

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4 Vol. 17 No. 8 April, 2003

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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.

Apr 1

Executive meeting at the home of
Wayne & Bonnie Steele, 6157
Whitaker Rd. Drive Kitty Coleman
Rd. to Left Rd., to Whitaker Rd.
First house after Brian Zimmerman's
acres of rhodos.

Apr 8

Kevin Moore will demonstrate how
to make hanging baskets for the
summer garden.

11 March

Spring flowers are waking up in our
gardens - members brought samples
of camellias, pulmonarias and others.
Marjorie Corsault brought a
beautiful display of hellebores, black,
yellow, spotted pink etc., and talked
of how to care for them. If tops of
leaves are cut off in Nov. black spot
can be prevented.

Harry introduced **Clint Smith**, who
then gave members an interesting
pictorial visit to Scottish and Irish
gardens he has seen as part of tours
he has led in the past several years.
He mentioned many details of the
history of rhodos in Britain, and the
people who introduced them, sending
seeds from far-off places like China
in the 19th Century. Many famous
gardens in Scotland and Ireland were
toured. The south of Ireland looked
like Tofino to **Ken Gibson!**

Peter Cox's garden near Perth was
much admired. What a wonderful
evening for the lucky members who
were able to attend the meeting.

MEMBER NOTES

Several important jobs are coming up
in the near future. It is time for YOU
to put your name on the list to help
out at garden tours (May 10) and the
Rhodo Show & Sale, May 4. By the
way, another casualty of the "big
storms" this winter was **Isabelle
Bergey's** useful gazebo. Speak to
Harry if you have ideas on setting up
our booth at the Filberg Garden
Show in June. AND volunteers are
needed to man a table at **Art
Knapp's** garden centre for a few
hours to sell tickets for the garden
tour May 10. Speak to Paul. Look
for lists to sign at the April meeting.

The Annual Meeting will be held at
Evelyn Wright's home and garden in
Comox, on May 13. Needed are
volunteers for several jobs for the
coming year - Membership, Secretary
and Treasurer positions are open.
Co-operation is the word, a viable
club needs members who are willing
to lend a hand occasionally, to keep

everything running smoothly.

We are sorry to have to report the
passing of **Evelyn McMullen** after a
short illness. **Gloria Guyader** has
offered to be our "Sunshine
Committee". Please advise her if you
know of an illness or death among
our members, so that a suitable
condolence can be sent to the family.

Harry Wright stands ready to set up
a hybridizing group. Please speak to
him for further details.

We have been informed that **Jean
Minch and Norm Todd** have been
presented with silver medals by the
ARS. And a recent Email requests
information on who in our chapter,
over the years, have been awarded
bronze medals. Names and dates are
to be sent to **Mike Bones**, Email -
rhodies@harborside.com.
I can check through all the
newsletters on hand, but "older"
members in the club should scratch
their brains in case I miss any.

Consideration is being given to
making up a car pool to attend the
April meeting of MARS, April 9.
Speaker will be **Steve Whysall**, a
writer for the Vancouver Sun, and
author of several books, such as "100
Best Plants for the Coastal Garden".
Phone Bonnie at 334-9436 as soon as
you get this newsletter, if you are
interested. Entry fee \$5.00.

Joan Walsh kindly donated several
books to the library. What do you
think of having a book sale one
evening? We may all have a good
gardening book to donate, and

another we would like to buy.

Are you interested in allowing a few members to tour your garden occasionally during the spring or summer? Advise Harry if so. This project was quite successful last year.

Bob Argall has invited members to his garden, 1:00 p.m. on March 29. If you didn't attend the March meeting, and if you get this newsletter in time, be sure to attend. 387 Wireless Road, Cape Lazo. There are already thousands of daffodils in bloom, as well as tulips, camellias, rhodos etc. That location must be Zone 9, whereas most of us live in Zone 7-8, depending on the weather in any given year.

DATES TO REMEMBER

For people who have to be "someplace else" during the next month or two, here are some alpine and rhodo affairs you might like to attend:

April 4-5 Vancouver Island Rock & Alpine Society show at Cadboro Bay United Church, Victoria.

April 5 Peace Arch Rhodo Society show & sale, Elgin Hall, 14250 Crescent Rd., Surrey.

Apr 12 Cowichan Valley Rhodo Society show and sale, Exhibition Grounds, Duncan.

April 12-13 Alpine Garden Club Show (no sale) Van Dusen Gardens, Vancouver.

April 18 MARS Show & Sale, Parkesville Community Hall.

April 26 Victoria Rhodo Show & Sale, Cadboro Bay United Church, Victoria.

April 26 Nanaimo Hort. Society Plentiful Plant Sale, Rutherford Mall, Nanaimo.

April 26 Oyster River Garden Society plant sale, Black Creek Hall.

May 3-4 Vancouver Rhodo show & sale, Park & Tilford Garden, North Vancouver.

May 4 North Island Rhodo Show & Sale, Fair Grounds, Courtenay.

May 10 North Is. Rhodo garden tour.

May 10-11 MARS garden tour.

Harry Wright has provided information on yet another garden pest, WHITEFLY. A tiny, white, moth-like insect. These may occur in large numbers on the undersides of leaves during the summer. The adults and their flat, oval pale green larvae feed by sucking sap and excreting a sugary substance known as honeydew. This is what makes the foliage sticky and allows the growth of a superficial black sooty mold.

Whitefly is controlled by spraying thoroughly the undersides of the leaves with an insecticide. Several applications at 10 day intervals may be necessary since the immature stages are less susceptible to insecticides than the adults.

Here is another interesting "Snippet" from **ROSE-MARIE**.

By the way, did you notice she is a regular columnist in the "Weekender" newspaper? "Living entity that a garden is, of course from one year to the next it is never the same. As growing plants gradually change the environs we so carefully craft around them, a gardener's greatest talent must be flexibility. And decision making. A favorite partial-shade bed must evolve into one for full shade, or else see a growing tree removed. Rhodo lovers might find that some old stand-by varieties no longer provide the gratification that warrant the space they take. For many of us, however, decision making often involves finding room for yet more plants that we do not want to garden without. Thank goodness current horticultural vogue is anti-lawn. For most of what remains of winter, I will be digging up lawn to make way for...

A few years ago I was introduced to

Japanese hydrangea vine, *Schizophragma hydrangeoides*. A member of the hydrangea family, this deciduous vine grows quite quickly and blooms in summer with soft white flowers a little like those of climbing hydrangea. The species blooms in white, and there is a pink-flowered form ('Roseum').

My first one came from The Plant Farm on Saltspring Is., a great place to find plants that are fairly new to the nursery trade. I planted it at the base of a somewhat scraggly Douglas Fir, and by the end of its second season it was well-established and had set a respectable number of flowers. Last year I acquired the cultivar 'Moonlight', so named for the slight silver variegation on its dark leaves. The luminescent effect is very appealing, and I expect it will be more so when the plant has matured somewhat. It seems a little slower growing than the species. It too is hosted by a tree, this one a wild cherry.

A few years ago I saw a young specimen of *Cotinus 'Grace'* in a private garden in Victoria. For some reason I had never planted a smoketree, often cited as a garden essential, and after I saw 'Grace', a fairly new hybrid, none other would do. After a few years of searching and enquiring, I found 'Grace' last June at Don McWatt's Island Specialty Nursery in Chemainus. Even my small plant was a delight all summer and fall. The foliage, which persisted until late October, was pale red to bright pink during the summer, then became a neon version of the same tones in September. The huge flower plumes are pink. 'Grace' is a hybrid of *C. coggygria* and *C. obtatus*, and does apparently become quite large. Yay!"

TALKING OF RHODO

COMPANIONS, there are new All-American selections for 2003 that may not be in our nurseries yet, but it is always worth looking!

Hardy Geranium 'Jolly Bee', royal blue flowers veined in maroon.

Geranium phaem 'Ring of Fire' has yellow leaves with red blotches and dark purple flowers.

Hosta 'Earth Angel', green and blue leaves with cream edges.

A 10" Galanthus (snowdrop) has semi-double upfacing flowers.

Cotoneaster milkedandii

HWJCM237 has small evergreen leaves, white flowers, and red fruits that remain all winter.

Hydrangea arborescens var. discolor 'Frosty', a 4 ft. plant with shiny blue-green foliage with white undersides, and flat clusters of white flowers.

Hydrangea quercifolia 'Semmes Beauty', a 12 ft. oakleaf with large clusters of upright-facing flowers.

Some of these can be purchased at Heronswood Nursery in Wash. State. Check also with Island Specialty, Chemainus, and The Plant Farm, Saltspring.

MECONOPSIS

Some of us never seem to have any luck growing these handsome poppies, but I read a few hints that might help, in the Feb. 1998 'The Garden', journal of the RHS, written by David Hyde.

"These plants require a moist but well-drained soil that does not become waterlogged in winter, is rich in humus and has a pH of less than 7. Mulching in spring will retain moisture and keep the root system cool, but it may be advisable to water in summer months to prevent an attack of powdery mildew. Keep plant out of direct sunlight and protect from drying winds.

Some of the best plants I have seen were growing happily in a nursery polytunnel just outside Perth, conditions that would spell their

death in the south of England.

The plants are generally short-lived, and should be propagated annually to ensure a good succession of flowering spikes from one year to the next. Mass planting has the best effect, but unless you sow seed collected from your own plants, this can be expensive.

A common difficulty with this genus is the short viability of seed other than that which is either home collected or received fresh. Seed stored in cool (3-4C) dry conditions can remain viability for several years. Without this treatment, viability deteriorates within a few months of harvesting, with poor rates of germination in the second season". Ed. Note: Many years ago, I saw a huge clump of these blue poppies at UBC, in the shade of a giant Douglas Fir. A private garden in Victoria was also seen to have a large area under a big Cedrus Diodar populated with these beautiful plants. And the most striking examples were seen at Peter Cox's garden, Glendoick, near Perth, where there were not only blue, but yellow, red, orange meconopsis, huge plants loaded with striking flowers. Even the hairy stems and leaves are eye-catching. These flowers are worth all the trouble, if you can find just the right conditions for them.

SUDDEN OAK DEATH

Lois Hole, member of a well-known gardening family in Alberta, produces a magazine "Lois' Spring Gardening" which is full of lists of good garden plants as well as useful articles. This year I found a comprehensive article on Sudden Oak Death, which is becoming more of a concern to gardeners on the Pacific Coast.

"This particular disease didn't exist in California until the mid-1990s when it was identified as the cause of death

of a few oaks in a park in San Fransisco. Since then, it has quickly spread to several other counties in that state, leaving many dead oaks in its wake. The first signs of infection are wilted shoots and pale leaves, followed by cracks on the trunk that ooze a dark liquid. Within a few weeks, the tree dies."

You can immediately see how serious this can be. The disease is closely related to that which caused the Irish Potato Famine, in the 1800s, Phythophthora infestans. Spores are carried by wind and rain to leaves and stems of plants.

It has been determined that the same Phythophthora fungus that attacks rhododendrons in Germany and Holland is attacking oaks in California.

In response to this threat, the Canadian Food Inspection agency has stopped importation of any wood products from California, including bark, mulch, sawdust as well as soil. California nurseries export a vast array of plants, from strawberries to evergreens to houseplants to rhodos. Unless Sudden Oak Death is eliminated in California, many varieties of plants will be harder to find in Canada or in other US states.

We all have a part in controlling this pest. Be aware of and obey restrictions on bringing plants home. Cuttings and seeds may be allowed, but be sure to wrap your treasures in moist paper towels if needed, not in soil, bark or moss.

HOMEMADE PESTICIDES

Phyllis Stepley kindly brought me an article from a 1988/89 issue of "Coastal Grower", which offers some thought provoking suggestions. "The general term "pesticide" includes insecticides, herbicides, fungicides etc. Most of these are synthetic chemicals, others biological

control organisms such as BtK. Some are made of low-toxicity chemicals such as soap, others contain naturally occurring extractions from plants such as pyrethrum". These are all tested by the federal pest Management Regulatory Agency.

Some people believe home made pesticides are safer to use. Those made from food ingredients such as garlic, vegetable oil, hot peppers or herbs are generally safer to handle than commercial pesticides, as long as you are not allergic to them. If too strong a solution, they may burn plant leaves. Gasoline may kill weeds, but is more toxic than most purchased pesticides.

Homemade pesticides are probably no better for the environment than purchased ones. There is no such thing as a smart pesticide, able to tell a good bug from a bad bug.

A spray of plain water is very effective for dislodging aphids and rose slugs. Boiling water will kill weeds in pavement cracks. Soap sprays are good, at the recommended amount, but dish soap and laundry detergents have added ingredients which may damage plants. Vegetable oils in a 1% solution (3 tbsp/USgal with 1/4 tsp soap) may work, but test a few leaves before spraying a whole plant. Same with baking soda - 1 tbsp/USgal with 1/4 tsp. soap. More soda will definitely damage roses, perhaps other plants also.

It is best to consider pesticides, homemade or purchased, as a last resort. Take precautions, read labels carefully, and don't use at all if you can possibly avoid them.

CAPTAIN DICK STEELE

The magazine "Garden Life", March/April 2003, has an interesting article on the rhodo expert, Capt.

Dick Steele, of Lunenburg, N.S., and many beautiful pictures of some of his rhodos. During the 1940s he was able to acquire seeds, pollen and cuttings from Windsor Great Park in England, and during his time in the Navy visited botanical gardens in Malaysia, Hong Kong, and the southern US.

When he retired from the Canadian Navy he bought an old farm and went into rhodo growing and hybridizing in a big way. He also breeds heaths and heathers, azaleas, Japanese maples and other trees and shrubs. His garden is now a mecca for Nova Scotia gardeners.

His daughter, pictured among some of the lovely flowers, fits right in as a flower arranger and garden designer. They would be welcome in any town in B.C. or Wash., but it is nice to know people on the wild Atlantic coast can grow rhodos with the best.

SUITABLE TREES FOR THE GARDEN

Steve Whysall wrote a useful article in the Times-Colonist in January. THINK before you plant a tree. He has had to cut down a huge Cedrus deodora and is looking seriously at a Brewer's Spruce (*Picea breweriana*), trees that were planted in the wrong place many years ago.

For most of our gardens, we should buy trees that will not be out of scale in ten or twenty years. If you can't wait that long, you can buy good-sized trees at a price. Here are some he recommends: *Cercidiphyllum* - lovely heart-shaped leaves, Japanese Snowbell (*Styrax japonica*), with dainty white flowers, a pink-flowered dogwood (*Cornus florida rubra*), a yellow flowering magnolia (*Magnolia Yellowbird*), and several dainty Japanese maples. In a sheltered spot you can try a windmill palm (*Trachycarpus fortunei*).

Just remember to plant the tree in the right spot, for trees are not easy to move, and it is heart-breaking to have to chop them down.

There are other interesting trees that would look lovely in your rhodo garden, and provide that necessary shade in hot afternoons. But before you buy, read a tree book, read the labels, and ask advice from people who already have one of these beauties.

DWARF HYBRID RHODOS

For the June 1997 newsletter I prepared an article on dwarf rhodos that do well in our area. These are all very useful for a small garden, rock garden, or for containers. Just remember none of them are very fond of fertilizer. First, some of Peter Cox's "birds".

Arctic Tern: *Ledum*-like crowded tresses of dainty white flowers on a hardy, vigorous plant. Alas, mine does not look very hardy or vigorous, with brown leaves after winter, and few flowers.

Chikor: Soft yellow flat-faced flowers, tiny shiny leaves on a twiggy rounded compact bush which would make a great bonsai. Protect from excessive heat in summer.

Curlew: Trusses of 1-3 bright yellow flowers, hardy but bud-tender in spring frosts. The bright showy flowers can completely hide the tiny deep green leaves,

Egret: Tiny white bells on long flower stalks. Best in sun for free flowering, but not hardy enough for a frost pocket.

Merganser: Another dainty plant with pale primrose-yellow flowers. Easy to root, easy to grow.

Ptarmigan: Lovely white flowers.

Razorbill: Bright rose-pink tubular flowers massed above small dark leaves. Another one that dislikes a frost pocket.(continued next month)