

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.

4 June

Executive meeting at the home of
Isabelle Bergey, 9291 Doyle Rd.
Turn off the highway at Hamm
Rd., and immediately down
Macauley Rd., for about 5 miles
to Doyle Rd. 2nd driveway on
the right-hand side. Let's hope the
tomatoes are ripe!

15 June

The annual BBQ (the Saturday
after the 2nd Tuesday of the
month) at **Len & Madeleine's**
show garden on Sea Terrace
Road.
Bring lawn chair, potluck food
items, plate, cup, fork, spoon etc.
for yourself and spouse or friend.

14 May

Members toured **Bonnie and
Wayne Steele's** "acres of rhodos"
and many other interesting plants.
At the AGM they heard of our
improved financial position, due
to the hard work of many
members at plant sales and garden
tours. Thanks to everyone.

New executive members pressed
into service included **Harry
Wright**, President, **Ann
Chevrier**, Ways and Means, and
two more **Wrights**, **Evelyn** and
Gwen will look after the Social
aspects of our club. We still don't
have a Vice-President. C'mon
people - the only way we can
continue to have a viable society
is by everyone working together
and taking a turn at work that has
to be done. This is true in the
world at large as well as in groups
such as ours. Have you done your
share? If not, speak up!

Many thanks are due to the hard-
working executive members
whose two-year stint is over. To
Paul Wurz, **Dave Crucq**,
Isabelle Bergey and **Edna
Foresman**, many heartfelt thanks.

Winner of a prize rhodo on the
NIRS Garden Tour was **Chris
Buchanan** of Comox.

MEMBER NOTES

There are so many items to
discuss this time, please forgive
me if the newsletter runs to 5 or 6

pages.

First, a report on the bus trip to
Victoria, organized by **Phyllis
Stapley**, another volunteer who
must be thanked and
congratulated for providing
members with a wonderful day in
several beautiful gardens.

Our first stop was **Dave
Dougan's** garden near the
Malahat. Many of his mature
rhodos were in bloom (though
everyone said all flowers were
about 2 weeks late this year) and
many alpine plants looked lovely
on his rock garden (which consists
of one giant rock).

Next we drove to **Trelawney's**
garden, which I would call a
"mini Weesje" garden for there
were about 3 acres of mature fir
trees, old and beautiful rhodos,
camellias and many other
interesting plants. A big thrill for
"us birdwatchers" was the sighting
of a bush-tit's nest part-way up a
clematis montana climbing up a
fir tree. The nest was
camouflaged with carefully
placed lichen and probably
completely hidden by clematis
flowers and leaves in a few
weeks.

Next, **Weesje's** garden, where 7
or more acres of fir trees have
hundreds of rhodos, and many
other interesting shrubs at their

feet, as well as ferns, primulas and other herbaceous perennials.

The last stop was **Carmen Varcoe's** garden, much smaller than the others, but packed with "new to us" and interesting perennial plants. We saw some of the plants she brought to our meeting in April, and many people bought treasures to pack onto our vans already loaded with people.

We had a wonderful day, and though we were caught up in an accident lineup on the Malahat, on the way home, that time was well spent in discussing various garden problems.

I have a report from **Isabelle Bergey**, representing the Social Committee.

"Edna and Isabelle thank all the members who so kindly volunteered to set up and wash up at coffee time. Thank you to all the generous givers of goodies at all our monthly meetings and other events. Your help has greatly assisted us in providing refreshments to our club!"

And a report on the **FILBERG GARDEN SHOW** from **Isabelle**.

"The Filberg Garden Show is a wonderful opportunity for our club to educate people and promote Rhododendrons. Thanks are due to **Harry Wright** and **Bernie Guyader** for helping set up the display (Gazebo from **Isabelle and Donald Bergey**). **Len and Madeleine Simmons** also provided beautiful flowers for our "mini" Truss Show. The display was staffed by our volunteers: **Harry Wright, Gwen Wright, Edna Foresman,**

Bob Argall, Isabelle Bergey, Mary Palmer, Betty Percy and Sharon Niscak. **Harry, Gwen, Edna, Sharon, Donald and Isabelle** dismantled the display.

To provide friendly service to the show-goers requires many of us to exert some effort; it should be acknowledged that some of our members also spent many hours at both the Filberg Show AND the Plant Sale. Well done, every one of you!

Also a big Thank You to the scrape-and sanding team: **Evelyn Wright, Gwen and Harry Wright, Bernie & Gloria Guyader, and Isabelle and Donald Bergey.** It took a lot of hot work getting the gazebo ready (Rumour has it that some of the workers took clothes off!). **Isabelle and Donald** painted the structure, and despite an ancient truck, provided the transportation".

THANKS, ISABELLE, YOU ALWAYS GAVE OUTSTANDING EFFORT THIS PAST YEAR.

While at the Filberg Garden show, I spent some time with **Bryan Zimmerman**, another member who has "acres of rhodos".

His display comprised of many fine photographs of areas in his garden. He was also promoting a new society, the Vancouver Island Gardens Association, made up of owners of some of the larger gardens and nurseries on the island, such as **Butchart's, Weesjes, Milner,** and of course **Bryan's Woodland Gardens.**

Some of the main rhododendron

areas of the world (not including China and the Himalayas where most of them came from) are our Pacific Northwest, Ireland, the West Coast of Scotland, and New Zealand. All of these places have similar climate and the acid soil that rhodos enjoy. Vancouver Island is a prime location for growing rhodos as well as many other plants, and the new Gardens Association has plans to promote gardening as a tourist attraction. Let's give them lots of encouragement.

SAY GOODBYE TO LEG LIFTERS

Harry Wright kindly donated this interesting article from Gardens West, May 2002: The saga of the "Piss Off"™ plant, *coleus canina*, began on a trip to Australia when a German gardener, **Dieter Stegmeier**, heard of a plant that kept dingoes and wildcats at bay. Thinking these plants might deter cats and dogs in his garden, he took plants back to Germany, but they didn't work. Then, on a trip to Brazil, he heard of a South American nettle that kept off rodents. So he brought plants back to Germany and tried crossing the two kinds of plants, resulting in the world's first environmentally friendly pet repellent.

Piss Off™ plants have small silvery-green leaves, compact habit, and light-blue flowers all summer. It is an annual and must be propagated from cuttings. Plant in full sun, in drier soil and do not over-water. The plants were introduced to Canada by **White Rock Nurseries** and may soon be available at your local nursery. Further information at

604-536-3330 or Email -
jpwhite@whiterocknurseries.com

TRIP TO RONNING'S GARDEN

Three of our members joined the MARS bus trip to **Bernt Ronning's** garden west of Holberg, which is several hours' drive on a gravel road west of Port Hardy, May 18-19. We joined a cheerful group of gardeners, all of whom had brought boxes and jars of cookies and cakes, so that meals and coffee breaks were not really needed. As fast as one box of goodies made its way through the bus, another followed it. The weather was excellent apart from one shower (we were already back in the bus).

Mr. Ronning's garden must have been a wonderful sight from about 1920 to 1960, but for the next 20 years it was abandoned. Anyone who has lived on the west coast of this island knows how the mosses, salmon berries and salal grow, and it is amazing how much work the **Moes** have done to resurrect the garden. They are constantly finding treasures that have been buried under 20 ft. high and wide clumps of salmon berries. Some wonderful and rare rhodos are blooming again after being buried under huge trees and bushes. Daffodils that had not seen the light of day for many years are again blooming in their hundreds. Rare and unusual trees, planted from seed between 1910 and 1920 are now forest giants.

Ron and Julia Moe are obviously dedicated to the task they have chosen. The garden is very isolated, but having been

lighthouse keepers they welcome the chance to garden in a warm, sheltered south-facing garden. They are very knowledgeable but welcome any suggestions as to the names or parentages of various plants in the garden. They welcome visitors, but the garden is not really wheelchair accessible. Vehicles must be left about 1/2 mile from the garden, with a fairly steep little hill to climb.

We spent the night at the Quarterdeck Inn, Port Hardy, where the meals were good and the beds soft. A quiet night, then back down-Island to first **Paul Wurtz's** lovely rhodo garden and nursery, **Len and Madeleine's** hundreds of beautiful rhodos, and finally to **Harry Wright's** garden. These three gardens were in total contrast to the one left by Mr. Ronning. A wonderful two-day adventure!

Many thanks are due to the Wagonmasters, **Pat and Ev Jefferson**, who did an outstanding job of organizing the trip and keeping everyone on schedule for two days. After the discussions with so many dedicated and knowledgeable gardeners, I feel inspired to suggest we have an "Inter-Club Plant Swap and Sale" one of these times. Everyone has an excess of various plants that would be real treasures for another gardener. How about it, program committees?

In the September newsletter we will have a report on the trip to Ucluelet to see **George Fraser's** garden.

MARGINAL LEAF

NECROSIS on rhodos

Several years ago I bought a really useful pamphlet "How to Identify Rhodo and Azalea Problems, Washington University Extension Bulletin 1229, 1993, cost \$6.50. I must have bought it at one of the fall conferences in Washington.

Several of my rhodos have a problem which looks exactly like the photo and description in this bulletin called Marginal Leaf Necrosis. On looking around other gardens I see I am not the only victim. On speaking to the Greigs during the trip to Holberg, I find they have it too, and took a leaf down to the Species Foundation for identification of the problem.

I will quote from page 7 of Bulletin 1229:

"Symptoms: Upper leaves brown, burned back (necrotic) from tips and or/edges toward the midrib or middle of the leaf.

Causes:

1. Cold damage occurs when temperatures dip to near or below the hardiness limit of the plant. May be accentuated by wind and drought.
2. Drought, especially while the plant is in active growth or the foliage is in soft growth, and on newly established plants.
3. High amounts of salts in the soil caused by excessive use of soluble fertilizers. Very common close to the house where the eaves protect soil from rain, and along the dripline of the house where fertilizer concentrations are high when the plant is in soft growth.
4. Root damage due to poor drainage, planting too deeply,

physical injury to root system, or disease.

5. Girdling due to weevil feeding on bark and/or roots.

6. Nutrient deficiency."

Take your pick of these explanations. I think 1 and 2 describe this past 12 months very well, in my garden anyway. This book does not tell us "what to do about it". We will have to use common sense and hope climate change is not too difficult for our rhodos to accept.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

Rose-Marie has sent a snippet which blends in very well with some of the information above.

"This year's cold spring has produced some major changes in my rhodo collection. After the frosts of late April, the Sayward Valley had a series of frosty nights through the middle of May, the worst one being -4C on May 6/7. Many rhodo blooms were spoiled or scarred, especially the dwarf yellows and blues that are (were) the mainstay of a bed in front of my house.

Numerous specimens of Curlew, Cream Crest, Gristede and russatum were growing into fine clumps meant to billow artfully in complementary tones, and for their first ten years or so, late April or early May frosts simply did not happen. For the last 5 years, however, each spring seems to be progressively colder here in frosty hollow, and on the morning of May 7, I'd had enough of brown mush were there had been glorious blue and yellow.

The collection listed above has

been given to a friend who lives on a hillside (and who is very young and optimistic), and the once-billowy bed is once again bare earth dotted with small, newly planted rhododendrons. Later blooming rhododendrons. The one exception is a fine specimen of 'Elya' I had purchased from Harry Wright at our plant sale May 5. Its flowers might be too early for frosty hollow, but with that foliage, it doesn't matter".

GREENFINGERS

I am not in the habit of watching videos, but after reading "Rootstalk" by Indumentum in the Fraser Valley South newsletter of March 2002, I went to the video rental store for a copy of GREENFINGERS, a movie about a group of men in a British prison who became interested in gardening and entered their garden in the Hampton Court Palace Garden Show. I really enjoyed it for several reasons: I have often read articles in "Amateur Gardening" about people who have done this; the tough detective Dalziel of the Dalziel and Pascoe series was the prison head; and Helen Mirren, also a tough detective in another series, was a "lady of the manor" type with flowery dresses and fantastic hats, who wrote gardening books but had a disgraceful-looking garden. These characters and particularly an "old lag" made the picture. The story was weak. But what the heck - a good way to relax with a bowl of popcorn after a hard day in the garden.

ALPINES AND RHODOS (or is it RHODOS AND ALPINES)

Bernie Guyader provided this interesting article, but first the Editor would like to add a few notes. Bernie's garden is located at the top of a hill, on a smallish city lot, and like most of us, he planted, years ago, rhodos and other plants that have grown to be much too large and have therefore had to be moved out. Meantime the alpine garden has remained in proper scale.

"Whether you say Rhodos and Alpines, or Alpines and Rhodos, they make a great combination. Whenever I read or attend talks on companion plants, I am amazed that there is never any mention of gentians. I suppose I may be prejudiced due to the fact that gentians are my favorite plants. I feel that the best companion plants have the same horticultural requirements as rhodos and bloom at different times, or complement the rhodos when they are in bloom.

I suppose that if we mention alpine, we should first consider the rhodos that are native to the Alps of Europe, which are *R. ferrugineum* found on siliceous subsoil and *R. hirsutum*, found on calcareous subsoil. We also have *Rhodothamnus chamaecistus*, which was formerly known as *Rhododendron chamaecistus*. These are all perfectly happy on a well-drained rockery, in full sun with a mulch of 2 or 3 inches of shale or rock chips.

I should mention at this time I also grow *R. radicans* on the rockery, but on the north side in a more shaded area. With these you can grow *Gentiana* in the *acaulis* group such as *alpina*,

kochiana and dinarica; these gentians bloom at the same time as the rhodos. *Pimelea prostata* and *Gypsophilla repens 'rosea'* trailing down over the rocks bloom later and give a pleasing effect during the summer. Also blooming in summer are *Gentiana* ssp. *septemfida*, *paradoxa*, *lagodechiana* etc. and other rock plants too numerous to mention.

Now to the Asian rhodos. I am drawn to the dwarf and low growing rhodos, because they fit in so well with the overall scale and scheme of things in our garden. I much prefer the species, but I do have many hybrids as well. In a north facing bed, about 20 x 10 ft., there are *R. impeditum*, *keleticum*, *williamsianum*, *cephalanthum* and *pseudochrsanthum*.

With these I have some of the 'birds' from Peter Cox. Centred between two bright blue hepaticas is *R. Ptarmigan*.

The Hepaticas bloom slightly before *Ptarmigan*, but they are still in full bloom when the pretty white bells of the rhodo open.

Also in this bed we have *Trillium hibbersonii*, a dwarf species about 2" tall with pink blossoms on 3" stems and *Cyclamen hederifolium* and *coum*; *coum* blossoms in the spring and *hederifolium* in fall. I have two *campylogynum* hybrids, at least I think they are hybrids, I got them from Tom Bowhan several years ago. One he named 'Ester Berry', which is very attractive, and 'Jade', which has shiny dark green foliage and a dark plum coloured bell blossom, is one of my favorites. 'Kim', another *campylogynum* hybrid is another favorite. R.

williamsianum with it's pink bells is between *R. 'Ptarmigan'* and 'Egret', great contrast. For summer colour there are white dwarf *Campanulas*, *Gentiana asclepiadea* in several shades of blue and mats of pink *Dianthus la bourville*.

Then in September, the Asian gentians start their show. *Gentiana sino ornata*, *ternifolia* and *x stevanagensis* and the many hybrids. They come in many shades of blue, from the palest colour, almost white, to dark blue with purple stripes. These blend in well with *Cyclamen hederifolium*, both pink and white forms, which bloom at this time. When the blossoms finish, the colourful foliage in dark green and silver carry on the show. There are many other plants that can be used especially any of the low growing ericaceous plants. I hope this shows that a large area is not necessary to grow a colourful display of Rhodos, and of course Alpine and rock garden plants for colour through the year."

BOOK REVIEW

Perennials; Enduring Classics for the Contemporary Garden
Rob Proctor & Rob Gray, pub. Harper & Row 1990.

This is a delightful book, full of pictures and stories about favorite garden flowers. Chapter headings such as "The story of antique perennials" and "A history of perennial gardening styles" gives some idea of what the book is about. There is information about some of the first European "plant hunters" in China in the 1700s, and descriptions of the various gardening styles that have

evolved since that time. I loved the pictures showing various combinations of "companion plants" and though there are no rhodos in the book, you can find many ideas for your own garden. I found the book in the Campbell River library.

TALKING OF BOOKS -

I decided to sign up for books from the Garden Book Club, (Doubleday), because for \$9.99 plus shipping and handling I could have three books. The books arrived and I was very pleased with these beautifully illustrated hardcover books - *Landscaping*, a Taylor guide, *The Garden Problem Solver* (Readers Digest) and *Perennial Combinations*, a Rodale book which emphasizes exactly what Bernie was talking about - combining plants that look well together and enjoy the same kind of soil, exposure to sun, and extremes of climate. The total price for the three came to \$29.90 Cdn. \$10.00 each is not bad. If you are a book lover I can recommend this method of buying. I have to buy 3 books in the next two years, but I bet I will buy a dozen anyway.

Perennial Combinations, by C. Colston Burrell, Rodale Press, 1999. (I will review the others at a later date).

Chapters such as *Combinations by Colour*, *Combinations for All Seasons*, *Combinations for Special Sites*, - on the Wild Side, and - For Extra Fun gives you an idea of what the book is about. The author concentrates on herbaceous perennials, and there are stunning photos of shade-loving groundcovers and

woodland borders, ideas for cottage gardens, sandy gardens, wet soil in shade - most of the book is very applicable for the kind of plants we grow and the gardens we tend. Descriptions often list the climatic zones as well as common and Latin names.

MORE FROM SAYWARD

Rose-Marie never fails to send us lively and informative articles.

A North Island Hedgerow

"The hedgerow at the back of my Sayward property came into existence because of owls. Owls of various species frequented my neighbourhood for many years, but about 15 years ago it became a novelty to hear or see one. In the interests of luring them to return, I thought that nurturing an old-style hedgerow would provide food and shelter for the small creatures that in turn feed owls, and would of course feed and shelter other birds as well. As this idea has developed, I have become increasingly interested in native plants also, so the rewards of the project are multiple. Most of the plant material for my hedgerow has come from other areas of the property. Many native seedlings volunteer in my garden, which is in a rural area. Some plants were purchased.

Only seeds were collected in the wild, although I have taken some cuttings from plants in roadside ditches. Plants grown from cuttings or seeds were established in a nursery bed for a year or two before facing the rough and tumble of the hedgerow.

The 150-metre property line which became the hedgerow has an exposed, sunny north end, a low-lying mid section, and a

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higher section under tall trees.

Except for a small section at this south end, the soil is rich alluvial silt, generously left by the frequent flooding of the Salmon River. I began the project at the sunny north end 10 years ago. The first year I planted only a few hazelnuts (horticultural varieties) and brambles (Himalayan blackberries), traditional hedgerow material."

Ed. Note:

What, she had to plant Himalayan blackberries? "I wanted to include the sloe (buckthorn) but couldn't find seeds or plants, so I added wild roses, (*Rosa nootkana*, a native) to the mix. Once these were established, I filled in some gaps with red osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*) and mountain ash (*Sorbus sitchensis*), twinberry (*Lonicera involucrata*) and wild crabapple (*Malus fusca*) - all plants that offer food to wildlife. Behind the hedgerow, on the neighbour's property, are some "wild" apple trees, seedlings from an old orchard. The roses and blackberries have climbed into these trees, and the long blooming period of the combined plants is a delight, not just to me but to hummingbirds and butterflies.

In the southern, semi-shaded part of the hedgerow I have planted some non-native material to supplement native shrubs and trees. A few cuttings of forsythia and flowering quince (*Chaenomeles japonica*) have taken hold, and an ornamental Norway maple (*Acer platanoides* Crimson King) punctuates the end of the hedge line. Spring-flowering bulbs push through carpets of miners' lettuce (*Claytonia siberica*), bleeding

heart (*Dicentra formosa*) and creeping Charlie (*Glechoma hederacea*). A few conifers and a number of seedling hollies serve to clothe this section in winter. In the middle section I have experimented with some native BC plants that do not appear in this area. Birch (*Betula papyrifera*) was salvaged from a construction site in Campbell River. Indian plum (*Oemleria cerasiformis* - I believe the Comox Valley is the northern limit of its range), is thriving after 3 years on site. Less successful are my efforts with native honeysuckle (*Lonicera ciliosa*). Most of the native plants in the hedgerow are doing very well, contributing attractive flowers, foliage and fruit through a long season. Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), crabapple, cascara (*Rhamnus purshiana*), Douglas maple (*Acer glabrum*), red-osier dogwood, mountain ash, ninebark (*Physocarpus capitatus*), hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*), red elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*), trailing blackberry (*Rubus ursinus*) and wild cherry (*Prunus emarginata*) are all capable of surviving each other's push for space and light. No compost or fertilizer is provided, but in early winter I rake all the leaf-fall and apply it as mulch. The hedgerow is fulfilling much of its promise. It has become a home to many local birds and small animals. It also provides a constantly changing display of leaf, bloom and fruit; a hedgerow walk offers something new to examine on every day of the year.