

# 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.

### 3 Sept

Executive meeting at the home of  
Harry & Gwen Wright, 769 Chaster  
Rd., Courtenay. All members of the  
"new" and "old" executive are invited  
to be present to help make plans for  
the coming year.

### 10 Sept.

Guest speaker has not been  
confirmed at the time of printing this  
newsletter.

### 15 June

The annual BBQ was held at the  
home of **Madeleine and Len  
Simmons**, and a wonderful time was  
had by all, touring the garden, eating  
the delicious potluck fare, and playing  
the hilarious scarecrow game  
invented by **Isabelle Bergey**. Thanks  
to all who participated in such an  
enthusiastic way! We all had a  
wonderful time.

### MEMBER NOTES

As we go to press, we don't have a  
Vice-President. Come on, guys and  
gals, you don't really expect Harry to  
do everything, do you?

**FRASER DAYS** May 18, Ucluelet.  
We have two reports.

**Bill Dale**, one of the organizers sent  
us the following information:  
George Fraser Day #2 in Ucluelet  
was held under sunny skies and with  
a good crowd of out-of-town visitors  
in attendance. Also in attendance was  
**Nels Rorvik**, of Saanich, now 92  
years of age, who in 1938 had given  
Fraser 40 corms of the pink  
Erythronium Revolutum, some of  
which he had also sent to Kew  
Gardens in Britain.

Guest speaker at the event was **Lynn  
Watts**, of Bellevue, Wash., who is  
the immediate past president of the  
ARS. This was very fitting as  
George Fraser had been the 4th  
recipient of the prestigious ARS  
Pioneers' Achievement Award.

At a short ceremony at the "Welcome  
to Ucluelet" sign several of Fraser's  
original hybrid rhodos were planted  
and the many rhodo plants beside the  
pathway along the road leading in to  
Ucluelet were admired.

Many people visited old Fraser sites  
in Ucluelet, including his grave site,  
which has been improved by the  
Lions Club of Ucluelet and which  
was decorated by Wanda McAvoy  
for the occasion.

All in all it was a very successful day  
on which this old pioneer was  
remembered.

Another report of this historic day  
has come in from **Phyllis Stapley**.

On Saturday, May 18, 2002, under  
brilliant skies and sunshine, George  
and I attended the Memorial  
Celebration of Ucluelet's Second  
Annual George Fraser Day. The  
event was co-ordinated by Lions Club  
member **Dave Godfrey**, who  
introduced Bill Dale, a member of the  
Victoria Chapter, ARS. Bill has  
worked diligently to restore the life  
history of George Fraser, early west  
coast rhodo hybridizer, and bring  
attention and appreciation to the  
Fraser hybrids still in existence. Also  
visiting were 3 sisters, Mabel Lister,  
Kate Ruttan and Fern Scarisbrick,  
members of the Brand family, who  
appeared in a 1929 photograph with  
George Fraser at 75 years of age.

**Bill Dale** unveiled a stone at the  
Ucluelet Entrance Garden  
commemorating the life and work of  
George Fraser. He made special  
mention of the Vancouver Island  
rhodo chapters who donated rhodos  
to be planted along the entrance to  
Ucluelet. Evidence of this work,  
done by volunteers, can be seen on  
one's approach to the area. As  
rhodos thrive in the ideal west coast  
climate, they can be readily seen  
throughout both Ucluelet and Tofino.  
At 11:00 a.m., we took a bus tour  
with tour guide Lisa, and visited the  
Fraser sites around town, where trees  
and shrubs, planted by him still exist.  
George Fraser purchased 236 acres  
of land for \$236 in 1892. Two years  
later he cleared 4 1/2 acres and built a  
house. (Cougar Annie was another  
avid gardener in those times).

George Fraser produced at least 19 hybrids, none of which were named until Bill Dale and others took on the job. His hybrids include R. Albert Close, John Blair, Mrs. Jamie Fraser, Fiona Christie, R. Fraseri, Fraser's Pink and R. George Fraser.

Mr. Fraser was posthumously awarded the ARS Pioneer Award, the only one outside the USA. He died in 1944 and is interred at the Ucluelet cemetery.

**Lynn Watts**, a past pres. of the ARS, was introduced as guest speaker. Lynn spoke of the restorative work done by Bill Dale. Lynn was presented with a framed picture of heather, another of George Fraser's interests.

The day ended with our joining the committee of volunteers, the 3 Brand sisters and partners, Bill Dale and daughter Kathy, Lynn and Marilyn Watts, for a lovely dinner at the Harbour View Restaraunt. Our fresh salmon was beautifully baked on a cedar plank.

**BILL DALE** has sent us another interesting article with connections to George Fraser and rhodos on the West Coast:

On June 20, 2002, **George Grossmith** passed away. George was not a great rhodo grower, but he did leave one plant that is worth mentioning. George was a fisherman out of Victoria who fished the West Coast of the Island.

In 1948 George and his bride went on a fishing trip up the west coast in his boat Princeton #1. His father had lived in Ucluelet and 1913-14 and helped George Fraser in his nursery.

When the Princeton #1 pulled into the village of Ucluelet, George and Eleanor Grossmith decided to look at what remained of Fraser's garden.

They spotted a seedling rhodo which they dug up and took to their home in Victoria, where it grew and bloomed beautifully for the next half century.

I heard about this plant in 2001 and went to take a look at it. I was quite impressed with the bright red blooms. I have no idea of the parentage, but no matter, it is a nice plant.

In 1891, George Fraser, as a 17 year old lad, had started on his horticultural career by getting a job at Christie's Nursery in Fochabers, Scotland. He had done his apprenticeship at nearby Gordon Castle, the home of the famous Gordon Highlanders. After holding the position of head gardener at several large estates in Scotland, he decided to go to Canada where he might be able to own his own land, something he could not do in Scotland. After several jobs, including, in 1889, foreman under John Blair in building Beacon Hill Park in Victoria, he decided on Ucluelet as his future home. He paid \$236 for 236 acres of bush and was on his way.

Now in 2000, the Fochabers Fiddlers, the high school band of Fochabers visited the west coast, giving concerts. After their performance at Victoria City Hall, I took Fiona Christie and band master James Alexander to Beacon Hill Park where Fiona placed a wreath of heather by the memorial stone to George Fraser.

In 2001 I took cuttings of the Grossmith's plant and asked Evelyn Weesjes to root them for me. I also registered the plant with the ARS and named it "R. Fiona Christie".

On July 7 2002 the Fochabers Fiddlers again came to Victoria where they performed at several places, then the whole band went to Beacon Hill Park where they

performed at the site of the Fraser Memorial Stone. Fiona, who is the band's featured dancer, performed and again laid a wreath of heather at Fraser's stone. I gave her two small plants of R. Fiona Christie to take back to Scotland and plant at the entrance of Christie's Nursery, where there is already a bronze plaque in Fraser's honour, and a plant of R. Fraseri.

The plants had to be bare-rooted before a phytosanitary certificate could be issued, but they looked well when they left for Scotland. Hopefully they will survive.

### **SPECIES STUDY DAYS**

This past spring, the once-monthly Study Days held at the Species Foundation were well received, and it has been decided to set up a similar program in 2003, on Saturdays or Sundays, once a month from Feb. to May. The cost will be the same, \$140 for the series, or \$35 for each lecture. Make a commitment soon if you are interested - half of the 30 people who can be accomodated have already signed up. For further information, talk to Harry Wright or Paul Wurz, or contact Mike Bale at [luz\\_hu@telus.net](mailto:luz_hu@telus.net) or Mike Trembath at [empty@shaw.ca](mailto:empty@shaw.ca)

### **BOOK REVIEW**

Hot summer days (we have had lots of these this year) are the time to sit in the shade with a cool drink and a good book, while looking around at the garden with a view to making improvements or cutting down.

I found two useful books for this purpose.

**DESIGNING WITH PLANTS** Piet Oudolf, Noel Kingsbury. Pub. Timber Press, 1999. This book has chapters explaining Planting Palettes - form, leaves, colour; Designing Schemes which demonstrate combinations of forms, colours, use of grasses and umbellifers and many

other suggestions. Moods, a chapter showing use of light, movement, harmony and mysticism; and suggestions for year-round planting. I borrowed this book from the Campbell River Library.

### **PERENNIAL COMBINATIONS**

C. Colston Burrell, Rodale Press, 1999. This book is chock-a-block full of striking photos and paintings showing combinations of form, colour, various sites in the garden and seasonal considerations. There are suggestions for enticing hummingbirds, planting for fragrance and for a supply of dried plants for winter arrangements. Most useful are suggestions for sunny sites, heavy clay soil, wet sites and other special sites. I chose this book from a list sent out by the Doubleday Book Club.

**Barbara Hess**, writing in the "Coastal Grower" Autumn 1996, discussed Success with Rhodos. I felt there are several useful hints in the article for us to share.

First, it is better to plant rhodos in the fall, after the first good rains, than in the spring. Spring planting means a summer of worry about sufficient water. Once rhodos are well established (five years or so), they will withstand weeks of drought if protected from the sun in the hottest part of the day.

**"WASH"** is the key.

**"W"** for water - a minimum of 1" per week year-round, either from natural rain or from whatever method is available. But a hot, dry site will not fill the bill regardless of the amount of water poured onto it. Conversely, rhodos do not like their roots to be in moist soil, so a well-drained site is equally critical.

**"A"** for acid - the soil should be in the pH range of 5.0 to 6.0.

**"S"** for shade - a general rule is the larger the leaf, the more shade the plant will need. However, they do need some sun to flower well. For example, plants with 5" long leaves need an average of 6 hours of sun in mid-summer in order to set flower buds. However, some red varieties seem to be more sun-tolerant than others.

**"H"** for the humus content of the planting bed, which should be 50% soil and 50% peat moss, compost, leaf mulch, shredded bark etc.

The planting hole does not need to be deep - usually about 12" for a big plant, but should be at least 3 times as wide as the existing rootball or container. The allows for a humus rich area as the shallow surface roots spread out. When placing the plant in the hole, be sure it is planted no deeper than in the container. Mix a little bonemeal with the backfill soil. Mulching with a nice fluffy layer of shredded bark or bark mixed with oak (or other) leaves will be appreciated.

If you have a rhodo that seems "sick", fall would be a good time to try to correct the situation. Dig straight down at the dripline to a depth of about 12". Small plants are no problem, but larger ones may need to be levered out with a plank. Slide it onto a tarp for easy movement to a new location. Or you can extend and amend the existing hole with a mix of soil/peatmoss/bark mulch/bone meal and replant the shrub, remembering to keep it well watered for a time.

Remember, plants are living things. Some are sickly and will never amount to much. If it resists all efforts, replacement may be in order". Ed. Note: After reading about "rose sickness" years ago, my rule is never replace a sick plant with another of the same kind in the same hole.

### **PLANT THUGS**

Perhaps the mild winters we have experienced in recent years, or the cool wet springs, or the dry hot summers - who knows, but something has caused some plants in the garden to become overly rampant. I trust my experiences with these "Garden Thugs" will be a warning to others:

**Bamboo:** *Sasa veitchii* is the worst, though it is such an attractive plant in winter, when the leaf-edges become a pale cream. Some bamboos stay in a small neat clump for years - so try to find information in a "Bamboo Book", and read labels carefully before purchasing a plant.

**Creeping Jenny:** *Lysimachia nummularia* in my garden creeps everywhere and almost never blooms. Difficult to eradicate.

**Creepng Charlie:** *Glechoma hederacea*, also called Ground Ivy: Another almost impossible to eradicate once it escapes from a hanging basket.

**Bishop's Weed:** *Aegopodium podagraria* (plain green or variegated) - This plant should not be sold or given away. The variegated kind is good for one purpose - if you plant your *Colchicums* among a drift of the pale green and white leaves, you can cut the huge and ungainly *colchicum* leaves and the Bishop's Weed leaves back to the ground at the end of June. Then when the *colchicum* flowers in Sept., the new Bishop's Weed leaves hold the flowers up and the mauve, green and white together make a lovely patch of colour. Because the *colchicums* multiply like crazy, plant the whole works in a corner where the group can't overwhelm other garden plants.

**Yellow Arch Angel** (should be called Arch Devil): *Lamium galeobdolon*

should never be allowed out of a hanging basket, for it will rapidly overwhelm the garden, the rhodos, the woods - and what a backbreaking problem to get rid of it!

There are several other lamiums that are much more well-behaved.

"Herman's Pride", an upright plant, has neat, beautifully marked leaves, and stays in a clump. *L. maculatum* varieties, with white to purple flowers, spread slowly and appear to prefer some shade.

**Perennial geraniums**, many varieties, all lovely plants, but some of the endless hybrids seed themselves all over the garden. After a year or two, plant sale customers just won't take any more of them.

**Viola labridoricum:** After I tried for years to start this plant from seed, a friend gave me a tiny plant. There are now thousands of them in my garden - a wonderful ground cover if you like purple leaves and mauve flowers in spring. I simply must pull some of it out.

These are the worst pests in my garden. If you need or want some of them, feel free to come any time and dig up any quantity. But don't say I didn't warn you!

Members of the Oyster River Garden Society spent a lovely evening in June at **Bryan Zimmerman's** Woodland Gardens. Bryan took us up and down every path (several miles of them), pointed out every rhodo, living among the native ferns, trees and shrubs on the acreage, as well as many other cultivated plants such as roses, lilies and hostas.

Bryan never stops working - new bark mulch on the paths, deadheading rhodos, and the latest is a large lake, complete with an island in the centre. Planting will be completed in the fall, when rain fills the excavation and soaks the soil, ready for more rhodos.

An enchanting garden and a wonderful evening.

Several people made a repeat visit to the Sayward garden tour day, and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. There were 9 gardens to visit, but we managed only 8, as we spent so much time at the Garden Gate Manor, a wonderful B&B on Community Rd.

**Darlene and Karl Huber** not only have dozens of rhodos and dozens of roses, they have a steep hillside planted with shrubs and perennial plants. It was late afternoon by the time we arrived there, and we were too tired to climb the hillside, so we sat on the comfortable patio with coffee and cookies. What a wonderful place to have a peaceful holiday!

We enjoyed all the gardens, especially **Whitworth's**, with over 50 David Austin roses, and two side by side front yards where the gardeners work together. Tucked into corners and under shrubs were tiny chairs, tables and benches made of tiny branches and bits of driftwood, with tiny people and animals having tea. What a delightful idea!

**Harry Wright** offered this interesting article:

Seems only yesterday we were doing plant sales and garden tours, and now it is time to mark the second Tuesday of the month on your calendar for our Rhodo meetings at the Comox United Church.

Lots of new growth on the rhodos, and they all seem to have a good bud set for next spring.

The hot spell that we have had this summer has left some burnt foliage; this can either be picked off or left to fall off on its own.

This summer has been more enjoyable than some, seeing as Lynn

and Paul Wurz, and Gwen and I, decided to take a few hours' rest and relaxation, to visit some gardens and nurseries.

We travelled from Salt Spring to Sayward and points in between, such as Maple Bay, Gabriola Island and the Comox Valley.

We visited many private gardens, all interesting, all different, and what a way to learn more about the plants we love to grow. Most important of all is the time spent with the designers of these gardens.

We all know how much time and effort goes into the creation of a garden, and we do like to show others what we have created, so take a few hours off and visit some of these gardens. I am quite sure you will be welcome (we even found a garden that had a surplus of lemon pie!)

The only thing that has to be controlled is the WOMEN, when they get into these neat little nurseries.

Some of our members are leaving the executive. To these people I would like to say "Thank you very much for a job well done". They are Kirsten Emmott, Isabelle Bergey, Edna Foresman, Dave Crucq, and Paul Wurz. Filling these positions on the executive are the following: Ann Chevrier, Evelyn Wright, and Gwen and Harry Wright. Many thanks for offering your help.

We will have the position of Vice Pres. vacant, so why not get involved and volunteer. We do have a lot of fun on the executive, and we need a full slate of people in order that the society can function as designed. Instead of coming to the Sept. meeting alone, why not bring a friend?