

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4 Vol. 18 No. 2 October, 2003



President Harry Wright 338 8345
Vice-pres Paul Wurz 287 4301
Secretary Diana Scott 338 0208
Treasurer Don Law 339 2735
Ways & Means

Ann Chevrier 339 3048
Publicity Evelyn Wright 339 7493
Harry Wright 338 8345
Librarian Bonnie Steele 334 9436
Social Gwen Wright 338 8345
Evelyn Wright 339 7483
Membership Dave Crucq 339 7845
Revenue Table Richard Bonney
339 7594

Sunshine lady Gloria Guyader
338 5276

Editor Mary Palmer 923 6629
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.

Oct 7

Executive meeting at the home of
Diana Scott. Drive down Coleman
Road (off the highway) to Left Road,
and pass Whitaker Rd (the
Zimmermans and the Steeles), on to
Eagles Rd on the left. There is a
gated deer fence. Push button on pole
by the big rock to open, gate closes
automatically. There is a long
driveway and no turn-around. If you
decide to leave your vehicle by the
road, bring a good flashlight!

Oct 14

The long-awaited visit by **Ken
Gibson**, with information and
pictures of this trip to see the gardens
of Ireland.

Sept 9

Paul Wurz gave a demo and useful
information on taking cuttings. He
has found Sept-Oct to be the best time
for evergreen rhodos. Deciduous
azaleas are a bit more tricky - about
two weeks after blooming is the time
for softwood cuttings, and you can try
Sept. for hardwood cuttings. Yaks,
dwarfs, and any yellow rhodos can be
done in early Sept. Paul recommends
fertilizing the plants early in the
season in order to encourage new
growth material for cuttings.

Our guest, **Eleanore Dempster**, told
us about the move, in 1997, of 500
rhodos and other plants "from shore
to mountain". These were all large
plants, and it must have been a
herculean job for Eleanore, husband,
and a little John Deere tractor. The
plants have settled in nicely now, and
she had many slides of beautiful
rhodos in full bloom on the steep
hillsides. Rhodoholics indeed!

MEMBER NOTES

Lois Clyde has offered to be
Historian, and care for the albums
containing pictures of members and
gardens over the years. If you have
snaps of people at BBQs, garden
tours or Christmas parties, please give
them to Lois so they can be displayed
in the albums. Names and dates
would be appreciated.

Remember **Gloria Guyader** is our
Sunshine Lady. Report to her if you
know of an ailing member.

And remember our Rhodo Garden -
stop by any time and remove weeds,
leaves, seedlings and branchlets from

the trees, deadheading that was
missed earlier - there is always
something to be done.

It was decided to leave the cost of
membership at \$35.00, though we
have to pay the ARS \$27.00 US.
This means the difference must be
made up by other means, and we have
found the Revenue Table to be a good
source of income. So keep those
plants coming (also other items such
as jam, unwanted tools, magazines,
etc. etc) and remember to purchase an
item or two each month. Two names,
such as Mr. & Mrs.... can be on one
membership. The difference is that
there is one vote only per
membership, if/when something
REALLY important has to be voted
on.

Membership renewal envelopes are
included in this month's newsletter.
Mail or bring your \$35.00 to the Oct.
or Nov. meeting. In order for
members to receive the Jan. ARS
Journal, money has to be received by
the ARS by early Dec.

CUTTINGS

Oct. is generally a good time to take
cuttings. Harry has made
arrangements with JARO Nursery to
have our members' cuttings cared for.
If you have some favorite rhodos,
take 4-6" cuttings of this year's
growth to Harry between 11-14 Oct.,
5 of each variety in separate plastic
bags, labelled with your name and the
name of the rhodo. They will be
potted up and cared for in a heated
greenhouse, transplanted to 4" pots
when rooted, and ready to be returned
to you by Sept. 2004. Cost will be

about \$1.65+- per rooted plant.

HELP! **Dave Crucq** is looking for anyone who has a R. Pepperpot, for he would like some material for cuttings. Pepperpot has cute little yellow campanulate flowers, heavily spotted with red, and new growth is reddish-brown.

Two new members were welcomed at the Sept. meeting, **Glenn Kaefer** and **Tiffany Wyles**, both Courtenay residents.

John & Tracy Watson did a great job of subbing for **Ann Chevrier** at the Ways & Means table Sept. 9. Thanks guys!

2004 will be the 150th Anniversary of **George Fraser's** birth, and a big celebration is being planned for late May in Ucluelet. Mark your calendar! **Bill Dale** wrote: "We hope to have a good crowd to celebrate this date. Fraser Days 2004 is to be held on the weekend following the May Day weekend. A bus trip to Ucluelet would give your members a chance to see the rhodos planted beside the walkway leading into Ucluelet as well as taking part in the other activities scheduled for that day".

Oct. 8 is the date of the next MARS meeting. If you are interested in joining a car pool, check with Harry.

Garth Widemire, who will be speaker for our Nov. meeting, is looking for speakers for other clubs in Dist. 1. Check with Harry if you are interested in sharing your expertise with members of other clubs.

MARTY ANDERSON, who heads up the R&A news reports: "Many chapter web sites have a link to the R&A News website (on the internet). Recently the R&A web site was moved to a different service

provider. So you must change the R&A News link to the following URL:
<http://www.rhododendron.org/news/newsindex.htm>.

Material will be updated quarterly as new issues are published".

MILNER GARDENS PROPAGATION PROJECT

Harry Wright is on a committee making plans for this project, and as you know, has over several years compiled a list of rhodo varieties grown in Dist 1.

It is planned to select 20 plants from the named Milner Gardens collection and propagate them in 2004. Also a short list of 10-20 varieties from Harry's list will be propagated each year, and all of these plants will be available to rhodo members and others in coming years.

The second phase of the project includes rebuilding a used 30 x 20' greenhouse, with a hot water propagation system donated by Haida Gold Gardens. When funding is in place, students will install the greenhouse.

An area at Milner Gardens will be developed in order to display the propagated rhodos, when they are ready for sale to members and to the general public.

Harry Wright can give us more details of this project, and we will be asked to consider helping with funding.

Harry Wright has offered this interesting article on PINES. "A walk through Haida Gold Gardens will show that I have a fondness for an important group of conifers known for long, pointed but usually soft needles sheathed in bundles and lasting two or more years. These are Pines, and they

succeed in dry sandy soils where little else will grow. They should be transplanted in early spring. With care, any garden that can add one of these quality pines to its inventory, will be enhanced.

Pinus aristata "Bristlecone Pine". The oldest living tree on earth, lives as long as 4000 years. Stout upright plant with horizontal branches. Needles flecked with white dots of resin. Growth 3" to 6" per year.

Pinus aristata compacta "Dwarf Bristlecone Pine". a dwarf of this slow-growing species. Beautiful compact form.

Pinus nigra "Austrian Black Pine". A good choice for a large garden, where a large specimen is required.

Pinus densiflora "Tanyosho" Dwarf Japanese Red Pine - a good plant for informal effect, multi-trunked.

Pinus Mugho "Mugho Pine". A low compact pine that can be kept under control, or can reach 8-10 ft.

Pinus Mugho "Mugho Dwarf Pine" A selected seedling. Our plant is 24" wide and 8" tall, 15 years old, pruned once a year.

Pinus sylvestris fastigiata "Blue Column Scotch Pine" - a nice blue columnar form of Scotch Pine, narrow and upright.

Pinus sylvestris "Scotch Pine" - straight well branched pyramid in youth, irregular and picturesque in age, with drooping branches.

Pinus wallichiana "Bhutan Pine". One of the most beautiful of all the large pines. It retains its lower branches and the young foliage is bluish green.

Pinus wallichiana "Zebrina" Variegated Himalayan Pine. Plant

has a yellow cast to it. What sets it apart is that each needle can have blue, green, white and yellow streaks at the same time. Grows 12-24" in a year.

Pinus muricata "Bishop Pine"- a native of Northern California. Slow growth rate and denseness make it an attractive landscape plant. Can reach 50' in time.

Pinus ponderosa - A large, fast-growing tree with extra-long yellowish green needles.

Rose-Marie has sent more Snippets (several sent some time ago) "Many of us have trouble keeping our Paperwhites (*Narcissus tazetta*) upright when we force them for winter bloom. Try vodka. A few drops of vodka in their water does in fact keep the stems from flopping. I haven't tried other liquors - for aesthetic purposes one would want to use a clear one like gin. We don't drink vodka, so when we get those little promotional vodka bottles attached to another purchase, we save them for the paperwhites.

For Vancouver visits I always pack one of my favorite books, "Trees of Vancouver", published by UBC Press, 1992, written by the late professor Gerald Straley. This wonderful volume manages to provide botanical and cultural information on the ornamental trees grown throughout the city, plus listing where good specimens can be found. Written by a botanist, it speaks eloquently to the layman as well, and the writer's love of his subject matches his prose. I have found it an invaluable reference book apart from its usefulness as a tree-tourist's guidebook.

My Sayward garden is home to a rapidly growing collection of pulmonaria species and hybrids. These handsome, low-growing

perennials like shade and moisture, so of course they are a good choice for a north-Island garden. Their early-spring bloom and handsome foliage provide year-round interest with minimal care. After blooming, they should be cut back, and can be divided then as well. However, there is a lot to do in mid-spring, so I usually don't get around to dividing my pulmonarias until September. Fortunately, that is all right with them, as the new divisions still have time to establish before winter.

There is a good selection of pulmonarias readily available, including hybrids with almost totally silver or cream foliage, like the popular 'Excalibur' (blue flowers with a pink tinge) and 'David Ward' (Pink flowers). *Pulmonaria rubra* 'Redstart' has all-green foliage that fills in after flowering begins. This one has coral-red flowers that are in bloom here by Valentine's Day, and this year, were out in mid-January. Selections and hybrids of *P. longifolia* have particularly handsome foliage, usually spotted white or silver, and blue flowers. Two of my favorite hybrids are 'Little Star', which forms a small clump of handsome mottled leaves with bright blue flowers, and the very fine 'Trevi Fountain' with similar colours on a larger plant. It is harder to find than most, but worth seeking out. Mine came from The Plant Farm on Saltspring Is.

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 insufficient water. Once rhodos are well established (5 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 rain or whatever 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. 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. This 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 the plant onto a tarp for easy movement to a new location. Or,

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 location. Another Ed. Note: By now we may have some different ideas than those listed - for instance, in British magazines, people are begged to use little or no peat moss, because the material is being rapidly depleted in parts of the world. I note one of the big English companies is importing their peat moss from northern Saskatchewan now, and coconut shell fibre is being highly recommended instead of peat moss.

Also, after a few very dry summers in our area, it is time to give some rhodos more mid-day and afternoon shade, or get rid of them, rather than giving the recommended 1" of water per week which many gardeners can ill afford.

ANOTHER SNIPPET FROM ROSE-MARIE:

"Most gardeners enjoy sharing their garden spaces with birds, and the last few years have seen quite an increase in the popularity of birdhouses. However, a bird tragedy in my brother's Campbell River garden prompts me to write about a potential problem with birdhouses. The introduced English Sparrow is quite a pest on Vancouver Island, and often displaces swallows, chickadees and other birds from nesting sites. If the entry hole for a birdhouse intended for violet-green or tree swallows is too large, the English Sparrow will take over the site, often destroying

the swallows' eggs or young. That is what happened to a nest of newly-hatched violet-green swallows in Ed & Thelma's garden. The birdhouse entry was just large enough for the smallish English sparrow to squeeze in and batter the baby swallows to death. Apparently the entryway should be no larger than 1 1/8", which is large enough for chickadees, just large enough for swallows, but too small for English sparrows."

BULBS - TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

Todd Major, Director of Park & Tilford Gardens in North Vancouver, wrote: (I am sorry I didn't note which magazine I took this material from) "There are many more flowering bulbs to grow and enjoy other than tulips and daffodils; for example the Galtonia candicans, known as Summer Hyacinth. Flowering in mid summer with white, slightly fragrant drooping funnel shaped flowers on 36" or taller raceme. It is hardy in Zones 6-10, in average, good draining soil.

More good performers for the south coast of B.C., which are long-lived, prolific and rewarding include Allium moly, grows to about 12", cheerful yellow flowers in spring. Allium neapolitanum is similar with clusters of perfumed white blooms. Both of these take full sun or light shade.

Allium nectariscordum (syn. Allium siculum) grows to about 40" in full sun, multiplies well and has maroon and greenish bell shaped flowers hanging in clusters. Bees love it. An added bonus is the seed heads, which remain all through summer and fall.

If you want something a little different, try Crinum x powellii from the Amaryllis family. This awe-inspiring plant is a garden origin cross between two other species. The 5' long strap shaped leaves can

grow as high as 4'. The amaryllis-like flower is a pink or red slightly fragrant umbel that rises 4 1/2' tall in late summer. It requires excellent drainage and a thick winter mulch, hardy Zones 8-10. The bulb is massive, can grow as large as a cantaloupe. It multiplies slowly and is sometimes slow to flower the first year or two.

One of my favorite fall blooming bulbs is Nerine bowdenii. This native of South Africa, another of the Amaryllis family, is a real treat in the fall when all else has finished blooming. The 24" clusters of shimmering rose pink blooms with narrow curved petals are a true delight in late Sept., Oct. or even Nov. Hardiness Zone 8-10. Mark placement of this bulb as the leaves disappear in late summer."

MORE SLUG NOTES

Some people have complained of quantities of large black slugs in their gardens this year. I have found very few compared to last year, but the summer was even drier. Most of those in our garden are not black this year, but various shades of brown, so that I am constantly picking up dried rhodo leaves which look almost exactly the same as brown slugs.

Here are a couple more hints for getting rid of these creatures. A lady writing in "Amateur Gardening" says grass clippings around her hosta plants keeps the slugs away. And a new product on the market in England for removing slugs is coffee. I don't know the details but the picture looked like a jar of dried instant coffee.

In the process of touring gardens this summer I noticed the owner of one large cut-flower garden in Black Creek (Colleen Christian) keeps a photo album with tags and envelopes from plants or purchased seeds. This way she can always quote the varietal name.