

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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

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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.

2 Jan 2002

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Edna Foresman**, 5898 Garvin Road, Union Bay, at 2:00 p.m., weather permitting. Drive south through Union Bay, look for Garvin Rd. on the right, up the hill, just after you pass the Baynes Sound Oyster plant.

8 Jan

A lively question and answer period is planned. Bring a written question to put in the box. A moderator will try to control the opinions and arguments. Also slides of the trip to Whidbey Island last spring will be shown. Bring something for the revenue table - a house plant or a jar of homemade jam would be welcome.

11 Dec

We had a lovely party, with delicious food, useful gifts, and a hilarious

rhodo game invented by Isabelle. Thanks to all who worked to make the evening such a success.

MEMBER NOTES

First I must get caught up on news from "Amateur Gardening" magazine. **Bob Flowerdew** advised (22 Sept) "There's a tendency to make work because it's always been done that way, by experts such as head gardeners, who have 14 under-gardeners". Adding quantities of fertilizer makes soft growth that attracts aphids. Hard-pruning the roses is fine if you want two perfect flowers for a show, but for lots of flowers, cut down on pruning.

THE LATEST ON SLUGS

Various items in recent copies of the magazine. Most large slugs concentrate on eating decaying matter. Tiny slugs and slug eggs should be picked off by hand when seen, or as a last resort, use slug bait. One reader found the dishes of beer she put out were drunk by the neighbour's cat before the slugs found it. A mesh screen stopped that problem.

AND - YOU SAW IT IN OUR NEWSLETTER FIRST!

In January 1999 I reported (from Amateur Gardening) that **Dr. Ian Kelly** of the University of West England had invented the "Slugbot". Remember? An arm from the doctor's robot picked up the slug and put it into a storage tank. Methane is extracted from the bodies of the slugs which is used to re-power the robot. Well, **Dave Barry**, a well-

known columnist, has only just received this information, according to an article in the Dec. 7 Times-Colonist but has offered other uses for the slugbot. For instance, it could be trained to remove cell phones from morons who start yakking into their phones in inappropriate places, church or a movie or on the street.

I seldom see bad advice in Amateur Gardening, but the writer who suggested planting tulips among the hardy geraniums so the dying tulip leaves will be hidden by geranium leaves, has never had deer in his garden. These two plants are the absolute favorites of the little mowitches in my garden. Maybe it is a good idea to try to train the deer to stay in one area?

For years the use of peat has been discouraged in the UK, mainly because the peat bogs there are just about depleted. I noticed on a label that one of the big UK companies is selling peat from northern Saskatchewan. Peat is difficult to work with anyway - it is difficult to wet, and once dried out it is almost impossible to wet it again. Use as little as possible, mixed with bark mulch or soil, is my advice. Anyway, they have been advocating coir (shredded coconut fibre) for some time, but the latest product, for use as plant pots, made in Switzerland, sounds like a good idea.

These "Biopots" are made from plant-based materials such as miscanthus (strong tall grass), natural binders and colourants, and are

totally biodegradable. They have already been tested, and will be on the market in 2-3 years.

At present, over 500 million plastic pots are used each year, and many are thrown away, but tougher environmental legislation is forcing manufacturers to look for alternatives. I hope a manufacturer in Canada or the US sees this article!

There will be two beautiful new magnolias on the market next year, bred in New Zealand and selected to bloom at a very early age. "Many magnolias take years to establish and come into bloom, but these will often flower the first year after planting". Watch for "Felix", a bright pink, and "Black Tulip", a darker red, in the nurseries. They will both grow to about 25 ft. tall and around 10 ft. wide, in time.

MICROPROPAGATION

Is now a standard tool for propagation of hostas, orchids, alstroemerias, African Violets and many other plants. It is also fundamental in the virus-cleansing of commercial crops such as strawberries, carnations, pelargoniums and potatoes.

HARRY WRIGHT has been growing rhodos from seed for some years, and has recently had five lovely plants registered by the RHS. They all have the prefix "Courtenay", and hopefully will be on the market in a few years, perhaps in time for the ARS Conference in Victoria in 2005. His plant material is being sent to Briggs Nursery for micropropagation.

CATALOGUE TIME

This time of year, one of the main pleasures for gardeners is perusing the latest catalogues. I have on hand the latest from The Perennial Gardens in Maple Ridge. These people specialize in all our favorite Rhodo companions - hostas, hardy

geraniums and many others. I will quote from the Knechtels' preface to this comprehensive catalogue - "After the events of this past year hit home we have come to realize that the insanity of our modern world cannot compare to the simple pleasures enjoyed in seeing the garden re-awaken in the spring, or the beauty of a single flower.

Our gardens are our refuge from the hectic and crazy world around us. We hope that you will all enjoy your gardens immensely this coming year." No one could say it better.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

We left **Rose Marie** describing Sorbus Pink Pagoda. Here is the rest of the article.

"Actually, I initially purchased Pink Pagoda because it was the only form of the species that I could find for sale. As often happens, a visit to Van Dusen set me off in quest of this wonderful tree from the province of Hupeh in China. On a fine Sept. day, I saw the mature groups at Van Dusen from a distance, and thought I was looking at trees with huge clusters of white flowers. When I drew nearer, I realized those garlands were berries, and ever since have longed to have such a grouping in my garden.

Another special favorite I first met at Van Dusen is the paperbark or red-bark cherry, *Prunus serrula*. This smallish, vigorous tree has exquisite mahogany-red bark that peels and shreds in curls and spirals. It is glorious all year, but especially so after a snowfall. Mine stands at the edge of a long sweep of lawn, so really shines when that lawn is white. The flowers and small and humble, but that is of no consequence when every stem and twig is so colourful. A native of Tibet, it has done well in soggy Sayward, growing rapidly into an elegant specimen requiring neither pruning nor special care."

BILL DALE of Victoria, (some of us have been to his interesting garden) has taken a great deal of interest in the Rhodo pioneer **George Fraser**, and in setting up the garden in Fraser's remembrance in Ucluelet. He has kindly sent us articles describing various Fraser rhodos, and I will add these to the newsletter from time to time.

R. GEORGE FRASER

There may be some doubt as to the parentage of R. George Fraser, but there is no questioning the origin of this plant. It came to Victoria via a circuitous route.

R. George Fraser was a cross of the West Coast Rhodo macrophyllum and the East Coast R. maximum. Fraser received the pollen of R. maximum from his good friend **Joseph Gable** of Pennsylvania. When the resulting hybrid bloomed he collected seed and sent it to Gable. He planted the seed and when it bloomed he was quite taken with it. In the book *Hybrids & Hybridizes* by **Philip Livingstone** and **Dr. Franklin West**, Gable is quoted as saying "but some half dozen years ago in a thicket of 10-12 ft. maximas I noticed a fine pink truss of flowers. Since the flower was so fine I immediately cut and dug and tore all plants and branches of maximum away that were touching or close to this plant; since then it has developed amazingly". This hybrid was initially designated Maximum #5, but later was named "George Fraser" by Gable.

At the time there were two truly authentic plants of George Fraser in existence. One of these grew in Gable's original garden. The other was discovered in the Gable section of the rhodo collection in the Tyler Arboretum at Lima, Penn. There Dr. West came across a huge plant of "George Fraser" that Dr. John Wister had bought from Gable in the 1950's.

Dr. West told me of the plant when he attended the ARS convention in Victoria in 1989.

It was arranged that **Dr. West** would get cuttings of the plant to **Lynn Watts** of Bellevue, Wash. When Lynn managed to root these he sent one of them to the Van Dusen garden in Vancouver and another to me in Victoria. Mine is now about 8 ft. tall and has bloomed, although sparsely. I have taken cuttings since and will be taking a plant of this to Ucluelet next year, to be planted near the "Welcome to Ucluelet" sign.

The hybrid George Fraser has touched the lives of several rhodo growers who have received awards from the ARS. Both **Fraser** and **Gable** received the rarely given Pioneer Achievement Award. Gable was given the ARS gold medal in 1953, **Dr. John Wister** the gold medal in 1961, and **Lynn Watts** the silver medal in 1997. **Dr. Frank West** and I have received ARS bronze medals. A picture of this plant was on the front cover of the ARS Journal, Spring 2000.

KEN GIBSON has very firm opinions of how to grow rhodos, and we have to admit he must know what he is talking about - just look at his plants! However, remember that the western side of Vancouver Island gets much more rain than the eastern shores. For instance, the 50-year average for the Campbell River area is 57 inches, and for Port Alice, 145 inches. Keep this in mind when following advice from Ken.

From PARS News Sept. 2001 (originally from Rhodo and Azalea News website).

Ken observes: Rhodos don't like wet feet, and require SHARP drainage. Many of his are planted on a 45 degree slope; just as well as he often gets 100 inches or more of rain in a

winter. "Soil breaks down to loam, from falling leaves and rain. It soon turns to muck or mud with no cavities for the mold which roots require. The roots can develop root rot in the summer heat, and death is the result.

The answer is how high are they? I never plant rhodos, I place them. But first I wash away any mud with the garden hose. A 3" bed of hydro chips or cedar sawdust is placed under the plant, and compost covers the exposed roots. The final root collar may be 16-18" higher than the ground level. Hydro chips and needles can be placed on the sloping sides after pounding down the root pad.

It may be necessary to secure or brace the plant for a year or two. I use electrical wire and 8" sections of old garden hose to brace it against a neighbouring plant or stake to be sure it doesn't rock in the wind. Sprinkle a little bone meal or canola meal around the plant.

Soil changes in 40 years of domestic use. The amount of shade is far greater and air circulation is far less. Look at rhodos or 'survivors' in old places - the healthiest are planted up high. I wish now I had planted all the rhodos with 6" of coarse sawdust under everything".

Ken has had problems with mildew which defoliated new growth on 'Virginia Richards' and 'Leverett Richards', and badly marred leaves on 'Cherry Float' and 'Ruffles & Frills'. This past year or two, many of us have had this problem. Ken's advice is - plant 'Virginia' on the east or south/east side of the house, and be sure she has good air circulation.

MORE MEMBER NOTES

According to "Indumentum", writing in the Fraser South newsletter of Sept., 2001, the more frogs you can

attract to your garden, the fewer weevils you will have. Weevils seem to be particularly fond of dry areas under fir trees, so rhodos there do poorly. Move them to a more open place and plan to offer ponds for the frogs. Another good friend in the garden is the towhee. They love to scratch around in the mulch under bushes where weevils hide.

Ed. Note: We are lucky to have 8-10 towhees in our garden, year-round. They nest in the woods, and spend the winters scratching under the rhodos and eating bird food that we supply. Fox sparrows are also great scratchers, and this winter we have two. I put all the 'Scarlet Wonders' and 'Baden Badens' in one spot, and gave them several doses of various pesticides, several years ago. They are now almost free of weevil chewings. Probably the towhees did a better job than the insecticides! I don't know if frogs eat weevils, but since we gave up replacing dead goldfish, and left our garden pond to the frogs, we have seen hundreds of tadpoles in the pool every summer, and are pleased to encourage a viable frog population in the area.

REMEMBER to bring back library books so other members can use them.

HELLEBORES

In a few weeks we will be watching for the first flowers, (not counting "Christmas Roses" that flower at odd times, never at Christmas in my garden). I think it is safe to say they are not bothered by deer or slugs. According to **Joe Harvey**, of the Victoria Rhodo Society, there are two main groups of hellebores - those with stems like foetidus, and those such as orientalis, which do not. Colours range from white and greenish through shades of pink to purple. New varieties include almost black, and shades of coral, even white with red stripes. Joe Harvey has been busy crossing various kinds

and colours and we will have to watch for some of these. They make wonderful companions for rhodos, though they bloom happily in more shade. Summer drought doesn't bother them, nor does the amount of frost and snow that are likely to occur here.

AND YOU THINK YOU HAVE GARDEN PROBLEMS?

According to the Victoria Rhodo Newsletter of last Feb., a person in London Ont. complained that racoons were eating her gladiola corms. So what? So she lives on the fifteenth floor of a high-rise apartment. She watched the little fellows climbing down the rough exterior of the building, after "brooming" them off the balcony.

RHODOS ON A WESTERN SHORE

Continuation of the article by **Leslie Drew** in the RHS Journal Rhodos 1992: At the same time as Blair was building Beacon Hill Park, **Richard Layritz** arrived in Victoria as a young immigrant from Germany and immediately started a nursery. His timing was perfect: the building boom was just beginning. Trained in horticulture in Stuttgart, he had then studied formal gardens in France and, on a visit to London, spotted the land-promotion advertising.

Layritz had enormous capacity for hard work. When he needed money to buy more land for his nursery, he joined the Klondyke gold rush and toiled so prodigiously as to be one of the few men to come out richer than when he went in. He soon had the first large nursery in B.C., supplying fruit trees for new orchards in the interior (as many as 40,000 in a single order) and ornamental trees and shrubs for public plantings and private gardens, the latter including the abandoned limestone quarry north of Victoria which **Robert and Jenny Butchart** were transforming into a

garden par excellence.

Layritz was the first nurseryman to import rhodos in quantity. One of these pre-First World War catalogues offered more than 300 cultivars, some from the high Himalayas, and by 1923 a new partner, **Major Harry Seale**, was buying hybrids from the Rothschild estate at Exbury.

While early interest in rhodos was being expressed ostentatiously in urban settings, in the background a few individuals quietly began to experiment with species and hybrids. **George Fraser**, living at Ucluelet on Vancouver Island's very wet west coast, began propagating and hybridizing. His 'Fraseri' was the first hybrid developed in Canada to receive international recognition. Fraser, whose field was all Ericaceae, would try anything he could get his hands on; his crossing of R. maximum with the native R. macrophyllum led to 'Albert Close'. Isolated though he was, he corresponded with two of the best authorities of the day - Cornwall's E.J.P. Magor and Pennsylvania's Joseph Gable - and was ever grateful for their advice and encouragement.

DID YOU KNOW? That contrary to popular belief not all rhododendrons are toxic. In fact some are downright tasty. For instance the corolla of R. cinnabarinum has a sweet-sour taste and is used in Sikkim by the head Lamas and Tibetan aristocrats to make jam. In Lachen and Lachung, the locals fry the corolla to a tasty delicacy.

In the Singalila Mountains, the flowers of R. arboreum are used to make a rhodo wine. Dried flowers of the species are also used for checking diarrhoea and blood dysentery.

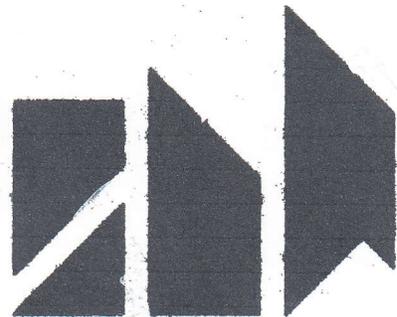
However, many rhodos are toxic and contain acetylandromedol, which was

first discovered in 1887. In 1961 the toxins were isolated and named by universities in Japan. It is not only toxic to humans and animals but also to some bees. Symptoms of poisoning include paralysis, breathing difficulty, convulsions, blood pressure drop, respiratory failure, death.

Parentage does not determine toxicity. For example, R. Red Wing, with 3 poisonous species in its ancestry out of 4, is innocuous. Highly toxic plants include thomsonii, niveum, prattii, Red Admiral, Barclayi, J.G. Millais, Fiery Cross, Red Star and Ascot Brilliant. R. thompsonii is prepared as a natural insecticide in Sikkim.

This material taken from an article in the Fraser Valley Rhodo Newsletter of Nov. 1996.

Ed. Note: Please don't try to make jam from your precious rhodo flowers - if I had any flowers on my cinnabarinum I would rather photograph them than eat them!



This is a famous puzzle credited to that famous puzzle-maker, H.E. Dudeney. All you have to do is cut out the pieces and make a capital 'T' of them.