

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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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.

5 Mar

Executive meeting at the home of
Wayne & Bonnie Steele, 6157
Whitaker Rd. Down Left Road off
Kitty Coleman Road, look for
Whitaker Rd, close by Brian
Zimmerman's garden. Note the
Annual Meeting will be held at the
same place in May.

12 Mar

Our member **Judy Walker** will
educate us with information on
Landscape Design. This should be
particularly interesting and useful for
those of us who have the habit of
acquiring cute little plants and then
wondering where to find room for
them, and what to do when they turn
into giants.

12 Feb

What an inspiring evening we had!
First **Bernie** gave us a brief but
thorough talk on fertilizing rhodos.

He crammed so many details into
such a short space, we would
appreciate a written report for future
reference.

Steve Hootman, in words and
pictures, took us to the most recent
trip by a group of mountain-climbing
rhodo fanatics to north-west Yunnan
Province of China. As the trip took
place in the fall, there were few
pictures of rhodos in bloom, but
many of "new" vacciniums and
gaultherias, covered with huge
berries, of which I hope he brought
back lots of seeds. Rhodo seed pods
were difficult to find. It rained for
almost the whole trip, but this didn't
seem to discourage the group. Slides
showing the magnificent mountains
and valleys, the boulder-strewn
rivers, the tiny villages and the
impoverished but kind and cheerful
people who live there - we felt
overwhelmed by it all.

Quoting **Keith Bowers**, editor of the
Seattle Rhododendronland
Newsletter of January (he said it all!)
"After our January program
presented by **Steve Hootman**, I was
very glad to go home and pull warm,
dry blankets over my head and dream
of happy quiet days in my garden!
Steve is going to amazing places and
bringing us astounding pictures from
far away. We thank him and are
probably secretly relieved he's the one
climbing up and down those scary
mountains, hanging over cliffs to get
that rhody truss and crossing that
slippery log where one misstep would
send him plunging down that
waterfall! Thanks Steve for a great
program! We stand in awe!"

Steve brought copies of the Species
Foundation Plant catalogue for 2002,
and some of the plants he described
are listed (grown from seed collected
on a previous trip). The best way to
buy plants from the RSF would be to
go down to Federal Way, with all
permits in hand, take the plants back
to the Ag. Canada people at the
border, and hope they allow them
through immediately. **Paul Wurz** or
Linda Easton can give good advice
on the subject.

All this reminds me of a statement
made by **Frank Fujioka** about
species rhodos: "A thousand years
ago Chinese hybridizers scattered
their rejects in the Himalayas". This
may well be only too true, but just
imagine what the "best" plants must
have looked like!

MEMBER NOTES

More special dates to remember:

2 March Seedy Saturday at the
Filberg Centre.

15-17 March Garden Show in the
Rec. Centre at Beban Park, Nanaimo.

25 April Bus tour to Victoria to visit
4 private gardens including Weesjes.
Cost \$25 - bring money to March
meeting. A 15-passenger bus will
leave Courtenay 6:30 a.m., return at
about 7:00 p.m. Bring packed lunch.

4-5 May Filberg Lodge Garden
Show (wrong date given last month)

11-12 May MARS garden tours.

18-19 May Bus trip organized by
MARS to **Bernt Ronning's** garden
near Holberg. A two-day trip, cost
\$150, which includes most meals,
gratuities etc., hotel in Port Hardy,
and visits to 3 gardens in the
Campbell River-Courtenay area.

(Paul Wurz, Len & Madeleine Simmons, Harry Wright gardens)
Phone Mary Palmer, 923-6629 or Pat Jefferson in Qualicum, 752-2524 for more details.

Remember, volunteers are needed to help at our Rhodo Show & Sale **May 5**, at our booth at the Filberg Garden Show **May 4 and 5**, and our garden tour on May 11. Sign up at the front table - the March and April meetings will be at the United Church as usual.

May 7 is the Annual Meeting and several pair of helping hands are needed now: a Nominating Chairperson, whose job is to track down committee members for Ways and Means, and Social - often two people work together very well - and a Vice-President. Don't be shy - I know you can do it. We are all too old, too tired, too busy - but often we are the ones who willingly take on yet another job. Please say "yes" when asked. The benefits are great and the work is easy.

Note: No more pictures in the newsletter until some computer glitches are worked out.

VALLEY GARDENS OPEN BY APPOINTMENT TO TOURISTS

Harry Wright writes: "I would like to have a list of Comox Valley gardens that would be open by appointment, when requested by tourists. This list would be made available to, and kept at the Tourist Bureau, and upon request, would be given to tourists who would set up their own appointment.

If you would like to have your garden listed, please give me a call at (250) 338-8345".

It is time to check over your summer-blooming tubers and corms such as dahlias and glads. The B.C. Council of Garden Clubs gives some good advice on why stored bulbs fail to survive the winter:

1. Temperature in storage area too cold.
2. Too many roots in one box.
3. Medium too wet or roots not thoroughly dried out before storing.
4. Lack of air circulation.
5. Contaminated roots, soil, medium or box- look for mold.
6. Area too warm, roots dried up, shriveled. Mist occasionally. If soaking in water overnight doesn't plump them up, throw them out. If soft or showing fungus, discard.

SERENDIPITY IN THE GARDEN

There is a little shop in Campbell River by this name, a great place to find interesting tid-bits for gifts or for your own garden.

What does this term mean?

According to "Rootstalk", writing in The Yak, newsletter of the Fraser South Rhodo Society, it means paying attention to structure and form rather than the detail of plant combinations. Once you have the bones of the landscaping in place the next step is to develop the "layered look" of tree canopy, shrubs, perennials and ground cover. This will be the basis for serendipity that will now be happening all around the garden".

One example he gave was to move the rhodo "Babylon" to a shady place under a flowering cherry, *Prunus yedoensis* 'Akebono'. He found the rhodo and tree bloom at the same time and the tree drapes puffy pink and white branches over the huge pastel pink flowers of the rhodo. Stunning!

ROOTING DECIDUOUS AZALEAS

In the magazine Horticulture, May 2001, Bob Polomski advises: "Deciduous azaleas are harder to root from cuttings than evergreen types.

The easiest way to produce new plants is by layering. In late spring or early summer, select a low, flexible branch and bend it to the ground. Wound the branch by removing an inch-long strip of bark from the underside.

Rooting hormone is not necessary, but can be used to speed up rooting. Bury this portion of the branch 3-4" deep, leaving the tip of the branch bent upwards. A piece of wire bent into a U-shape, like a large staple, may be necessary to keep the branch secured to the ground. Keep the branch evenly moist and it should be well rooted by the following spring. Sever it from the parent plant at this point and treat it like any rooted cutting".

NOTES FROM THE MAGAZINE AMATEUR GARDENING:

More on the Slugbot: Time magazine voted it one of the best inventions of 2001 (it uses no electricity) but there are no plans to market it at present.

By the way, when you crack nuts, save the shells to put around your hostas to deter slugs.

A simple way to start African Violets from leaves: Use a small bag of sterilized soil, tape up the ends, cut a hole in the centre for watering, and make holes to insert leaves, two to a hole, back to back, with stems cut down to about 1 1/2". Put in a closed propagator or heated propagation tray, try to keep the temperature at about 68F, and soon little plants will appear.

Do you worry about lichen on azalea stems? It is an indicator of clean and humid air, and does no harm. No spray will kill it. You can pick or scratch them off by hand, but be careful to not harm the bark.

WHAT IS FABIA-BUREAVII

In the Jan. 2002 newsletter of the Vancouver Rhodo Society, **Ken Gibson** replies to this question with an interesting bit of historical information:

"I'm no scientist, but I have looked at a variety of these plants. In my opinion it's the variety of *bureavii* that makes the difference. In the Seattle area, Half-Dan Lem's *bureavii* is considered one of the best. Hence, 'Hansel' and 'Gretzel'. I suppose R. 'Teddy Bear' is here somewhere also, and a more straggly one that appears in the Fraser Valley, too.

The most superior is Greig's 'Fabia-Bureavii'. Here again, the Greig form of *bureavii* is in my opinion the finest form available. **Bruce Briggs** concurred with this shortly before his death. The Greig 'Fabia-Bureavii' is easily recognized. It is more compact, but its main feature is its shiny leaves, which look like they have been painted with plastic paint.

About 15 years ago we were touring Thompson's Nursery south of Astoria, Ore. It was here that I saw rows and rows of these fine plants. I said to Mr. Thompson, "I've only seen a form like that up in Canada before". He replied "Where the hell do you think we got it? We were at Greig's in 1937". The mother *bureavii* went to UBC in Vancouver about 1975. I feel fortunate to have known Mary Greig and I'm proud to grow both of these fine plants."

(That isn't the end of the story, either. Ken generously supplied the Botanical Garden with cuttings of the Greig 'Fabia-Bureavii'. Once rooted and potted on we'll make them available to VRS members. Thanks, Ken!)

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

Last year, just before Christmas, we experienced THE SNOW (yes, 28 inches of snow, a whole winter's worth, in one night). This year, December brought us THE WESTERLY. Sayward gets some hefty west or northwest winds all year, and usually all summer, but this one was remarkably brutal. I live on a narrow side-road that was tree-lined until the night of Dec. 13. Over 20 trees fell across the road (and power lines), and dozens more fell alongside, as if Godzilla had come for a stroll. At first light the morning after, I anxiously toured the garden, expecting broken branches or worse, and was amazed to discover absolutely no damage at all. One alder branch had fallen in the blueberry patch without striking any plants, and that was it. It was dreary being without power for five days, but I'm very grateful that my well-loved trees and shrubs were all spared.

HEALTHY SOIL MAKES A HEALTHY GARDEN

The magazine *Gardenwise* produced a directory, this spring, of gardens, garden centres, societies, as well as useful articles on a variety of gardening subjects. The article on Healthy Soil should be of use to everybody, especially at this time of year. Here are some of the tips mentioned:

- # Always break through any layer of earth that prevents free drainage.
- # For trees and shrubs (read rhodos), amend the soil 60 cm to 1 metre deep. If you can't go down, build up above grade.
- # Always use organic matter to improve your soil - manure, compost, peat moss, composted bark mulch, leaf mold. Do not use sand - it fills pore space and prevents drainage.
- # Leave small sticks and rocks in the soil - they help to build structure.
- # Avoid using herbicides, soil

sterilizers or other chemicals on the soil. These chemicals kill the beneficial bacteria and fungi that aid root growth.

These hints and many others were written by **Todd Major**, who we met at Park & Tilford Gardens last year.

SPACE BETWEEN RHODOS

Many rhodo beds become overcrowded because the enthusiastic purchaser has trouble using restraint in buying no more plants than there is space for in the garden. However, if one is fortunate to be able to plant with spaces to allow for future growth, there will be the problem of what to do with the bare ground between and in front of the rhodos.

When shrubs are small, and large spaces have been allowed between them, the use of filler shrubs has merit. Hydrangeas are a good choice, enjoying the same growing conditions, and later moving with fair success. Care must be taken not to use invasive plants which will grow vigorously and steal moisture and food from the rhodos.

When smaller slow-growing plants such as R. Moonstone, R. Bow Bells and R. Hummingbird are establishing themselves, *Myosotis* (Forget-me-nots) will add pleasing colour contrast and can very easily be pulled out when they begin to encroach on the rhodos. They are great little self-seeders, too; 5 plants can become 100 in a very few years. Ground-covers such as *Gaultheria procumbens*, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* and *Lithospermum* are useful choices.

Primulas in their many varied forms serve a dual purpose in the rhodo garden. Their blossoms offer excellent colour and though they must be planted carefully so as not to clash with the rhodo flowers, they can become a valuable part of your landscape. Two problems, in my garden. The deer will eat every

primula the same night they are planted, and weevils love primulas. Would they eat primulas in preference to or addition to rhodos? Who knows; I don't have any primulas in my garden!

For spring and summer there is a varied selection of bulbs which will prove useful to fill spaces in a well planted garden. The Oriental lily is a worthwhile addition. Ferns and hostas are two more excellent "filler" plants. They come in a great range of colours and can create intense interest in the garden.

We haven't begun to mention all the other "little" bulbs which make bright carpets of colour before or during rhodo flowering time. Crocuses, scillas, muscari, botanical tulips, galanthus and dwarf daffodils are so easy to plant and grow - how can we resist them!

All these plants can be easily moved to another area when they take up too much space in your rhodo garden.

Note: This article was originally written by **JoAnn Foster**; I have added a few observations.

ANOTHER "NEW" EVERGREEN

The Feb. 2002 RHS Journal "The Garden" has an interesting article regarding a "new" species of conifer, discovered in Vietnam in 1999. Alas, the taxonomist has decided several names must now be changed, including that of our native Yellow Cedar, previously known as *Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*. The new plant is named *Xanthocyparis vietnamensis* (golden Vietnamese cypress) and the Yellow Cedar is now *Xanthocyparis nootkatensis*.

This tree is only the third "new" evergreen found since 1941, when *Metasequoia* was found in China. In

1994 the *Wollemia* was discovered in Australia.

ANOTHER FRASER HYBRID

Bill Dale of Victoria has written descriptions of several of George Fraser's hybrids. R. Mrs. Jamie Fraser is one that sounds intriguing. I wonder if anyone here has a plant? "Another of Fraser's successes in hybridizing was a plant that he called R. Mrs. Jamie Fraser, after his brother Jim's wife. This is a cross between *R. arboreum* and *R. macrophyllum*, again crossed with *R. arboreum*. It is therefore 3/4 *R. arboreum*.

Fraser claimed it was the darkest shade he ever grew. **Joe Gable** said the dried flowers, sent to him by Fraser in 1931, were almost black.

One plant of this grew at Wickeninish Inn. When **Ken Gibson** was given the job of replacing the walks there, he had to move the plant. He took it home to Tofino and planted it beside a large stump, and it is growing beautifully there. Cuttings were taken and I got my plants from Pat & Everett Jefferson at their Qualicum Beach nursery.

This is an outstanding hybrid with flowers that are a burgundy red, is a good grower and it is hoped will be more widely grown".

MORE RHODO HISTORY

I seem to be spending more and more time on the history of rhodos on the Pacific Coast. Trusting you are not bored, here is more of the article written by **Leslie Drew** and published in the RHS Rhodos 1991:

"Contacts were increasingly important as plantsmen and women, satisfied that they had found a congenial climate, became more sophisticated in their tastes. The RHS was the fount of information and plant material. **Mrs. Butchart** tested for West Coast suitability a

wide variety of seeds from plant hunters' expeditions. In the procuring of prize seeds of newly discovered rhodo species from southeast Asia, a close network developed privately along the coast from B.C. to California.

Dr. C.T. Hilton, in the Alberni Valley, was an early grower and distributor - to **Fraser** among others. Whatever their sources, the efforts of these rhodo fanciers could lead along unforseen paths to lasting benefits. For instance, among the retired people who chose to settle here and garden were British army officers, who had served at hill stations in India. One of them was a naturalist, **Dr. Richard Stoker** (brother of Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*). He and his wife obtained seeds, perhaps direct from northern India, for their garden at Lake Cowichan, which grew into a small nursery in the care of their younger friends, **George Buchanan Simpson** and his wife **Suzanne**. Essentially, theirs was a collection of quality alpinists. In the 1930s, the rhodo portion formed the base on which **Ted and Mary Greig** founded their pre-eminent specialized nursery at Royston, on the east coast of Vancouver Island".

WHAT- ANOTHER SLUG STORY?

Yes, I have slugs on the brain. I love this little item taken from Amateur Gardening last October:

Mrs. Stables writes: "I have 3 secret weapons at the bottom of my garden called Gerty, Berty and Shirty - my Aylesbury ducks. Every morning and evening I go on slug patrol - this enables my girls to dine in style. The bigger and juicier the slugs, the better - all are slurped, gobbled and gulped down with great relish followed by quacks of delight.