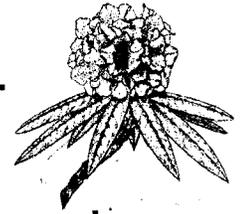


NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4 Vol. 17 No. 3 November, 2002

President Harry Wright 338 8345
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 338 5267
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.

Nov 5

Executive meeting at the home of
Don & Dorothy Law, 671
Crestview, 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.

12 Nov

No MERNIE on PARADISE MOUNTAINS
Ken Gibson will be our guest, to
show slides and tell us about his trip
to Ireland last year.

8 Oct

Bill Dale came to our meeting to
update us on the George Fraser
Rhodo Garden at Ucluelet. There are
now 175 rhodos planted alongside
the road to Ucluelet, as well as all the
plants in the garden. It is sure to be a
magnificent sight next spring. Two of
our new members, Dave and Noni
Godfrey, who have moved over from

the West Coast, helped with the
planting there. Bill told several stories
of plants and people who have been
associated with Fraser's garden in the
past.

Don McWatt, of Island Specialty
Nursery, brought a table full of
beautiful plants, all dressed in fall
colours, to illustrate his talk on
"Gardening in a Changing World".
The advice he gave regarding
planting and climate was very
appropriate, for we do seem to be in
a series of very dry summers. Don't
fight the climate, plant specimens that
don't object to dry summers. Mahonia
for instance, which grows happily in
gravel at Oyster Bay, is a good
choice. Don had several varieties
with delicately coloured autumn
leaves. (The native ones stay a rich
dark green, with just the odd leaf
turning bright red).

MEMBER NOTES

We never seem to run out of material
on slugs. Every gardening magazine
has advice and letters from readers.
Here are two suggestions from "The
English Garden" Nov. of this year.
Ducks are the ultimate answer of
course, but how to keep the ducks
from eating plants such as lettuce and
annual flowers? Borax sounds like a
good suggestion (for slugs, not ducks)
- two tbsps. to 2 gal. water, poured
on emerging leaves of hostas,
delphiniums and other favorite
munchies, then again in June. Borax
will not harm plant roots, people or
pets, and is approved for use in
organic gardens.

GARDEN BUGS

Remember fast movers in the garden
such as centipedes are our friends for
they go after slow-moving creatures
that eat plants.

METHUSELAH

The oldest living inhabitant of the
earth is a plant - an ancient
Bristlecombe pine (*Pinus longaeva*)
called Methuselah is 4,767 years old.
It grows in icy conditions in the
mountains of California, has a
growing season of 45 days, poor
alkaline soil, and adds 1" in girth
every 100 years. The wood is dense,
resinous, and very resistant to
decomposition and disease.

MOVING RHODOS:

Do this job in the Sept. - Nov. period,
after the fall rains start, so there will
be enough moisture in and around the
plant to help it survive. Make sure
the plants are well watered before and
after moving. In most years in our
climate, the end of Sept. is too early,
for the soil is still dust-dry. You
might have to wait until December to
do the job in a rainy period before the
snow flies.

These notes from copies of Amateur
Gardening.

Is everyone happy with delivery of
your newsletter, by E mail or Snail
mail, and does anyone want to
change? Just speak to Bernie so he
can make adjustments.

Don't forget the Revenue Table. A
poor time of year for plants? How
about pickles, jam or fresh bread?
Any of these would be welcome!

*WRONG
MEETING
WAS AT
BONNEY'S*

HOUSE PLANTS

When it is too cool and dark for outdoor gardening, houseplants can keep us in touch with the soil and cheer us with their bright flowers and leaves. African Violets often bloom through most of the winter. Rex begonias not only bloom but have wonderful vari-coloured leaves. They seem to be happy in the dark days of winter, in fact sun will rapidly burn their leaves. Ferns, of course, will live even in a dark corner, maybe not happily, but they survive. This year I decided to try a few orchids, and have found a fascinating new way to spend winter days and nights - reading all about them. I read some orchids even grow high in the Himalayas with some of the rhodos, as well as in some steamy jungles of Brazil. Convincing them to be content on a windowsill is not always easy, but a challenge which will probably keep me hopping until the first rhodo blooms next February.

WHY DO TREES LOSE THEIR LEAVES?

I have explained why leaves change colour in autumn; now perhaps you will be interested in why deciduous trees lose their leaves in fall. Amateur Gardening explains "Evergreen trees and shrubs retain their foliage throughout the winter, but deciduous trees lose their leaves as light levels decrease in autumn. Shorter day lengths mean plants make less sugar in their leaves, so find it less possible to maintain them.

Leaf fall is activated by the blocking of vessels as the sap becomes thicker and the flow slows down. This coincides with the death of a layer of thickened cells where the leaf joins onto the branch, at the base of the leaf petiole. The layer dries out and allows the leaf to detach, a process called abscission. A leaf scar is left behind at the point where it was joined to the branch, and usually, there is a dormant bud immediately

above, to be stimulated into growth the following spring, when days become longer again."

SUDDEN OAK DEATH is in the news again, though I doubt we can do anything about it. It has attacked various plants in California, including rhodos, and our Dept. of Agriculture is trying to keep it out of the province by disallowing nursery stock in from that state. The fungus enters the trunk of the tree, and causes bleeding cankers. Thousands of oaks in California has been affected, as well as rhodos and other shrubs.

WESTERN REGIONAL RHODO CONFERENCE

Bernie Guyader, Harry Wright, and Paul Wurz attended this conference in Bellingham, Sept. 20-22, 2002, and Paul has kindly sent in this report:

With Bellingham being in such close proximity to the B.C. border, the conference was a great opportunity to participate in various seminars, purchase new plants, to renew acquaintances and make new ones.

We left Courtenay at about 8:00a.m. Friday with Harry at the wheel. The Departure Bay ferry was the more convenient and with a quick trip through Vancouver we made it to the Border crossing by 1:30 p.m. We took the truck crossing, with a 30 minute wait to get through Customs - security was not an issue, although we did present our Passports.

We arrived at the Hampton Inn at 3:00 p.m. after a brief stint at Bellis Fair shopping mall where Harry was in search of a Greek oilskin cap, and we had a quick lunch at the Food Fair.

We pre-registered for the conference and also for the Inn, which proved to be quite reasonable in spite of the exchange rate. I was quickly

attracted to the plant sale which included many species plants and many new and excellent hybrids - more about the plant sale later! We attended the Friday evening Dessert Social which was followed by an interesting and well-done presentation by Bill Dale on the Abkhazi Gardens. There was time afterward for socializing with conference participants.

Saturday morning the three of us attended the presentation by Steve Hootman entitled 'Rhododendron Species in the Garden'; it was very informative and worthwhile. The next seminar I attended was on Fragrant Rhododendrons, by Don Wallace who runs the Singing Tree Gardens Nursery in northern California. Presentation #3 was 'Rhodo Blooms Through the Year' presented by Diane Thompson, President of the Seattle Chapter.

The afternoon activity was a bus tour to Mt. Baker. The weekend weather continued to be excellent, with shorts and T-shirts seen on several 45 minute stops on the way to the top. It proved to be an excellent time for Alpine plant lovers to visit the mountain as many were still in bloom. I took the opportunity to hang onto Bernie's shirt sleeve in order to expand my knowledge of alpines. *R. albiflorum* was quite abundant although long past blooming. Several 18" trout were seen cruising close to shore in the alpine lakes. I was very surprised by the lack of commercialization on the mountain.

A Social Hour preceded the Saturday evening banquet, which featured salmon and prime rib. The evening was well organized and a highlight of the weekend. The program following the banquet was on Inspirational Gardening by Brian Minter. The NIRS crew had a traditional post banquet social with the **Greigs and Steve Hootman**.

The conference ended after several seminars Sunday morning. We were impressed by slides of many new hybrids at the Hybridizer's Forum chaired by Frank Fujioka.

The weekend ended with our arrival back on the Island by 4:30 Sunday afternoon. Unfortunately the plants I and several other people purchased, are still waiting in Bellingham.

Agriculture U.S.A. were supposed to have Phyto certificates available at the sale, but they never materialized.

Import permits were also required. Hopefully these plants will cross the border soon, with the help of Dr. Mike Bale.

Ed. Note: Oct. 23, while writing this newsletter, I checked with Paul to find the plants are still being cared for in a Bellingham nursery.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD from Rose-Marie Silkins.

As I clean up the garden beds for winter, I gather the seeds of favorite annuals before pulling the plants for the compost pile. Most of these flowers have indeed been favorites for the forty-odd years I have been gardening, and I am happy to say I have never outgrown my fondness for their simple charms. Apart from the bedding varieties, many of the once-common annuals are seldom grown, perhaps because they are too simple for current tastes. Last year I rediscovered the humble Virginia stock, *Malcomia maritima*, after forgetting all about it for many years.

I had a failure in an unfortunate location, a sudden bare spot front and centre where I had planted some expensive new perennials that promptly made it clear they had no interest in sharing my life. Some *Malcomia* self-seeded there, and in a very short time they had graciously covered my bare spot with their delicate creams and purples, a task they performed reliably until frost.

Not trendy, not startling, but charming enough to draw my eye and occasion a repeat planting this year.

An annual so easy to grow as to be almost weedy, Love-in-a-mist (*Nigella damascena*) seeds itself reliably throughout my beds, providing washes of blue in early summer, then attractive seed pods that I cut and dry for winter bouquets. Garden visitors always ask about this plant, perhaps more than anything else I grow.

Another old favorite is *Salpiglossis*, Painted Tongue. It's a bit finicky up here - I start it in the greenhouse - but once the plants are 6" tall they manage quite nicely outside. A member of the nighthshade family (*Solanaceae*), *salpiglossis* has flowers shaped like elongated petunias. Their texture is velvety, and the colours belong to velvet as well: deep blue, dark red, rust, brown, all with yellow veining.

Ed. Note: More about annuals next newsletter, in time for browsing through the new catalogues.

Bernie Guyader reports on plans for a Cumberland garden:

CUMBERLAND'S NUMBER 6 MINE HERITAGE PARK

The Village of Cumberland has started to develop a Heritage Park on the site of the old #6 mine. The park has been laid out and basic paths are in. Several artifacts are displayed and benches, in the form of ore cars have been sited. They have built an information pavilion and are now in the process of planting shrubs and trees.

I was approached by **Ron Bannerman** to enquire of our Society for help, by providing some rhodos for planting. I had a very good response. On Tuesday Oct 15, **Dick Bonney** and I went up to **Margaret Murray's** to pick up 3

large *R. oreotrephe*s, which were donated by the **Oyster River Garden Society**. We delivered them to Cumberland and assisted with the planting.

Two days later we picked up 2 rhodos from **Pauline and Dick**, a Jean Marie de Montague and a Hoppy. Then it was over to **Madeleine and Len's** where we picked up a large *Sappho*. At **Gloria and Bernie's** we loaded a white *macrophyllum* and 3 small *Ramapos*. We delivered them all to the park and planted them.

Harry has also offered a large plant which we will get to them when they are ready with more planting areas. The layout appears to be well planned, and the hope for the future is to have a miniature ore train circling the park. This looks like an area which will look great with rhodos.

The park is located behind the public works yard, which is behind the fire hall. Take a drive up - I'm sure you will enjoy it.

FALL COLOURS

I can't help but to write more about the fabulous fall season we have been blessed with this year. After a hot dry summer, starting in July and ending whenever, we continue to have bright sunny days, cool nights, some fog, almost no rain or wind. Result: the brightest fall colours we have seen in many a year. *Acer macrophyllum*, the Big Leaved maple, is usually almost leafless after the first south-easter, but this year, no south-easter. The trees, as of 23 Oct. are clothed magnificently in huge, brilliant yellow leaves, which make gardens and forests glow with light. Many other trees and shrubs are similarly covered with bright leaves, yellow to orange to red to purple. What a sight! I hope you have all gone out to appreciate the show.

Of course, I have to be picky and complain that if we don't get rain soon, I will be unable to do any digging or transplanting, for the soil is as dry as dust and our well is very very low, as is the nearby river. Now I have to worry about the thousands of salmon waiting to move up the river. What next? Beware the sudden hard frost that sometimes hits us around the beginning of November.

COMPANION PLANTS

Shrubs that "go well" with rhodos include the Hydrangeas and Viburnums. Hydrangeas bloom after the rhodos are finished, prolonging the colour show in the garden. Then in the fall many of them offer brightly coloured leaves as well as holding onto the flowers month after month. Various Viburnums you will find blooming any time between January and December, with the added bonus of perfume from *V. tinus*, *V. x burkwoodii* and *V. x bodnantense* "Dawn".

Viburnum leaves also change to brilliant shades of cinnamon, red and purple in fall. The deer like to nibble on evergreen types such as *V. davidii*, *V. tinus* (I fooled them by trimming the bush lower down and they haven't reached the 12 ft. part yet), and *V. rhytidophyllum*, but they haven't bothered (yet) with the deciduous ones.

When you think of the huge variety of viburnums that are happy to grow for us, maybe we should consider a garden comprised of nothing but viburnums and rhodos. We could be sure then, of having flowers 12 months of the year. *V. x bodnantense* "Dawn" starts to bloom in Oct. in my garden, with the main show in April, and nothing discourages it - rain, snow, frost - a few flowers might turn brown but as soon as the weather moderates, dozens more open. And what a perfume! *V.*

tomentosum (*plicatum*) var. *mariesii*, gives a huge display of white flowers, in wedding-cake tiers, then the most beautiful coloured leaves in fall, cinnamon to bright red, with the added bonus of red berries. All the viburnums have berries, yellow to red to brilliant blue to black, much loved by robins in winter. A most satisfactory companion in the rhodo garden.

BY THE WAY, don't forget that if you plan to buy shrubs or trees, go around to the nurseries quickly now, before the weather changes. You will not only find some terrific bargains, but you will be able to see what the plants look like in fall, with their brilliant leaf colours. Japanese maples especially are giving a wonderful show at the moment, and so are many others. There are little purple flowers on many kinds of dwarf rhodos, and the fall-blooming heathers are just lovely.

FEED THE BIRDS

The weather is sure to change soon, and our feathered friends will be coming around for their favorite snacks. Don't disappoint them, please, for they always reward us by eating insect eggs. If you attract the birds year-round, by always leaving food and water out for them, the spring and summer birds eat quantities of aphids and other unwelcome insects, and the winter birds clean up other pests. Even on the darkest days, the song sparrows and purple finches will warble a few songs to remind us of spring.

Black oil sunflower seeds seem to be the favorite of most birds. Pine siskins like Niger thistle seeds in spring (they seem to spend the winter flying around in huge flocks and seldom land at the feeders until Feb. or March). I put out cracked corn for the jays, towhees and juncos, and when the weather turns cold and wet I mix up "bird cakes" using cracked

corn and any animal fat I can get hold of, such as saved bacon and other fats from the kitchen, suet, and pork fat kindly supplied by Paul Wurz. I do not add raisins, peanuts etc., for though the jays love the fancier "cakes", when one feeds 20 jays every day it can come quite expensive.

SPRING BULBS

It is not too late to plant some bulbs to brighten the spring garden. There are more new fancy daffodils on the market every year, and Bob Argall tries many of them. If you have not seen his garden in April, you must add it to the "must do" list for next spring. He not only has many exquisite examples of daffs, but can give advice on which ones not to buy (their heads are so heavy the spring rains bash them down). Tulips - I love tulips, but so do the deer, and without a tight 12 ft. fence it is hopeless to try to protect them. They don't bother as much with species tulips, but don't trust my advice. As for interplanting them with daffodils - they will often eat both, though "they never eat daffodils", according to some gardeners.

Now the deer never seem to bother with crocuses. They eat the muscari and Dutch Iris leaves, which foolishly grow in fall. Crocuses, especially the winter-blooming ones, make carpets of colour from January on. There are fall-blooming crocuses in the garden now, and even some of the colchicums are still looking fine. By the way, deer never (so far) eat colchicum or arum leaves, which open out and grow all winter. They have never touched the hellebores either, which is very kind, for hellebores of one sort or another will be in bloom from December to April, another great ground cover rhodo companion.