

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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

Vol. 17 No. 8 April, 2002

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The club meets the second Tuesday  
of the month, except July and  
August, at the United Church on  
Comox Ave., Comox 7:30 p.m.

## 2 April

Executive meeting at **Don & Dorothy Law's** home, 671 Crest View, Comox. After passing the corner of Noel and Pritchard, and crossing Brooklyn Creek, continue a short drive along Noel and turn up the first road to the left, to Crest View. (This little road had no name on it last time I tried to find Don's house).

## 9 April

Our guest will be **Carmen Varcoe** of Victoria. Carmen is a very enthusiastic and knowledgeable speaker on the subject of herbaceous perennials in general and Rhodo companions in particular. We look forward to noting quantities of good advice - bring pen and notebook!

## 12 March

**Judy Walker** gave a lively talk called "Garden Design 201" on the subject

of what to do (and not to do) when planning a garden. She advised "Choose the right plant for the right place. If you have to prune a shrub or tree continuously, get rid of it, for it is the wrong plant for that location".

"Be brave, move a plant - or a path when necessary". She showed pictures of houses and yards overwhelmed by "cute little evergreens" that turned into monsters over the years.

We are all infected at times by the "just for now" syndrome. Years go by, the poor plant never gets to its planned position, and the garden ends up being a hodge-podge (like mine, alas).

I'm sure we all went home full of determination to correct some of the planting mistakes we have made. Thanks for the wake-up call, Judy!

## MEMBER NOTES

Rhodo fertilizer will be in at the Black Creek Farm & Feed by the time you read this. Remember to tell them you are a Rhodo member to get a discount.

There are still seats available for the trip to Ronning's garden - phone Pat Jefferson at 752-2524 for information. There are probably no seats left for the Victoria garden trip; phone Phyllis Stapley at 287-2845 immediately if you are interested.

## CAN YOU HELP?

A work party is needed on April 15 to scrape and paint the gazebo in which we have a rhodo display at the

Filberg Garden Show in May. This event will take place at Isabel Bergey's home, 337 8281, 9291 Doyle Rd (second driveway on the right after you turn off Macauley Rd. in Black Creek). Wear old clothes, and bring scraper and gloves.

The Nominating Committee is still looking for bods to fill spaces on the Executive. A Vice-President is badly needed.

If you are interested in attending one or more of the Species lectures at the Species Foundation, March 23, April 27 or May 25, ask Paul Wurz for more details.

## IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

25 April North Island bus tour to Victoria gardens  
27 April Cowichan Valley Rhodo Club show and sale  
27 April MARS show and sale  
5 May North Island Show and Sale  
4-5 May Filberg Lodge Garden Show  
11 May North Island tour of 6 local gardens  
11-12 May MARS garden tours  
11 May Nanaimo show & sale  
9-12 May Rhodo time at Milner Gardens  
18-19 May Bus tour to Ronning's Garden, organized by MARS  
18 May Open House at Geo. Fraser Garden, Ucluelet.  
Mid-April to Mid-May Rhodo time at the Hailey Rhodo Grove in Bowen Park, Nanaimo. A MUST if you are down that way.  
May is the busiest month of the year for rhodo lovers - try to fit one or

more of these into your schedule - and remember also to offer your help at our show, the Filberg show, or garden tour. Cookies are always needed, also.

In July, there is a silver anniversary conference of the North American Heather Society in Nanaimo. More details later.

### WINTER - WHAT WINTER?

Early morning, March 15 - snowing like crazy at Oyster River. This has been such a strange winter, I decided to check the 15th of the past few months. November - sunny and warm, up to 12C. December - a howling south/easter, 2" rain. January, 1C(early a.m.) sun and cloud. February 2C, sun and cloud. March - snow, then sun, cloud, no snow by noon.

So on March 16, a planned trip to Nanaimo to see the Garden Show at Beban Park. At home, a few clouds and sun. As we drive further down Island, more patches of snow. Nanoose, snowing heavily - should we turn around and go home? No, nowhere to turn around. Nanaimo, snowing heavily, 6" snow everywhere. We enjoyed the displays of plants, garden accessories and seeds, but feeling nervous about the weather, stayed a very short time. What a pity - the display area was twice as big as in previous years and there were several interesting lectures too.

We headed home, and by the time we arrived at Qualicum, the sun was shining and there was no trace of snow. WINTER?

Let's hope that was the last of it! No, as I write this on 18 March it is snowing heavily - again - at Oyster River.

One thing I learned from this winter - the tall euphorbias that usually look like handsome little evergreen bushes in winter HATE HEAVY WET

SNOW. First they sprawled, then the leaves curled up in the cold north wind, now I can only hope new growth will come up from the roots. Maybe I should stick to the varieties that die back completely in winter.

### GARDENING NOTES from Fine Gardening magazine.

\*Attractive hose guides can be made from 2 ft. pieces of rebar with drapery finials on top, all painted to suit your colour scheme.

\*Paint the handles of your pruners and little diggers with bright colours so they can be easily spotted where they were dropped.

\*4litre milk jugs make great little greenhouses for rooting clematis or protecting baby plants. Anchor them with several pieces of wire bent into giant staples.

\*Seeds that need cold weather for a few months in order to germinate can be left in a shady spot in plastic bags for the winter. Be sure to label them.

\*You can make plant supports with plastic coffee can lids and a few bamboo rods. Cut a large hole in the middle for the plant stems, and smaller holes around the edge for the bamboo.

\*Portable potting - Mix soil, fertilizer, bark mulch etc. in the wheelbarrow, and use the barrow as a potting bench. You can easily wheel it to the shed for pots, the garden for plants, or to the nearest hose. A plank across the middle gives a firm table to work on.

\*Luggage carts are really useful.

One person keeps one in the car trunk, one in the potting shed and one in the garage. Heavy potted plants, bags of fertilizer - an invaluable tool!

\*Recycle chopsticks for delicate plant-handling, old steak knives (my favorite for digging dandelions out of the lawn) and old pruners are also useful weed-pullers.

\*Time to tidy up ornamental grasses?

Wrap the stems with string or masking tape, then cut the whole

clump with hedge shears.

\*Clear 1/4" or 1/2" polyurethane elastic (find in sewing notions) makes great ties for tying delicate plants to stakes. Stretchy - and almost invisible.

I have been asked to remind members about "Birds in the Garden" items. I use a mixture of bacon and other greases, saved all year in MT cans with cracked corn or chick scratch, to make bird puddings. Add peanuts or raisins if you wish. I save all the egg shells all year, and in spring crush them and mix with crushed oyster shells (sold at feed stores). This material is spread around the emerging hostas, and hopefully discourages slugs. It is also eaten by birds in the garden, helping to toughen up their egg shells.

**Bernie Guyader** has kindly written up his notes on Plant Nutrition and Fertilizers. "As we are all aware, rhodos prefer a soil pH of 5.0 to 5.5. At this level, certain nutrients are more readily available than if the pH is 6.0 or higher. At around 5.0 most of the minor elements, ie iron, manganese, boron, copper and zinc are available and the major elements, Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium are still readily available in the amounts required by the plants. Sulphur, calcium and magnesium are also available in reduced amounts. From this information we may presume, rhodos require more of the nutrients that are available at these more acid pH levels. So the first thing to do is test the soil, at least for pH.

Now, if you choose not to test, one thing to note. We get approx. 1100 mm (44") of rain per year. If you have well drained soil, as I do, you might say I live in a gravel pit, you can be pretty sure the acidity level is quite high, which could mean that there are not a lot of available nutrients. To raise the pH by one

point you would have to add about 50 lb. of lime per 1000 sq. ft. Liming in the late winter with dolomite lime, containing magnesium, could be quite beneficial.

Rhodod prefer their nitrogen in ammonium form rather than nitrate. Nitrogen is needed for strong green growth, Phosphorus is needed in fairly large amounts for blossom production. It can be provided by superphosphate (0-18-0) or treble phosphate (0-48-0). This last contains less sulphur than 0-18-0, which may be needed for pH adjustment. Adding sulphur to the soil lowers the pH. You can use bonemeal for phosphorus, but wear rubber gloves and face mask to protect yourself from adverse effects.

Potassium is not needed in large amounts. The minor trace elements, if required, can be given by using fritted trace elements, but be very cautious. A little may be ok but too much can be poisonous. Use a specially formulated rhodo fertilizer such as Green Cross.

Now a general rule of thumb - fertilize your rhodos before and after bloom, probably March and early July, no later, keeping in mind that some rhodos, especially dwarfs, will tolerate very little fertilizer. On the side of caution, I would give dwarfs no fertilizer.

If your plants are showing signs of yellowing, water the plants with 1 tbsp. epsom salts per gallon of water. If they show signs of chlorosis (yellow leaves with bright green veins) they could use some chelated iron.

Look carefully at your plants. Most rhodos and other evergreens use older leaves as storage sites for nutrients. As the nutrients are used and storage sites emptied, old leaves will drop off. Most evergreens hold

their leaves for 3 or 4 years. If your plant has 3 flushes of leaves they are in good condition. Two flushes, they are getting hungry. One flush and they are very hungry or sick. If leaves are smaller than normal, they may have been fertilized late in the growing season. An excess of nitrogen results in excessively large leaves and long stems.

A shortage of nitrogen can cause stunted growth and pale green leaves. A shortage of phosphorus shows up a stunted growth and leaves with purple or red discoloration. Potassium deficiency is indicated by the edges of leaves turning pale yellow, and as discoloration moves inward the outer edges turn brown and appear scorched. Now these problems could be caused by other things such as lack of moisture or freezing. But both these conditions cause a problem for nutrient uptake, so it still comes back to carefully perusing your plants. Let them tell you their needs. Happy Gardening."

The magazine "Gardening Life" always has some handy gardening tips. How about these: (Mar/Apr 2002) When planting tiny seeds, make your own seed tapes with strips of paper towels and a paste of flour and water. Put a blob of paste every inch or so, drop a few seeds into each blob, and allow the paper to dry. You can then lay them on top of your seed-starting mix, and sprinkle on a bit of soil. The paper towel will break down in the soil.

**GRACE EXNER** has a greenhouse for sale. Wooden base, uppersection covered with curroplast. 8 ft x 6 ft, 7 ft. high at the centre. It includes a fan. If interested, phone Grace at 339-6845. She lives at 2160 Stadacona Dr., Comox.

**HARRY WRIGHT** says: Remember to bring items for the Revenue Table - it is our main source

of income this time of year.

## LISTS

Here are "Proven Performers" found in gardens of rhodo members in Nanaimo. Do you agree with these? Elepidotes: "Point Defiance", "Nancy Evans", "1000 Butterflies", "Sir Charles Lemon", "Lem's Cameo", "Loderi King George", "Hon. Jean Marie de Montague", "President Roosevelt" and "Teddy Bear".

Small leaved lepidotes: *R. augustinii* Deciduous Azaleas: "Cecile", "Klondyke" and *R. luteum*. Evergreen Azaleas: "Hino- Crimson", "Hino-white", and "Vuyk's Rosyred". I do believe these are all just as dependable in our area, except for "President Roosevelt", who has the nasty habit of stems snapping off at ground-level when under stress such as heavy wind or snow.

Show-stopping Hostas (from Fine Gardening April 2001): "Alex Summers", green with wide golden border, "Grand Tiara", a dwarf with dark green centre and wide golden border, "Great Expectations", corrugated blue leaves with creamy variegation. "Stained Glass", fluorescent golden leaves, wide green edge, vigorous, sun tolerant. "Tattoo" must be a Canadian for it has a green maple leaf pattern in the centre of each rounded golden leaf. Hostas make fine companions for rhodos. They are happy in part-sun or shade, but you do have to be on the look-out for slugs!

How about some sweetly-scented shrubs (from Fine Gardening plus my extras): Daphnes of all kinds, Calycanthus (but it may not be quite hardy enough here to flower), Osmanthus, Hamamelis varieties, (*H. mollis* has the strongest scent in my garden), and of course the many

scented azaleas such as *arborescens*, *luteum* and *occidentalis*. There are scented rhodos too - Loderi King George and any relatives among others.

#### SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

Rose-Marie has apologized for missing several meetings lately, but she still faithfully emails interesting snippets.

"At the end of Feb. I treated myself to a visit to **Les Clay's**. For a long time I have been looking for *R. keiskei* var. *cordifolia* 'Yaku Fairy'. Les has a beautiful specimen in his garden, but he has never had any to sell, at least not when I was there. This year, however, I was in luck, and am thrilled to have this exquisite creeping rhodo for my garden. A native of Japan, this form was found on the Island of Yakushima, and 'Yaku Fairy' is a named clone. It remains prostrate, blooms at a young age, and covers itself with pale yellow flowers. **Peter Cox** says "It will grow well in full exposure in even the coldest UK gardens". (On a good day, I compare Sayward's climate with Scotland's, but probably we have more in common with the Outer Hebrides).

I have never visited Japan, but have developed a great fascination for the Island of Yakushima, which has given the world such extraordinary plants. Most rhodo enthusiasts have at least one plant of *R. yakushmanum* or one of its named selections, and hybrids with 'yak' parentage are among the most popular rhodos on the market. My new 'Yaku Fairy' will be placed near a favorite plant that also comes from what must be a magical island. *Pieris yakushmanum* is a tough little dwarf that looks just like a large *pieris*, but in miniature.

There are a number of dwarf hybrids on the market, and some are quite handsome, but they can't compare with the structural elegance of this

plant - 8" high, it will spread to three times wider than that, indifferent to wind and sun exposure. It is a deep, rich green, and its leaves are very small, in proportion to the plant, rather than large leaves on a dwarfed plant. Its sprays of red flower buds provide very generous white bloom in early spring. I wonder if the NIRS might consider a club trip to Yakushima...

#### MORE HISTORY

In the June 2001 issue of the Victoria Rhodo Society newsletter is an account of a talk by **Richard Hebda**, who writes regularly in "Gardenwise" magazine, formerly "Coastal Grower". His research into the primordial ooze of Saanich Inlet illustrated some of the remarkable changes that have taken place in this area over the past 10,000 years or so. "A sophisticated seaworthy drilling rig was employed to extract, from the bottom of the inlet, a long core of some 70 to 80 metres. The anaerobic condition of the sediment depths has preserved intact the pollen grains of some thousands of years, allowing a clear understanding of the plant environment through recent ages.

An unusual section of the retrieved core revealed a sudden change lasting a few decades some 11,000 years ago. This change involved a rapid warming throughout B.C., thawing the glaciers and causing great floods which eroded the softer rock to create the huge interior river canyons. The thrust of such floods easily reached our Island across a much narrower sea, creating the Saanich 'trough', from its earlier ice covering. Pollen grains from this section revealed a previous land cover of hickory, walnut, basswood and linden - species decidedly unknown to the modern scene. The post-flood devastation would have left great expanses of bare rock meadows thinly covered by bracken and bunch grass, with a few scattered

Sitka spruce, but no forests.

The first Douglas firs appeared some 10,000 years ago; between 9300 and 7500 some Oregon ash would have been seen, and the meadows began to sport camas, buttercup and cow parsley. Then the oaks arrived and by the 6200 year mark their forests may have reached a peak with the grasses disappearing but bracken fern surviving. As the climate changed again, wetter and cooler surrounds stimulated the Douglas fir and by 5000, the rainforest with expanses of western cedar and western hemlock took hold. The Sooke Hills are typical of this scene.

Garry oaks set in their meadows of wildflowers have been reduced by the encroachment of urban tracts, automobiles and such foreign interlopers as wild broom. Pestilence and disease have come and gone, culling the weak, but perhaps strengthening the survivors. We are familiar with the gall wasp and phylloxera visitations of the last decade. And a nasty strain of phytophthora appears to be marching northward from California.

Change is inexorable, but there is much that can be done to preserve the nobility of these great tree meadows."

Ed. Note: This must have been an extremely interesting talk. There are lots of questions to be asked, following through from 5,000 years ago to the present. Where did the seeds come from, to start the Douglas fir forests? How did the camas and the Garry oaks come? I presume the "nasty strain of phytophthora" referred to is the "Sudden Oak Death" that is attacking not only oaks, but *Arbutus*, rhodos, even huckleberries, which has caused our government to stop shipments of plants from California and Oregon this spring.