

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4 Vol. 17 No. 4 December, 2002

President Harry Wright 338 8345  
Vice-pres Paul Wurz 287 4301  
Secretary Marleen Crucq 339 7845  
Treasurer Don Law 339 2735  
Ways & Means

Ann Chevrier 339 3048  
Publicity Evelyn Wright 339 7493  
Harry Wright 338 8345

Librarian Bonnie Steele 334 9436  
Social Gwen Wright 338 8345  
Evelyn Wright 339 7483

Membership Bernie Guyader 3385267  
Revenue Table Richard Bonney  
339 7594

Editor Mary Palmer 923 6629  
Articles not credited are by the editor.  
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.

### 3 Dec.

Executive meeting at the home of  
**Ann Chevrier**, 417 King Rd.,  
Comox. Drive down Balmoral to  
Lazo Rd. and turn left onto King.

### 10 Dec.

Annual Christmas party. Bring your  
spouse or a friend who might like to  
join the club. Also each person  
should bring a gift, preferably garden-  
related, suitable for a man or woman,  
gift-wrapped, but do not bring  
material for the Revenue Table. The  
executive will provide food, and you  
can expect the usual silly and/or  
hilarious games. By the way,  
members will be asked to bring  
flower slides to the January meeting  
instead of to the Christmas party.

### 12 Nov.

**Ken Gibson** was unable to attend,  
but **Bernie Guyader** did a

magnificent job of filling in. First,  
**Bernie** led a brief  
discussion on "What's wrong with  
this rhodo leaf", demonstrating with  
various sick-looking leaves. Many  
rhodos have suffered as a result of  
several years of drought, though it is  
amazing how many plants came  
through the long dry period this year  
with little effort. Many questions and  
answers made for lively discussions.  
It was recommended that rhodos be  
fertilized in Feb., when there is at  
least a chance of spring rains.  
Always water fertilizer in well.  
Another pertinent question was on  
pruning rhodos. **Harry Wright** felt  
it is best to prune in early spring (if  
pruning is necessary). If plants are  
pruned after flowering, there is  
always a chance of new growth being  
damaged by an early fall frost.

**Bernie** then presented slides showing  
scenes and flowers in Paradise  
Meadows and surrounding area.  
What a beautiful place this is! We are  
fortunate to have an entirely different  
world of flowers, trees and shrubs so  
close to home. A question was raised  
regarding bringing home plants from  
the mountains. The answer is NO  
NO NO. For one thing very few  
mountain plants will survive in the  
climate and soil at sea-level. Also the  
area is part of a park. Take as many  
pictures as you wish, or take a  
sketch-book, pencil or paints. But  
DO NOT dig anything.

### MEMBER NOTES

Have you been around the Rhodo  
Garden lately? The new Garden  
Committee includes **Bernie  
Guyader**, 338-5267, **Isabelle**

**Bergey**, 337-8281, **Joseph Richer**,  
337-2076 and **Dick Bonney**, 339-  
7594. You may be called on to help  
with maintenance, or just pop in (as I  
do) when it is convenient. There are  
always a few weeds to pull, even the  
odd missed seedpod.

### NEW MEMBERS

I have been remiss the past few  
months, in not mentioning new  
members who have joined the club.  
We are happy to welcome **Marjorie  
DeWitt**, **Dianne Hammersly**,  
**Bernice Morrison**, **Joseph Richer**,  
**Bev Johnston**, **David & Marion  
Edmundson**, **David and Noni  
Godfrey**, **John & Tracey Watson**,  
**Joan Walsh**. Also **Ron & Mo Fidell**  
have rejoined the club. We are so  
glad to see you all!

### TALKING OF DRY SUMMERS,

here at Oyster River we had 260 mm  
rain in the six months from May 1 to  
Oct. 31. Then in the first 16 days of  
November we had 253 mm.  
Nevertheless, the soil is still dry 6"  
down and moving plants in the  
present warm pleasant weather means  
giving them a good watering.

### NEWS - GOOD, BAD AND SAD.

**Paul Wurz** has graciously offered to  
take on the Vice-President role for  
the next time period. **Harry Wright**  
wants to give up the "Tour of  
Gardens" job and needs one or  
several people to take on the work of  
finding suitable gardens and members  
who will help on the day, which will  
be next May 11. And the sad news is  
that the Rhodo World has lost **Betty  
Spady**, who died recently. Betty has  
been a hard worker for many years;

her latest effort was the Rhodo and Azalea News on the Internet. She received newsletters from all over the country and chose interesting articles to include in her newsletter - 25 or 50 pages of material about 4 times a year- a stupendous job. She will be sorely missed by all members of the ARS.

### ALMOST EQUALS METHUSELAH!

A Canadian Cedar tree lives in the Broughton Archipelago on Watson Cove Peninsula.

This tree came to life 1700 BC. In 400 BC the tree was 1300 years old and Alexander the Great conquered Egypt. In 800 AD the tree was 2500 years old. Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. By 1800 AD the tree was 3500 years old and 13 ft. in diameter. Captain Vancouver sailed past it on his way to anchor. In 1994, the tree was 3694 years old, still growing, and 15 ft. in diameter. This excerpt was taken from the book "Heart of the Rain Coast" by Alexandra Morton and Billy Proctor.

### SCENT IN THE WINTER GARDEN

The RHS Journal "The Garden", December 1994 had a timely and well illustrated article on various shrubs that bloom and offer wonderful perfumes during the winter months. To quote the author, John Kelly: "It is all too easily forgotten at planting time that it is not a good idea to walk on the soil in winter. This is especially so during mild spells, when the ground is soft and moist and most scents are at their best.

Many plants with scented winter flowers will be largely wasted if they are not easily reached. They do not all waft their scents widely, and you may simply forget that they are perfumed. If, when planting, you make sure that all those with winter

scents are placed near paths or near the doors, their scent will not go unheeded".

Hamamelis mollis and Osmanthus yunnanensis grow into large shrubs or trees, and do waft their scent across the garden. But Daphne bholua, Sarcococca hookeriana var. digyna and S. ruscifolia var. chinensis need to be by the front door to "knock the socks off" approaching visitors. There are several viburnums - tall and shorter - which bloom in mild spells all winter. My Viburnum x bodnantense 'Dawn' has shot up to about 20 ft. but it is worth while to drag a branch down for a good sniff.

Some people living in pockets of Zone 9 around Comox should try Acacia dealbata with its soft and subtle fragrance. You might lose it in an unusually cold winter, but they often spring back up from the roots, and are fast-growing. In these Zone 9 areas you might try one of the shrubby honeysuckles also, such as Lonicera x purpusii 'Winter Beauty', which can flower anytime from Christmas to mid spring, or Erica lusitanica, which has naturalized itself in parts of southern England. Wonderful perfumes.

Of the hardier kinds, Chimonanthus praecox has a powerful scent, but needs a hot summer to ripen the wood for flowering. Not all the Hamamelis are strongly perfumed - H. mollis is the best. Others are more noted for their bright flowers and beautiful fall colours.

Don't forget the Daphnes. Daphne mezereum, deciduous, blooms in January - bright pink/purple flowers with lovely scent. Who grows D. jezoensis? It has bright yellow flowers, and loses its leaves in summer (but it is not dead). It blooms in early winter, and likes a bit of shelter and moist, leafy soil. There are many other Daphnes, some with

strong perfume, that bloom later in the spring.

Some of the winter-blooming bulbous plants are scented, but you will have to read the labels carefully to get the right ones. Some people can smell the perfume from snowdrops, others can't. Try to find Galanthus nivalis 'W. Thompson'. Crocus laevigatus 'Fontonayi' has a sweet perfume. These need to be planted in a raised bed or in pots so you don't have to get down on your knees in cold weather.

Early-flowering bulbous irises such as I. reticulata and I. histrioides have delicate scents. Try to find an I. unguicularis - a wonderful perfume.

"It is undoubtedly true that perfumes and odours elicit different reactions in different people. Some of us are very much more sensitive to certain ranges of smells than others, while the interpretation of a scent can be extraordinarily different. Irises of all sorts inspire analogical analyses. You will hear people say they smell like violets, greengages, plums, apples and caramels".

Ed. Note: That is so true. To me, Daphne retusa and D. tangutica smell like tobacco, and I have a "wild" rose bush that smells strongly of apples, winter and summer. When taking friends around the winter garden, ask what the various shrubs smell like, to them, and you will likely be amazed.

### SIMMS MILLENUM PARK

By now, I hope everyone has spent some time in this beautiful "natural" park on the bank of the river near the 5th St. bridge in Courtenay. There is plenty of parking, and many paths to wander along, some overlooking the water. Many native trees have been left, as well as new plantings of more exotic trees and shrubs. There are benches for a rest or to have lunch. A quiet, peaceful place to go any time

of the year.

### SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

Here is the rest of **Rose-Marie's** article on annuals, just in time for your annual browsing through new catalogues.

"Perhaps my favorite annual is godetia, which likes my cool, damp garden and obligingly self-seeds in appropriate spots each year. Those that appear where they shouldn't don't seem to mind being transplanted into containers. Godetias bloom only in colours I like - many shades of pink and lilac. It blooms until frost. The horticulture industry has come up with some flashy hybrids that are shorter, fuller, even double, and are bushy enough for pot plant sales, but the seed for these varieties is very expensive, and the plants don't bloom as long - nor self-seed as reliably - as the old-fashioned single form.

Single flowers. To my mind the most dramatic example of "new and improved" double-flowered creations being a dramatic disappointment is the case of the common hollyhock. A single-flowered hollyhock standing tall in a border is a statement of elegant simplicity. The colour range is luscious, with subtle shadings often apparent in the lighter or darker centres of the single bloom. In contrast, a double hollyhock reminds me of a Kleenex flower, often with colour to match. I have been gathering the seeds of my hollyhocks, wondering what new colour delights they contain. Most of my hollyhocks over the years have been rose pinks or pale salmon, or the popular dark red, but this last season produced some exquisite combinations of creams, buffs and pinks.

That really might be the best part of growing annuals, the annual surprise. Gathering open-pollinated seed, and letting the plants self-seed, gives us new colours and shapes each year.

And sometimes those self-seeded volunteers give us new ideas for planning and planting as well. Some of my most successful plantings originated with a volunteer that placed itself where I never would have thought to. But that is another story."

**BERNIE GUYADER** has provided us with information about a lovely little tree which should be more common in our gardens: **STYRAX JAPONICA** (Japanese Snowbell) "Here is a tree that adds interest to your garden all year long. It is a small tree, 25 ft. tall and 15 ft. wide. All its twigs and branches go off at different angles, making a very attractive plant, which holds raindrops in all its joints. With the low sun of winter behind it, it appears to be covered with tiny jewels.

The light green leaves in the spring are soon followed in June with thousands of white fragrant blossoms hanging down from each branch. You can smell the fragrance from anywhere in the garden, and even if your sniffer doesn't work too well, you can follow the sound of buzzing bees. The fruit, which is a hard nut about 3/4" long, is enclosed in a pale green cover which remains on the tree long after the leaves fall, giving the impression of tiny decorations hanging from the branches.

This tree is a suitable size for most gardens. I will donate one to the club. I was going to suggest it for a raffle, but they are about six ft. tall and rather awkward to transport. If anyone is interested they can contact Harry or me".

**NORMAN TODD**, writing in the Victoria Rhodo Newsletter of Nov. 2002, says "If I were choosing 12 rhodos for a city-sized new garden blessed with a couple of established trees to give summer shade, what would they be? With a choice of

over 2000 or 3000 obtainable hybrids and 400 or so species that can be grown here, the selection is indeed difficult. There are a lot of variables to sift through, yet it does not involve a huge amount of risk, as there are so many good doers. In the end, it just comes down to personal taste - or prejudice".

Norm goes on to talk about some of his favorites. Among the larger, tree-like rhodos, he recommends macabeanum, cream to yellow blooms in March (after many years of growing), 'Lem's Monarch', soft pink blooms in May or June, and the pink form of auriculatum, which is a July-August bloomer. For a July bloomer he chooses 'Good News' red flowers that look good with annuals.

To start the rhodo season he chooses 'Lee's Scarlet', darker pink than 'Rosamundi' and a better plant for it blooms for 4 months, November to March. 'Snow Lady' looks great in winter with the snowdrops, hellebores and primroses. Near 'Snow Lady' he would plant 3 little 'Razorbills', with little tubular pink firecrackers for flowers.

On into March and time for two striking reds - 'Taurus' and 'Rubicon', both with dark tough foliage, but if we are running out of room, 'Taurus' will become a much larger plant, so perhaps settle for 'Rubicon'.

Then there are some smaller lepidotes which are "must haves". 'Ginny Gee', 'Blaney's Blue', rigidum, hanceanum and campylogynum. There are many dainty forms of campylogynum, all choice, but be sure this plant has perfect drainage but never dries out, and NEVER gets a whiff of granular fertilizer.

For a May show-off he suggests 'Fantastica', a dependable bloomer which is not plagued by weevils. For a good yellow, 'Nancy Evans' is

choice. " Not too big, wider than tall, and as reliable a bloomer as Herb Robert", says Norm.

This is more than a Baker's Dozen, but who cares? This group will give almost year-round colour in the garden, and all are hardy and reliable in our area.

↳

#### **HAMAMELIS**

It is just about time to start looking for buds on these fabulous plants, in fact H. Virginiana is in full bloom. There are several lovely colours, from yellow to red, bright coloured leaves in fall, varying amounts of perfume, what else do we need in a shrub. I had always been warned that it is impossible to take cuttings (they are all grafted) but I find, on reading the RHS Journal "The Garden" of Jan. 1999, that there is a reliable method, which, if it works, can save you many dollars. To quote: "Rooting and overwintering the cuttings requires diligence and patience. Select young, soft shoots in early summer, collecting them in the evening or early morning. Make cuttings 3" long, severing them just below a node. Remove the lowest leaf and dip the base in rooting powder.

Have pots ready with 2" potting compost, containing slow release fertilizer, in the bottom. Fill the pots with compost consisting of equal parts coir (or coarse peat) and perlite. Using a dibber, insert the cuttings, 5-10 in a 6" pot. Lightly spray with fungicide, and place pots in a mist propagator, closed propagating case, or seal in an opaque plastic bag with moist sand in the bottom. Bottom heat of 18-22C (65-72F) should be provided.

High humidity is needed and in the right conditions cuttings should be fully rooted within 8 weeks. Wean them off gradually, and overwinter in a cool but frost-free greenhouse. If

growth is rapid, pot up the same year, otherwise wait until the following spring".

#### **PRUNING RHODOS**

Notes taken from Fine Gardening magazine July-Aug 2002

**Maintenance Pruning:** Remove flowers and dead wood. Seed production takes energy from the plant that is better spent forming next year's flowers. Check for dead or broken branches every year. If snow or ice damages the branches, cut them off as soon as possible after the weather moderates.

**Shaping:** Any branches sticking out at awkward angles should be taken off completely, or if just part of it needs to be cut, follow the branch down to the last whorl of leaves that you want to keep, and cut just above this. Shaping can be done in spring, just after flowering, but if cutting non-flowering branches, do it any time it is convenient.

**Rejuvenate:** When necessary, cut much farther down on the bush. Look for latent buds (pin-head sized pink dots) low down on the branches, and cut just above these. You can cut down to 6" above ground in a pinch. If you don't want to lose flowers for a year or two, cut down 1/2 or 1/3 of the plant each year for several years. Many species and hybrids can be cut very severely and come back good as new. There are still old grafted rhodos

around that have red or pink flowers on one side and mauve the other. The grafted plant and the old (Ponticum) from below the graft have grown together to make a bi-coloured monster. I have seen many of these in Vancouver. The Ponticum branches can be cut right down and you will end up with "half a plant" but it will be all one colour. If you don't want to do such a drastic job, at least cut the ponticum back to half, and make sure it doesn't decide to overwhelm the rest of the plant. This kind of pruning can be done in late winter, just before new growth starts.

#### **MILNER GARDENS AND WOODLAND**

A letter recently received has the following information:

Dear Founding Donor (Our club sent a donation):

"It was only 3 short years ago that the fledgling Milner Gardens and Woodland Society reached out to the community at large, encouraging individuals to become Founding Donors. You along with 400 others responded with generosity. This initial funding provided the kick-start allowing the Society to commence a program to develop the property in such a way that it would become a cultural and economic boon to the Island. In recognition of this generosity, a Founding Donors' plaque, located on the outside west wall of the Pool House/Gift Shop was recently unveiled."

*Some say, Nights are long,*

*Days are short,*

*It's Winter!*

*We say, It's Christmas and*

*A Very Merry Christmas to all!*