

# NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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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 June

Executive meeting at the home of  
**Pauline & Dick Bonney**, 2393  
Seabank Rd.

### 14 June

Annual BBQ will be held at **Lois  
Clyde's** home, at 1446 Seaview Rd.  
Drive down Miracle Beach Rd and  
turn right onto Seaview Rd. (drive  
right through the park). Watch for  
1446 on the water side - if you arrive  
at a chain link fence with hundreds of  
deer on the other side, you have gone  
too far!

### May 13

The annual meeting was held at the  
home of **Evelyn Wright**, and though  
the weather was cool and cloudy, it  
did not rain. After touring Evelyn's  
neat and lovely garden, we covered  
business, the most important of which  
was Elections 2003.

**Diana Scott** volunteered to be  
Secretary for the next two years, **Don  
Law** offered to continue as Treasurer,  
and **Dave Crucq** will be Membership  
Chairman. **Bernie Guyader**  
promised to continue helping to mail  
the newsletter by Email, and **Gloria  
Guyader** will continue to offer  
services as Sunshine Committee.  
Remember to phone her if you hear of  
an ailing member.

Many thanks to all these hard-  
working people, and appreciation for  
all the work many members have  
done over the past year. **Jane  
Drown, Ray Palmer and Bernie  
Guyader** have continued to help with  
the newsletter; all the people who  
have provided delicious food all year  
(how about some recipes?) and those  
who have brought in plants for sale  
and for raffles. **Dick & Pauline**  
provided a lovely rhodo for the  
Annual Meeting prize. Dick has  
continued to do an outstanding job of  
organizing and selling plants on the  
Revenue table, all year.

Thanks also to the committees who  
organized and operated the Truss  
Show and Sale (**Paul Wurz**,  
chairman), and the garden tours (**Ann  
Chevrier**, chairman). Over 100  
people toured the gardens on a  
beautiful sunny day. The members'  
sale table at the Truss Show was  
successful also, with **Marjorie  
Corsaut** in charge. Thanks again to  
all these enthusiastic members.

### MEMBER NOTES

Remember to bring plate, eating  
utensils and mug to the BBQ, as well  
as food (salad, hot dish or dessert),

and garden chair. Plan to arrive at  
about 4:00 p.m.; food will be served  
at 5:00.

There is a list now of members who  
are willing to have visitors tour their  
gardens during the summer. Advise  
**Harry** if you would like to add your  
garden to the list. Don't worry about  
weeds - every gardener has the same  
problems.

Remember Filberg Lodge Garden  
display June 7-8. We still need a sun  
shade for our booth, and remember to  
offer to help if you can. There will be  
dozens of wonderful garden and plant  
displays to view.

On April 25, there was a ceremony in  
Beacon Hill Park commemorating the  
planting, over a century ago, of  
rhodos by George Fraser. Last fall,  
**Bill Dale** donated some George  
Fraser hybrids to the city of Victoria,  
and these have also been planted in  
the park. **Harry Wright**, among  
others, was invited to the ceremony.

**Rose-Marie Silkins**, author of  
"Snippets from Sayward", also has a  
column every second week in the  
Weekender newspaper. She recently  
wrote about the hardy rhodos that are  
reliable in the Sayward area, where  
the weather can be colder and wetter  
than just a few miles south.

This reminded me of the wonderful  
"old" rhodos I have had blooming in  
my garden this spring. Last summer,  
you remember, was about the driest  
on record, and my plants had very  
little or no water for 5 months. Did  
this stop them from forming flower

buds in August? Not on your nelly!. Good old R. Cunningham's White, faithful James Barto, Rosamunde and Christmas Cheer, Grace Seabrook and Virginia Richards - the list goes on and on. And you should see R. Loderi King George! I am sure many people can give similar reports. On the other hand, some of the "new" hybrids are dead or dying. Maybe I have to admit we live in Zone 7 after all.

#### **MORE ON CLIMATE**

Since 1984, members of the Pacific Northwest Palm & Exotic Plant Society have experimented with many plants which have always been considered "too delicate" for our climate. They have had much success with plants such as the Windmill Palm, *Trachycarpus fortunei* (which is for sale in most of our local nurseries this year), *Musa bas joo*, the Japanese fibre banana, sure to give an tropical look to any garden, various eucalyptus (many of us have had these in the garden for years) and even Australian Tree Fern, *Dicksonia antarctica*, which needs just a little protection.

This group has a \$30 annual membership fee, a quarterly journal, and quarterly general meetings at VanDusen Gardens. If you are interested, find more information at the website [www.palms.org/pacific](http://www.palms.org/pacific). Information from the B.C. Council of Garden Clubs Bulletin, May/June 2002.

**Harry Wright** has given us advice on disposing of the RHODO LACEBUG.

This insect usually causes trouble on plants growing in exposed, sunny positions. Over-wintering eggs are laid on leaves, and hatch in May. When fully grown in July, the lacebugs are about 1/4" long and dark brown. The wings are carried flat on the insects' back and the presence of numerous veins in the

wings gives them a lacy appearance, hence the name.

The insects and their nymphs live on the undersides of leaves, where they will suck sap. This causes a yellow mottled discolouration to appear on the upper surfaces of the leaves, while the lower surface becomes a rusty-brown colour.

Control lacebugs by spraying the undersides of the leaves thoroughly with malathion.

#### **SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD**

Rose-Marie has sent us interesting advice on potatoes. "Being not only Dutch by birth but also the product of countless generations of Dutch farmers and gardeners, I devote considerable energy, time and garden room to cultivating potatoes.

The potato-planting season begins as early in March as I can work the ground (without being locked up for lunacy), and I continue to plant at intervals through to the end of July. Finding a potato that does well in very early spring, and does well quickly, is of course an ongoing obsession.

A few years ago, at the Courtenay Seedy Saturday. I was introduced to a venerable Dutch heirloom called 'Rode Eerstling' (roughly translated Red First-one). This is indeed an amazingly early variety. I plant Rode Eerstling with several other early varieties the first week of March, and it is a good-sized plant when the others are barely cracking the soil surface. It sets a reasonable crop well before the others, and then holds medium-sized tubers in the ground until fall, which is a good thing, as its flavour and texture are much better than. As a new potato, Rode Eerstling is disappointingly insipid. Or perhaps, in potatoes, as in most other matters, my tastes are

more Canadian than Dutch".

I can always find good advice and inspiration in the articles written by **Helen Chesnut**, in the Times-Colonist. Like many of us, she has some big straggly old rhodos in the garden, so last year she cut down the tallest, lankiest stems on R. Bow Bells and Sappho, and they now have new lush growth at ground level. She plans to cut the other half of the plants back after flowering this spring. Some rhodos renew themselves rapidly after this treatment, others do not (they will probably die) but it is worth a try when the garden is turning into a jungle. Our club started up about 18 years ago and the first rhodos purchased at that time are now monsters - something has to be done. I have turned many of mine into "rhodo trees". What is your experience?

**Helen Chesnut** makes good use of epsom salts (magnesium sulphate), not only for garden plants, but for her tired aching muscles after a hard day in the garden. In fact she buys 2 - 25kg sacks per year for these purposes. Every shrub gets 1/4 cup of epsom salts every spring. For the bath - 1/2 to 1 cup does wonders.

#### **CLEMATIS PRUNING**

It has always been difficult to remember which clematis to prune when. **Helen Chesnut** has simplified the job with the following advice: If a clematis blooms after mid-June, the flowers are produced on new wood, therefore prune out most of the old growth in late winter. Prune down to plump buds on each stem, 12-24" above the ground.

Spring-flowering clematis need very little pruning except to restrict size, reduce tangling and remove dead wood. Try to preserve the main framework of the plant, and prune after flowering. If you are faced with

a tangled mess, prune back to good buds close to the ground, in June, after flowering.

Now there are some clematis that bloom twice a year, and therefore need slightly different handling. These are large flowering hybrids that bloom in May or June on growth made the previous year, then they bloom again on new wood in early autumn.

I will quote Helen: "the flowering pattern of these vines makes them difficult to prune without a lot of work. It is often recommended not to prune at all, except for a little tidying, until they get out of hand or need renewing. Then cut them down to good buds close to the ground in early summer after the first flowering. The result will be flowers at eye level in late summer and autumn.

Another relatively easy way to manage these twice-flowering clematis varieties is to relay prune. Cut half the plant down in late winter, leaving half on the trellis to give the early flowers. The half you have cut down will put out new growth to carry the second flush of bloom. In the following Feb. or early March, cut down the other section."

#### **DWARF RHODOS**

There are many lovely little plants, ideal for partly-shaded rock gardens, front of borders, or Bonsai work; many are species rhodos and some have proven to be great for hybridizing. *R. impeditum* is a tough, reliable mound of purple after a few years, *R. keleticum* similar. Try to find the best forms of *R. hanceanum* such as "Nanum", *R. calostrotum* "Gigha" and *R. keiskei* "Yaku Fairy", which is parent to "Ginny Gee", "Patty Bee" and "Too Bee".

Others to look out for include *R. kiusianum* "Komo Kulshan", also the

white form, *Campylogynum* (you can make a hole collection of the marvellous colour combinations this plant offers), *Sargentianum* and its hybrids "Sarled" and "Maricee". *Moupinense* and *Pemakoense* are others to watch for.

These plants are not always easy to find; look for them in specialized nurseries such as those owned by some of our members, or at Rhodo Shows and Sales in May in various towns on the Island. Small plants will be expensive - being dwarfs they take time to propagate and grow to size for sale, but they are worth it - even the smallest garden will provide homes for some of these little darlings.

#### **GARDEN VISITS**

There are many interesting gardens to visit during the summer on Vancouver Island - save the ferry fare to the Mainland for buying more plants. Dashwood Gardens, 7230 Dashwood Rd., Port Alberni. Tofino Botanical, in Tofino, the Old Rose Nursery, 1020 Central Rd., Hornby Island. And of course the garden tours during June & July - in Campbell River, Quadra Island, Denman Island and Sayward, none of them too far from home. Check out our Rhodo garden in Courtenay (plan to do a little dead-heading while you are there) and don't forget, if in Nanaimo, Beban Park.

#### **BOOK REVIEW**

*Trees for the Garden*, John Cushnie, Whitecap 2002. This soft-cover book is a great one for the coffee table. The photos by Sarah Cuttle are outstanding, and show many examples of bark, tree shapes, interesting leaves and fruit. There are sections of trees for acid or clay soils, trees to impress the neighbours, trees for dry and sunny or coastal sites, windy sites, protected sites - lovely. BUT - I think all of us are used to now

looking for the Zone # and this book does not give much idea of what climate the tree will be happiest in. The captions under the photos give brief lists of information such as "Deciduous", "Likes full sun", "dislikes alkaline soil".

So, in my opinion, it is necessary to have good prior knowledge or a good reference book, to go along with this one. You could take it to a nursery and show exactly what you want, but if they don't have that exact variety, you must find further information somewhere, hopefully from the nurseryman. It is mainly a picture book, inspiring for the beginner gardener, but more knowledge of these trees is needed before you buy one.

#### **MORE SNIPPETS from Rose-Marie**

The winter 1992 newsletter of the Native Plant Society of B.C. prints a press release issued by the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, publicizing the discovery of a new conifer species in Vietnam. Regarded as a missing link between the true cypresses (*Cupressus*) and the false cypresses (*Chamaecyparis*), the Golden Vietnamese cypress has been confirmed as a new species in a new genus. *Xanthocyparis vietnamensis* is a small tree with unusual foliage, mature trees bearing both needle and scale leaves. Its closest ally, the Nootka cypress, has now been transferred to the genus *Xanthocyparis*. Unfortunately the Golden Vietnamese cypress is "already critically endangered in the wild". Efforts to conserve habitat and to develop cultivation and propagation techniques, have been initiated by teams of Vietnamese, American and Kew scientists.

#### **ROOT CUTTINGS**

Here is a simple and inexpensive way to produce more of your favorite perennials. First, mark the plants you

intend to work with, in summer (Oriental poppies, for instance, disappear after the end of June). Then, sometime in January or February, dig up these plants and carefully cut off some of the thickest roots. Replant the mother plant, and give it extra protection in cold weather as well as extra food in spring.

Now trim the roots into about 2" pieces, cutting "the top" straight across, and "the bottom" with an angled cut. They don't like to be planted upside-down. Sprinkle cut edges with a little powdered sulphur. Mix a medium of equal parts of fine gravel or perlite, sand and moist potting soil. Use shallow containers or flats with good drainage, fill with soil to about 1" from the top (or if just a few cuttings, use a 5-6" pot).

Plant the roots with top ends near the surface of the medium and the bottom ends deeper, about 1/2 to 3/4" apart, and arrange the flat so the top (top ends of roots) is higher than the bottom.

Cover with a bit more medium and leave in a cool (but no frost) corner until spring. Leave in a sheltered cold frame, water gently when necessary, and watch for signs of new leafy growth.

Thanks to **Phyllis Stapley** for this material from the Coastal Grower Summer 1998.

## **RHODODENDRON, A PLANT FOR ALL SEASONS**

**Karen Shuster**, writing in the Vancouver Rhodo newsletter in April 1992, gave a list of rules for choosing plants (mainly rhodos, for sure)..

**#1** Flowers last only a short time, but you will be looking at the plant for many years. Go for good-looking plants. You can't go wrong with a "Yak" or any hybrids in this family. Terrific flowers and fascinating

foliage. The noble "Sir Charles Lemon" has beautiful foliage and eventually becomes a lovely small tree. Others worth looking for are "Unique", pseudochrysanthum, and campanulatum var. aeruginosum.

**#2** Keep it simple. Don't set your heart on a plant that isn't available locally or is a known prima donna. There are so many others which would make you even happier. "PJM" is a doer - a medium sized plant with aromatic foliage and bright flowers; it always looks good. Another is "Dora Amateis", a vision in white. If you want a larger-growing plant, "The Hon. Jean Marie de Montague" is a good solid red. For something smaller, try *impeditum*, a tight bush of vibrant blue.

**#3** Do some research, it's fun. A combination of walks in a well-labelled garden and browsing through books will do the trick. Trips to Van Dusen Gardens and the Asian garden at UBC are obvious winners. Get yourself a Greer's Guide and some of the Cox books, make use of the library, and soon you'll be an expert.

**#4** Choose a plant which is at its best when you are in the garden. If you spend every June in Arizona, there is no sense filling your garden with late-blooming hybrids and Exbury azaleas. The hardy souls who use their gardens for a quick winter pick-me-up might consider some early bloomers such as "Snow Lady", *moupinense*, "Mary Fleming", "Olive", or "Christmas Cheer".

**#5** Ask the experts. Rhodo society members like to talk about their plants even more than growing them, so use the social time at meetings to get advice. Volunteer to do something about which you know next to nothing, so that you can hang out with the experts and learn from them.

**#6** Indunge your fancy. If you like purple, grow every shade of it. There are many named varieties of R.

*augustinii* which offer every shade of blue/purple. For instance, *fastuosum* "Flore Pleno", "Bob's Blue" and *impeditum* blend nicely together. Or go for fragrance -

"Loderi King George" and the other Loderi hybrids are all heavenly. So many of the deciduous azaleas are fragrant, and don't forget plants with fragrant foliage.

**#7** If something does well in your garden, get more like it. If you have nothing but sun, buy azaleas instead of the broad-leaved rhodos which prefer some protection. If a *williamsianum* hybrid flourishes in your soil, it has enough friends and relations (Wilbrit, Linda, Bow Bells, Karin, Moonstone) that you can appear to have a large variety while staying within a narrow range.

**#8** Don't ever get discouraged by adversity. The experts lose plants occasionally; you will too. Look upon the losses as opportunities.

**#9** Don't throw good money after bad. If "Purple Splendour" dies on you twice, forget it. Some plants are just not meant to be grown in certain places. Try "Anah Krushke" instead; it's much easier to grow and is a better looking plant.

**#10** Take a chance. Use every opportunity to get young, inexpensive plants at the sales and grow them along. They'll have a better chance of making it if they do their growing up in your garden. If they don't turn out to be what you had in mind, they're easily disposed of. And some "Unknown Warrior" might turn out to be the love of your (gardening) life!

Ed. Note: On this last point, talk to **Bonnie and Wayne Steele**, who are in the habit of doing just that - they have rows of small and 1 gal. pots in a protected corner, where the plants grow on for a year or two before being placed in a bed.