

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4 Vol. 18 No. 4 December, 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.

## 2 Dec.

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Wayne & Bonnie Steele**, 6157 Whitaker Rd. Down Kitty Coleman Rd., turn onto Left Rd., and right on Whitaker, just past Zimmermans'.

## 9 Dec.

The regular Christmas party, with gifts, games and food. No Revenue Table. Bring a wrapped gift, garden-related, cost less than \$10. The Executive will provide refreshments.

## 11 Nov.

**Garth Widemire** was our guest and brought along many wonderful slides of rhodos in various gardens in the Fraser Valley, as well as some from the Species Foundation. He showed slides of not only rhodo bushes in full

bloom, but usually close-ups of individual flowers or trusses. They were all lovely. The one that really caught my eye was R. Grandma's Hat, a Lem cross. He also showed some spectacular Magnolias. A very satisfying evening with a knowledgeable visitor.

**Harry Wright** presented a large board on which was pinned a great variety of rhodo leaves, from tiny to huge, with and without colourful tomentum and indumentum, reminding us that rhodos are not "just flowers", but plants that provide us with colour and often scent, year-round.

## MEMBER NOTES

3 rhodos have died in our rhodo garden. If possible we would like to replace them with the same varieties. Can anyone spare a R. pseudochrysanthum, a R. rubiginosum or a R. mucronulatum? Speak to **Dick Bonney** if you are willing to donate one of these.

**Gwen and Harry** have invited members to the "**Festival of Lights**" in their garden during the Christmas season. Garden open to the public 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. on Dec. 20, 22 and 24.

Would you like to "Show and Tell" or give a 5 minute talk about some garden aspect? Speak to Harry. At the January meeting, slides will be shown, and members are asked to wrap up 10-20 slides showing gardens, flowers, Rhodos, landscapes - whatever - and give them to **Dick Bonney** before 31 Dec, so they can

be placed in the carousel. At the February meeting, it is planned to have a Book Sale as well as the usual Revenue table. We all probably have garden books that we have read and re-read. Bring them to the meeting, and take home one or two others. Prices will be very moderate.

Thinking ahead to 2004 - The Plant Sale and Rhodo truss display will be on May 2. **Paul Wurz** will be in charge. The Tour of Gardens is planned for May 8, and **Harry Wright** will be in charge of arrangements. If you know of an interesting garden that might be included in the tour, please advise Harry, so people can be contacted in good time.

There is consideration being given to having the District 1 President's meeting here next August. Harry will by then be our District Director. Members will be asked to billet people from other clubs in Dist. 1. We will likely have a garden tour and BBQ that day. Give this plan some thought.

The Northwest Flower & Garden show will be held in Seattle Feb. 4-8 and if you can gather a group of 20 or more friends to go, the price will be only \$15 each, plus meals, hotel and other travel expenses, of course.

Harry took 250 rhodo cuttings to Jaro Nursery. It will be interesting to see how well they grow. Next Sept. is when you can expect to get them back.

### SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

**Rose-Marie** has sent us some thoughts on winter decorations. "The early cold snap put an end to asters and chrysanthemums here, and I have had to switch to winter resources earlier than usual to keep vases filled for the house. Living in the country makes this easier, of course. Many native plants provide interesting shapes and textures of branch and seed that work beautifully with evergreen boughs or even on their own. As I write this I have a small pitcher filled with hazelnut catkins on my desk.

A few branches of these are a simple, charming winter bouquet. They come from our native beaked hazelnut, *Corylus cornuta californica*, which grows in clearings in the Salmon River valley. Branches of our native wild roses, loaded with brightly coloured rosehips, are lovely with snowberries and, with some evergreen boughs, are splendid Christmas decorations too. Our two native species, *Rosa nutkana* (Nootka Rose) and *Rosa gymnocarpa* (baldhip rose) both provide bright hips as well as classic, fragrant single roses in June, but both the fruit and flowers of *R. gymnocarpa* are much smaller than those of the Nootka rose.

The ready availability of holiday decorating material in my garden and the surrounding woods and fields usually keeps me from buying decorations. However, I have always been tempted by the florists' displays of pepperberry at this time of year. The masses of small red berries clustered on the branches of the pepperberry tree make ideal holiday decorations, and are sold in wreaths, garlands and bouquets through December. Every year I intend to find out more about this plant, and whether or not I can grow it myself, so this year, I have finally spent some time researching it.

Commercially grown pepperberry is *Schinus molle* (Peruvian pepper tree, a large, handsome tree with a weeping habit), or *Schinus terebinthifolius* (Brazilian pepper tree or Christmasberry tree, a large shrub or small tree). Both are native to woodland in Mexico, Central- and parts of South- America, but have become established in Florida and California, where *S. terebinthifolius* is now dangerously invasive. The berries of both trees are credited with many medicinal and even a few culinary properties, but some sources advise against ingesting them. (There is an Australian 'pepperberry', the fruit of *Tasmannia aromatica*, syn *Drimys lanceolata*, which is a prized seasoning). The berries as produced by the trees can be purple or pink as well as red, but apparently the commercial sprays are often dyed in these and similar colours. For those of use wanting to grow our own, the news is disappointing. The plants are evergreen, but will not take frost, in fact no temperatures below +10C".

Ed. Note: Talking of *Drimys* reminds me of the first time we went to Falmouth, Cornwall. It was March, and there were many Magnolias and Rhodos and daffodils in bloom. But I suddenly noticed a huge tree with evergreen leaves (rather like rhodoleaves) and white flowers with wonderful perfume. I had never seen anything like it, and asked the gardener to name it. He said *Drimys winteri* but his strange English(?) accent made it impossible for me to understand him. He finally wrote it on a bit of paper for me. The next one of these I found was in a seaside garden in Wales, but this time it was a many-stemmed shrub. Another variety perhaps. I wonder if they grow in Zone 9.

### RHODOS IN NORM TODD'S GARDEN IN VICTORIA

In the Spring 2003 issue of

Gardenwise, I found an interesting article in which Norm Todd talked of rhodos and how to keep them happy. His nursery is about 20 years old now, and he has 300 species and over 900 hybrids in the garden. He spends time teaching at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific.

Norm says that if rhodos reside in soil that is black, fertile, friable and has the right amount of humus, they may never need fertilizer, but our heavy winter rains can wash away nutrients. So he feeds his plants every two months, starting in November and ending July 1. Fertilizer need is governed by soil temperature, and doubles with every temperature increase of 10C. So a plant that benefits from 30 millilitres of fertilizer in November could require double or triple that amount in May. He believes the plants need extra nitrogen, so he feeds the 10-8-6 formula developed at UBC. This formulation contains all 13 elements needed, and 50% of the nitrogen is offered as sulfur-coated urea, when is released over a long period.

The most common reason for yellowing of rhodo leaves is shortage of nitrogen, so add fish fertilizer 5-2-3 or Miracid 30-10-10. Yellowing can also indicate a shortage of magnesium, so use Epsom salts, 15 millilitres to 4 litres of water. If extra nitrogen and magnesium don't solve the problem, use chelated iron.

If you prefer organic fertilizer, the following mix, developed by Alan & Liz Murray, is recommended. Our group has visited this garden on a mountainside in the Duncan area, several times, and noted the healthy rhodos and magnolias.

4 parts each canola, alfalfa and blood meals, 2 parts dolomite lime, 1 part each of rock phosphate, bone meal, kelp meal and greensand. Apply once a year, and mulch heavily with

ground bark.

Norm recommends if changing to organic feeding, do it over time, overlapping applications, as this mixture takes time to break down and release its nutrients.

Ed. Note: I believe all the aforementioned organic material can be purchased at Buckerfield's or at Campbell River Nursery.

### AN EFFICIENT WEED-KILLER

According to a writer in Fine Gardening #91, vinegar is a useful weed-killer. Not ordinary 5% kitchen vinegar, but 20% Acetic acid. You can spray directly onto plants or apply as a drench to the soil. Spraying onto plants strips off the waxy, protective coating on foliage, and makes plants vulnerable to desiccation.

Vinegar concentrates sprayed onto soil work by lowering the soil pH to a level where plants can't survive. This acidifying effect can last up to a year, depending on soil type and weather. Once the soil pH is lowered, taproots will eventually starve, but might have one last flush of growth from nutrients stored in the roots. Once plants are dead, which may take up to six months, bring the soil pH back to neutral level by adding lime at a rate of 5# per 100 sq. ft, and add a 3-4" blanket of compost to restore microorganisms.

These products work best on warm dry days, temperature +65F. If used before watering or rain, it will wash off. Citrus oils, alone or combined with vinegar, are also very effective. Use for spot-killing, as these mixtures will kill anything they touch. Wear eye protection and gloves, and don't expose any skin to the spray. This information from Ann Lovejoy. In the US at least, there are several named products. Look for ingredients such as eugenol

(a clove & cinnamon oil compound), acetic acid and citric acid on the labels.

### HAMAMELIS

I cannot resist talking about these wonderful winter blooming plants. They are all hardy here, and if we do have a fall of snow or some freezing nights while they are in bloom, they don't mind at all.

#89 Fine Gardening magazine gave some information about these shrubs. There are 100 cultivars of these plants, native to Asia and Eastern North America. Bloom time is fall (H. virginiana) to late winter. Flower colours include various shades of red, yellow and orangy-brown. They are hardy in Zones 5-8, and need well-drained loamy acidic soil with a non-compacting mulch.

They are happy in full sun to partial shade, and may object to stress from drought (though last summer didn't faze mine). They can grow to 15 ft. high and wide. If you have to prune, do it just after flowering is finished. Some varieties have a strong perfume - hybrids Arnold Promise, Pallida and species mollis have the best scent.

These have always been expensive plants, because they are almost all grafted. It is said they are almost impossible to root from cuttings.

A year ago I included instructions for growing hamamelis from cuttings. Did anyone try this method? Here is a repeat, information from "The Garden". RHS Journal, Jan. 1999: "Rooting and overwintering the cuttings requires diligence and patience. Select young, soft shoots in early summer, collecting them in the evening or early morning. Make cuttings 3" long, severing them just below a node. Remove the lowest leaf and dip the base in rooting powder.

Have pots ready with 2" of potting compost, containing slow release fertilizer, in the bottom. Fill the pots with compost consisting of equal parts of coir (or coarse peat) and perlite. Using a dibber, insert the cuttings, 5-10 in a 6" pot. Lightly spray with fungicide, and place pots in a mist propagator, closed propagating case, or seal in an opaque plastic bag with moist sand in the bottom. Bottom heat of 65-72F (18-22C) should be provided.

High humidity is needed and in the right conditions cuttings should be fully rooted in about 8 weeks. Wean them off gradually, and overwinter in a cool but frost-free greenhouse. If growth is rapid, pot up the same year, otherwise wait until the following spring".

**HARRY WRIGHT** has been checking out the trees in his garden. Here are more of the deciduous trees he describes:

"Cercidiphyllum japonicum (Katsura Tree) - with rounded heart-shaped leaves that provide different colours throughout the summer and fall, this tree is always attractive, and it can grow to 50 ft.

Cornus kousa (a Dogwood) - a multi-trunked tree that will eventually reach 20-30 ft. Flowers and leaves are small but the tree flowers in abundance from mid-June for a long period. White flowers are followed by raspberry-like red fruit, and the fall colour is deep red. This tree is more disease resistant than our native dogwood.

Fagus sylvatica purpurea - leaves on this old favorite emerge a deep dark red and change to a purple-green as they age.

Corylus avellana "Filbert" - a small tree that has a place in the landscape.

The long yellow catkins in Feb. and March are a conspicuous feature. A big plus is the nuts in fall (if you get them before the Steller Jays arrive).

Ginkgo biloba - one of the oldest plants in the world; the fan-shaped foliage has been found in fossils. Excellent golden fall foliage.

Gleditsia triacanthos "Sunburst" - a large tree with fine leaves allowing filtered sunlight to the plants below. The new foliage is bright yellow and holds its colour all summer.

Halesia carolina (Silverbell) Early in the spring this spreading tree has branches draped with many clusters of white bell-shaped flowers. It is sometimes called the Snowdrop tree.

Larix decidua (Common Larch) One of the few conifers that is not evergreen. The needles drop in the fall, after turning a striking shade of gold. Soft green new growth in the spring is also attractive.

Liriodendron styraciflua - one of the finest trees in autumn when the leaves turn to shades of crimson or purple.

Prunus "Kanzan" The most popular of all the flowering cherries. Stiffly ascending branches are produced when the plant is young, but spread with maturity. In April-May the branches are smothered with hanging bunches of purplish pink, later changing to double pink flowers. These flowers, when they fall, provide a solid blanket of pink on the whole area under the tree.

Quercus coccinea, "Scarlet Oak", a fast growing tree when young. The leaves are large and glossy and in the fall, turn a rich scarlet.

Quercus Garryana, "Garry Oak". A nice tree to have in the garden if you have room, and an added bonus is

that the nuts attract the birds.

Styrax japonica "Japanese Snowbell". A beautiful small tree with graceful, fan-like branches. It grows to about 25 ft. Small oval leaves with scalloped edges turn yellow before dropping in the fall. Dainty white bell shaped flowers dangle down from the branches in June. Seeds are also attractive.

Ulmus alata "Cork Elm". Very attractive bark, and the branches have a winged corky growth on them

Ed. Note: I have been using a 1960 encyclopedia for spell checking. The classifiers often change names or spellings so any errors are mine alone.

#### **CORYDALIS**

Have you some of these little charmers in your garden? In the past few years the hybridizers have been busy turning out new colours, so that various new shades of blue, red and purple can be added to the list of flower colours, which also include yellow, pink and white. They make a wonderful low-key companion for rhodos. They start to bloom early and last until hot summer weather causes them to go dormant for a few months. New foliage comes with the fall rains and at this time they can be divided. They are related to Dicentra spectabilis "Bleeding Heart" and D. cucullaria "Dutchmans' Breeches". They seem to be perfectly hardy in this area, in fact some varieties can be quite invasive. But they are so cute!

Fine Gardening #65 offers an interesting article on Mycorrhizae. Toadstools in the garden are a sign of the mycorrhizal relationships that exist underground between the roots of many kinds of plants and the fungi that surround them. Mutually beneficial relationships exist between soil-based fungi and various plants,

including rhodos. Acting primarily as decomposers, these fungi break down organic matter and provide nutrients such as phosphorus, sulfur, nitrogen and zinc to the plant whose root system it has colonized. The host plant reciprocates by providing carbohydrates for the fungi.

The relationship goes on to increase the plant's water uptake by doubling its surface root area, and protects the plant's root system from other types of common pathogenic fungi that can weaken roots and make them susceptible to bacterial infections.

Although these fungi naturally occur in the soil, it may take weeks or years to establish them after soil has been disturbed. You can introduce them by applying an inoculant which may include a combination of different kinds of fungal spores. These can be purchased at garden centres in powdered, liquid or granular form. Read the labels carefully, and be sure the plant roots are well covered before planting.

It's CHRISTMAS and we think of Snow, turkey, sprigs of holly and stockings, Music boxes, frankincense, wise men and brandy, Santa Claus, perfume, chocolates and puddings, Shepherds, stars, poinsettias and candy.

Angels, babies, Joseph and Mary, Churches, wreaths, children and sleigh bells, Friends, gifts, shortbread and sherry, Carols, lights cake, chimneys and candles.

And all our friends.

# MERRY CHRISTMAS