterson