

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4 Vol. 17 No. 2, October, 2002

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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.

1 Oct

Executive meeting at the home of
Gloria & Bernie Guyader, 1965 - 6
St. East, Courtenay. Drive along
Back Rd. to 6th, and up the hill.
Watch for Bernie's red-leaved
berberis hedge on the right.

8 Oct

Don McWatt of Island Specialty
Nursery will be our guest. He will
talk on Restoring the Spirit of the
Garden, (and the gardener), and will
bring along a few plants for sale.

10 Sept.

Paul Wurz gave a demonstration on
taking rhodo cuttings in fall. He
emphasized the necessity of sterilizing
pots, soil and tools for this job. He
recommends a mixture of sand or
perlite and coarse peat or ground-up
bark, 50/50. Dip the ends of 4"
cuttings in gel or #3 Stimroot, trim
large rhodo leaves by 1/2, and slice

an inch off one or both sides of the
bottom of the stem. Paul has 65-70F
bottom heat and 100% humidity for
his cuttings.

Keith Russell of Stone Tree Nursery
spoke on the art of Bonsai, and
demonstrated with several small-
leaved rhodos, including one he
planted at our meeting 7 years ago.
It is a big plant now, and Keith
showed how to root-prune and
replace old soil with new, before
putting the plant back into the same
pot. He recommended this be done
about every 4-5 years, and suggested
equal parts of roots and branches
should be removed.

His soil mix includes fish compost
and a special lava rock from Japan.
The most important point is to have
good drainage. He uses copper-
coated aluminum wire to train
branches to a desired shape.

Many questions were asked of both
speakers, and members took home a
great deal of useful information.

Ed. Note: This is a great time of year
to visit this nursery, for the **Russells**
have a lovely garden, showing
examples of many of the plants they
sell. There are also Bonsais, pots for
this purpose, and many dwarf
evergreens suitable for bonsai work.
Tree and shrub leaves are changing
colour also.

MEMBER NOTES

Members can look forward to the
Nov. meeting, when **Ken Gibson** will
show slides and tell us about his trip
to Ireland. **Bill Dale** will also be on

hand to give the latest news on the
George Fraser garden in Ucluelet.

A bus trip to Victoria is being
planned for mid-Oct. Cost will be
about \$25.00. If you are interested in
joining the group, please phone
Isabelle Bergey at 337-8281. Reason
for the trip is to admire the many and
varied autumn leaf colours in various
parks or gardens.

WHY DO LEAVES CHANGE COLOUR IN FALL?

This information, from Amateur
Gardening, was printed in our Nov.
1997 newsletter, so it is time to
remind people, especially as we are
planning a bus trip to see some of the
beautiful leaf colours that we can
expect this time of year.

"In the sap and some of the cells of
plants are pigments, the most well
known being green chlorophyll.
Other pigments include carotin -
orange and red - and xanthophyll,
basically yellow. Under temperatures
below 45F, chlorophyll production
ceases and a breakdown of all the
pigments occurs. Usually chlorophyll
breaks down first, thus exposing the
other colours. If these pigments are
in abundance, then one would expect
a good autumnal display, but the
situation is not that simple.

During the growing season, plants
with the use of chlorophyll and
sunlight change carbon dioxide from
the atmosphere and water from the
soil, through the process of
photosynthesis, into sugars. These
sugars are used as energy by the
plants, or combined with other

chemicals to form tissue-producing materials.

Excess produced during the growing season may be stored in the roots and stems. Any other excess is converted into flavinoids (other coloured substances), particularly if cool nights slow the movement of sugars produced during the day. This is a safety mechanism to prevent a high sugar concentration in the leaves.

Therefore, cool nights following sunny days should encourage the production of orange flavones or red, scarlet or purple anthocyanins.

Anyone who has mixed colours knows red and yellow mixed will produce orange, but yellow mixed with purple will give brown.

Combine these two colour-producing methods with the tannins naturally produced in many plants, along with the oils that some plants produce from excess sugars and starches, and waste matter deposited in leaves, and a more complicated situation arises.

Some plants are very reliable in their production of the needed chemicals and will produce a good show every year, notably varieties of *Acer palmatum* such as *Osakazuki*. Some plants never produce a good show, and others do well if given the correct conditions. Recently, nurserymen have been selecting and propagating more colourful forms of good autumn foliage trees and shrubs.

Many young actively growing trees and shrubs do not give of their best, when almost all of the sugars produced are needed for growth. As soon as the growth rate settles down, they start producing more and better colours.

Sunny days followed by cool nights are needed for the best displays. Adequate moisture is needed to prevent premature leaf fall. An open

garden site where the tree receives full sunlight helps".

How about leaves that are always purple? "Foliage appears to be a different colour when pigments present in the leaves, reflect back other colours such as purple, masking the green colour produced by chlorophyll. Some plants contain these other pigments to prevent them absorbing wavelengths of light that might be damaging to the plant tissues (just like sunscreen). Purple and red foliage appear these colours because they are reflecting back red wavelengths of light, to protect the foliage from the sun's radiation."

NEWS FROM MYSTIC WOODS NURSERY

Courtenay and Comox members may not get as far as Mystic Woods (almost next door to **Paul Wurz'** rhodos) very often so you might be interested to know they will have another site ready for spring customers. This will be on Dogwood St., next to the Royal Coachman Neighbourhood Pub.

Their newsletter has information about the Vancouver Island Gardens Association, which has 15 members between Campbell River and Victoria, including Mystic Woods and Kitty Coleman Woodland Gardens. The goal of VIGA is to promote the Island as a destination for tourists seeking beautiful gardens. **Bryan Zimmerman** has further information on hand.

TIME TO THINK ABOUT RENEWING MEMBERSHIP IN THE ARS

Most of you will find a little envelope enclosed with this newsletter, so you can mail your cheque if it is not convenient to take it to the meeting. The cost remains the same for a single membership, \$35, and a family membership is \$45. Associate members (who belong to another

Rhodo club) pay \$10.

As we know, the Canadian \$ is not worth much in US funds, so in order to subsidize the amount we pay the ARS in US dollars, we must remember to keep the Revenue Table full every meeting. House plants, garden plants, bottled jams or pickles - bring a few, buy a few. Plants that overflow your garden beds are sure to be treasures for other members.

NEW MEMBERS

Joe and Helen Stefiuk have rejoined the club - how nice to see you again! and there are several other new members. **Julia and Ron Moe** of Holberg (The Bernt Ronning Garden), **Diana Scott** and **John & Lily Vanderhorst** of Courtenay have joined our group. Welcome to all!

TALKING OF TRIPS

People in the Fraser Valley chapters are thinking of planning a trip to gardens along the way to and in Portland, in the spring. They would leave Vancouver early on a Sat. morning, spend two nights in Portland, and return Monday evening. The cost would be around \$300 Cdn. US funds would be needed for hotel and meals. Anyone interested should contact **Mike Bale** at (604)853-8839.

R. PACHYSANTHUM

One day I saw a plant in **Harry Wright's** garden that made me drool, even though it was not in flower at the time. "What is that beautiful thing" I asked. "R. pachysanthum" said Harry. Luckily I had on hand a useful description of this plant, from **Gwen Bell**, writing in the Seattle Rhododendronland newsletter, Dec. 1992.

"This rhodo is a bit of a mystery to most of us for it has been in cultivation only since 1972. I first saw it in New Zealand in 1980. Attracted to the beautifully

indumented plant, I asked gardeners at the the **Pukeiti Rhodo Garden** what they knew about it. They replied they new nothing about it except that it was being called *R. venturi*.

It appears to be an exceptional plant, allied to *R. pseudochrysanthum*. The leaves are cordulate, widest at the stem end and very pointed at the tip. Beneath the buff coloured indumentum, the leaves are dark green and smooth. The undersides are clothed with orangy-buff hairs, thick and soft. On my first plant the indumentum seems to stay on the leaves and stems year-round.

The plant habit is good for it holds its foliage for more than one year. It makes a compact, well-branched, well covered shrub. According to some books, the height of *R. pachysanthum* in the wild is 4-5 ft.

The trusses of about 11 campanulate flowers are similar to *R. pseudochrysanthum* but bloom earlier. They are white with purple flecks and bloom in late April or early May.

This interesting species was introduced by **John Patrick** and described as living on grassy slopes and ridges above the tree line at about 10,500 ft. in central Taiwan, just above the *R. pseudochrysanthum* belt. It was originally thought to be a form of *R. morii* but has been declared a distinct species and most recently placed in Subs. *Maculifera* with its neighbours *R. morii* and *R. pseudochrysanthum*.

Peter Cox wrote that if this species continues to live up to its early promise as a foliage plant, it may rival *R. yakushmanum* in popularity, especially as it becomes better known."

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME!

Yes, we had a very dry summer this year - and last year - but don't think it is the first time. What has changed in the past few years is our concern with lack of water, the cost of water, and what of the future. Here is an article written by **Grace Cullum** in the *Island Grower*, Oct. 1986.

"Lack of sufficient water down below the root system of rhodos and azaleas at anytime of the year is very deteriorating, but in winter this condition is most certainly fatal.

When the root ball or mass is dry and a cold snap occurs, the surrounding frozen earth drains away all the life and small amount of moisture from the root system. When the temperature warms slightly and the earth thaws somewhat, the moisture robbed from the shrub never fully returns. It is drained away by other roots and material in the soil. When shrubs such as camellias and rhodos suffer from "bud blast" it is not always the fault of frost or freezing rain. It is also lack of winter moisture in the root system.

Here are two tried and true preventative measures to guard against harmful effects of a cold winter. One should be especially on guard against the dry root hazard this year. It has been extremely "Sahara Desert" dry since the first week of July and most shrub plantings are likely drier than they should be. (remember this was 1986).

Starting now, keep those soaker hoses on the move, threading them among as many shrubs as possible and soak for 12-20 hours at a time. Test the moisture content with a shovel or probe. 18 inches of good moist soil is the desire.

The other method of getting water down to a good depth is with a heavy iron bar. These bars are weighty and quite easy to drive, at intervals, all around the outer edge of the root system, to a depth of 12-14 inches. Don't be stingy with holes. A large shrub of 6-7' can benefit from at least a dozen holes.

Place the sprinkler in a position to cover a good number of these holes, and water for half a day. If we should get rain for 2-3 days in the near future, don't depend on the rainfall for it is never sufficient after a drought. If the weather stays fairly dry, with only occasional precip, water thoroughly every few days, until we get the usual coastal deluge. Then the dearly beloved expensive shrubs should be safe. A wind-break around the more tender rhodos and camellias also prevents a lot of bud-blast".

With threats of our climate changing to a more Mediteranian one in the next few years, my opinion is that the above advice is no longer usable. For instance, by the end of Sept. our well is so low we can water only the most desperate plants. People with water meters would complain bitterly at the cost of leaving hoses on for 1/2 a day at a time. No, my plan is to give away or garbage the rhodos that have spent this summer getting yellow, curled up leaves even though they were watered far more than their share. The other problem with these plants, of course, is that they have not formed very many flower buds, for they need sufficient water in July and August in order to form next year's flowers. Native plants such as Mahonias (Oregon Grape) and many other shrubs and trees have basked in the sun. Plants with grey or hairy leaves are happy, even heavily indumented *R. "yak"* hybrids in full sun. Water - we will have to learn to live with less.

SPECIES OR HYBRIDS

My plan is to write about why or if one type is better than the other. Maybe some of those rhodos that live happily in full sun on bare Chinese hillsides are the ones we should be growing here!

Graham Stuart Thomas, writing in one of his many useful gardening books, said "One of the great things in growing "species" as opposed to hybrids, is that we at once become more conscious of the beauty of the entire outline of the plant, the poise of its blooms, the grace of its stems, and above all, the value and individual beauty of its leaves. There are of course exceptions".

The January 1983 ARS Journal printed an article by **Herb Spady**, who pointed out some of the pros and cons of growing species rather than or as well as hybrids. The very reason for hybridization is to improve the offspring in some way. Some of the species rhodos are tolerant of only a very narrow range of growing conditions. Some who have tolerance to more or less cold or heat, or less acid soil, also have less than perfect flowers. Hybridizers have worked for years to modify some of the unwanted characteristics.

One bonus of hybridization is hybrid vigour. Many of these plants are "better doers" than their parents, and are easier to propagate as well as easy to find in the nurseries. Many hybrids bloom at an earlier age than their parents, and with more abandon.

So why grow species rhodos? Why climb mountains? Perhaps species are more interesting than hybrids because they come from "Nature's Garden". With some experience with growing, and knowledge of species, a person will better understand the principles and results of hybridization.

There is something lacking in hybrid rhodos. The void is usually in plant habit and leaf, occasionally in the flower. One seldom sees the soft felt green in the leaves of any R. griersonianum hybrids. And though the leaf-size of R. williamianum is often used to help reduce the size of leaves of larger hybrids, the balance of leaf size and plant size of R. williamsianum is seldom seen in its hybrids.

So for sheer beauty of leaf, bark and shape of plants, you need species rhodos in your garden. For large leaves and flamboyant flowers, hybrids will make you happy. The best idea is to have some of each!

HOW ARE YOUR HOSTAS?

This summer, mine have been better than usual. Even though we were inundated, this spring, by thousands of huge black slugs, the hostas are still looking well, with only the odd nibble showing on the leaves.

My method is to save and crush up all egg shells, year-round, and when necessary add crushed oyster shells to make enough for all the plants. Lay a ring of this material around every hosta as it comes out of the ground in spring, and sprinkle a little diatomaceous earth on top of the shells. Finally a 6" wide line of this material all along the edge of the main hosta bed. Voila! No badly-chewed hostas.

GARDEN SUGGESTIONS FROM GARDENWISE MAG:

Try sprinkling cayenne pepper under the bird feeder and other places in the garden where cats prowl (this is for other people's cats of course) and look for birds to eat. The cayenne pepper will get on their paws and then into their mouths. They won't come back.

Anyone going to Victoria might keep these dates in mind: Hort. Centre of the Pacific - a workshop Gardening on the Edge Sept. 28 and a plant sale Oct. 19. Annual Apple Festival on Salt Spring Island Sept. 29, Peninsula Garden Club plant sale, Sancha Hall Oct. 12, and in Vancouver, an Apple Festival at the UBC Botanical Garden Oct. 19 & 20.

Douglas Justice writes (Gardenwise mag. Fall 2002):

Japanese maples are changing leaf colour now (visit the nearest park or nursery) and if you plan to buy one, here are a few items to keep in mind: They need shelter in hot dry summers, especially if in pots. Wind they also dislike. Otherwise they are hardy to -25C in the ground, -12C in pots. Insulate the pots or put them in a frost-free place for a few months when necessary.

Verticillium wilt causes sudden dieback of whole branches in warm weather and is most common where plants are under stress, for instance poor drainage. Under crowded conditions where branches regularly lash each other when it rains, or when pruning is carried out in wet weather, bacterial blight might be a problem, although this disease typically disfigures only the ends of branches.

Many maples are grafted, as cultivars don't always make good roots on their own, and seedlings will not exactly resemble the parent tree. Grafting is a specialized nursery technique, which adds considerably to the price. The cheaper palmatums are usually "understock", that is, seed-grown plants upon which a desired cultivar is grafted, and where the graft has failed. These plants may or may not be exemplary, and the worst usually find their way onto commercial landscaped sites, instead of the burning pile where they belong.