

North Island Rhododendron Society

PO Box 3183 Courtenay BC Canada V9N 5N4

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R. macrophyllum

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Articles not credited are by the editor.

Dec 7 Executive meeting will be held at the home of Rob Argall, 387 Wireless Road, in the Cape Lazo area, Comox.

Dec 14 is the date of the annual Christmas party, which means bring some finger food, a garden-themed gift (not over \$10 value) and be prepared for a Holly-Jolly evening. Every person who attends should bring a gift.

Nov 9 Our guest was friend **Les Clay**, who brought beautiful slides of some 75 species rhodos which do well in our gardens. He gave everyone a list of the plants he described, which would be handy to take on shopping forays. Not every nursery sells many of these plants - it might be necessary to check with **Harry Wright, Linda Easton or Paul Wurz**. Rhodo shows and plant sales put on by rhodo societies - ours and others in Dist. 1 are good places to find these beautiful but sometimes scarce and expensive plants. We noted that many of these rhodos are found naturally on mountains in Yunnan, Sichuan or Tibet, at 2000 m or higher, yet they adapt beautifully to our warm wet (at times) or dry (all summer) seaside gardens.

MEMBER NOTES

Paul Wurz and Bonnie Steele have had hospital stays lately and we all hope they are both feeling

much better (no lifting those big old rhodos, Paul!). **Phyllis Stapley** has had to give up her membership (temporarily we hope) due to family commitments. We will really miss you, Phyllis!

At the January meeting, (barring quantities of snow), Terry Richmond of Alberni will be joining our panel of experts to ponder those tricky gardening questions. Make notes as you wander around the garden this month and bring written questions to the meeting. While looking around the garden, sharpen your brain for the Feb. meeting. What's the name of this beauty? The tag disappeared years ago. Leaf size and shape, indumentum or not, colour of the flower buds, height. Do this a few times in your own garden, and you will know better what to look for when you see the slides and plants presented at the meeting.

We were advised to get a hotel reservation in Victoria soon, for the conference next April.

GOOD BUGS - BAD BUGS

We won't discuss bad bugs this time, but a recent article by Helen Chesnut in the Times-Colonist gives advice on keeping the good bugs in your garden. They need shelter, water, corners in which to overwinter, and plenty of food -

pollen and nectar. The best fed adults produce the most eggs, which hatch into larvae which consume large quantities of garden pests. The garden should have a wide diversity of plants - lots of herbs and daisy-type flowers. If you have to spray, don't spray everything, just the weevils on just that one rhodo (don't ever spray on windy days - tomatoes are very sensitive!) Good bugs include Ladybugs (alas, I just read that in England a new giant ladybug, black with red spots, eats other ladybugs, as well as soft fruit, will give people a nasty bite, enters houses in the fall and when frightened secrete smelly blood which stains curtains and carpets). They were introduced to North America from Asia to keep down aphids. These are not "good" bugs. Amateur Gardening 30 Oct.

But little Hover flies are great aphid eaters. Ground beetles chomp on root maggots, cutworms, slugs and snails. Look after the good bugs and they will look after your garden.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTING

It will soon be Christmas, and **Gwen and Harry Wright** have been busy as usual, decorating their garden with lights for the annual Light Show. The garden will be open to the public Dec. 20, 22 and 24, 7-9 p.m. I noticed last year that many other houses in that area were brightly lit up.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Times-Colonist of 18 Nov had

an article by Lee Reich (Associated Press) which certainly made me think. He talked about gardening traditions associated with planting trees and shrubs. What do you think of his suggestions?

SPRING PLANTING.

NO. Fall is a better time - roots have time to get established before cold weather, and soil is easier to work with.

SIZE OF PLANTING HOLE

It is not necessary to dig a bathtub-sized hole for a tree.

USING GREAT QUANTITIES OF ORGANIC MATERIALS in the hole.

Not so. The material may be too soft and fluffy and roots will have little reason to leave the area.

STAKE THE TREE AFTER PLANTING

Better not. Swaying in the wind toughens the trunks and causes roots to become stronger.

CUTTING BACK STEMS TO BALANCE THE ROOTS

Don't. Hormones produced in stem buds, particularly in the tips, helps stimulate root growth and hence, stem growth. Remove stems at their origin if necessary.

It is necessary, however, to choose the site carefully, mulch, and water regularly for the first two seasons. Ed. Note:

Of course, this brings me to the weather. This fall, our area has had a bit of everything. Very dry, heavy rains, gale-or hurricane-force winds - flooding in the Sayward Valley, all these events would make planting a tree more difficult than usual. So the biggest item on the list is - Use your COMMON SENSE. (Mr. Reich didn't mention that).

CHRISTMAS TREAT

I am giving you some gardening highlights from recent issues of Amateur Gardening. Hard to believe - In October, one of the AG writers, Chris Beardshaw, went to a garden centre to buy some spring bulbs. He was directed to

Aisle 34, where he found Santa Claus and his elves, and the only "bulbs" on sale were for Christmas Tree lights.

Troublesome leaves - Some tree leaves give the gardener problems. Oak leaves stick to each other; they are difficult to scrape up. Horse Chestnut leaves disintegrate quickly and become stringy when wet, sticking to paths and patios. Lime (Tilia) leaves rot quickly, a nightmare to clear up. Sweet Chestnut (Castanea) leaves stick to concrete and are slippery to walk on, and Walnut - large leaves often fall all at once.

Ed. Note: This fall, all leaves seemed to fall in bunches - every time we had a gale. We chopped and mowed them, raked them, then a few days later- and a few days later- four times altogether. The gales Sunday of this week finished the job. One last raking will do it.

You must have noticed the brilliant leaf colours this fall. More than usual? Some of the best include acers, particularly Japanese maples of all kinds, Fothergilla major, and Amelanchier canadensis (a refined Saskatoon Berry). Many other trees gave outstanding displays. Sept-Oct. is the best time to visit nurseries if you are planning to buy a tree. You can pick out the colours you want when they are at their best. Japanese maples are among the best companions for rhodos. They never grow too tall, and their delicate leaves give the rhodos underneath just the right amount of shade.

Many people believe the Bottlebrush plant (Callistemon), an Australian native, is not hardy here. But several gardeners in Manchester and parts of Yorkshire are growing them with no trouble. Some species grow wild on the highest peak in the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales. Bev Johnston has one I feel sure.

Every year we are warned we will be having "the coldest winter in X... years"; and the same warning goes up in Britain also. Time will tell. Meantime, "the experts" say cold

weather does not kill garden pests. Vine weevil grubs can survive to -18C. Some tender plants may not survive a colder-than-usual winter. Best not leave that palm or banana out, or any plants in fancy terracotta pots, unless they are guaranteed frost-proof.

This is just about the last chance to prune maples, birches, walnuts or magnolias, for by January they will be pumping sap up the stems and "bleeding". Unless they have had branches ripped off in recent gales, best to leave the pruning until early summer.

Thanks to Amateur Gardening for the above discussions.

DISCOUNTS AT VARIOUS BUSINESSES

Members have received membership cards which allow them to receive discounts (often 10%) at various stores and nurseries in the area. This list may not be complete. If you are unable to attend meetings and/or get your newsletter by Email, please phone Dave Crucq so your card can be mailed to you.

Art Knapp's Plantland, Black Creek Farm & Feed, Buckerfield's (gardening items), Campbell River Garden Centre, Courtenay Nursery, Growing Concern, Just'n Tyme, Mystic Woods (over \$100 purchase), Paradise Plants (2 locations), River Meadow Farms.

SHADE, SHADE, SHADE

Harry Wright has written this article, useful any time of year, but particularly in winter, when there is less shade, but you might be contemplating more summer shade for the rhodos.

"Shade, shade, shade - seems that every garden I enter, the topic of shade is mentioned at least once. Not enough shade, too much shade, new gardens don't have enough and older gardens have too much shade.

A plant, when small and planted near light shade, seems too soon to be located in the wrong area once the shade canopy has increased.

With shade available, a greater selection of plants can be enjoyed,

and they can only be enjoyed if they are grown in their chosen environment, sunny or shady location. Trees provide shade; finer leaved trees will provide filtered shade and larger leaved ones create dense shade. Degrees of shade can be controlled by proper placement of plant material, and if anyone has the privilege of creating a new garden, afternoon shade can be directed by planting a tree 10 ft. south and 10 ft. west of the target area.

When selecting trees we should be concerned about the type of root system as this could restrict the planting area available around trees. Trees with a tap root system would be preferred.

Gleditsia triacanthos "Sunburst" locust would be a good choice for a large tree; the foliage is bright yellow, and the fact that it leafs out late in spring allows the ground to warm up. By the time the weather gets hot, the tree is providing light filtered shade.

My choice for a smaller tree would be a *Styrax japonica*. Flowers waxy, white, fragrant, bell-shaped, about 1/2" long, blooming mid-June, after most other trees have finished blooming. Small leaves allow light shade.

Evergreen trees are also good providers of shade, with many colours of green, blue and yellow to choose from, but most evergreens have surface roots, making it difficult to plant under them.

Hedging can also be used to create shade, as well as fencing. If instant shade is required, a section of fencing can be used, and removed at a later date when the tree canopy has developed.

If existing trees are causing too much shade, it is time to start removing some lower branches. I have been told that as a tree grows higher, the existing branches will be higher from the ground (WRONG). If that was the case we would be lowering our swings continually.

Low branches will always cause more shade, as the longer they get, the heavier, thus causing them to droop more, increasing the shade. Trees should be looked at and walked under, not around.

BOOK REVIEW

There are many "new" trees, shrubs and various herbaceous perennials listed in newer publications and even in our nurseries. It is hard to keep up with all the new information, and of course, we always want to try one of these plants.

There are new books in the book stores too, and they are as tempting as the plants. I found one in the Campbell River library the other day, and found it fascinating reading. This book, *Trees and Shrubs for Foliage*, is one of a series, the *Woody Plant Series*, published by Firefly in 2002. Author Glyn Church, photographs Pat Greenfield.

This book is not a complete list of trees and shrubs, but all are plants that the author loves. The photographs are outstanding, and the descriptions are comprehensive though condensed. Hardiness zones are listed as well as notes on cultivation. There are 250 fine photographs.

I started listing plants that I had never heard of that are hardy in our area (Z 7-8 in general) and are happy with hot dry summers, and had to give up writing. Have you heard of *Camptotheca* or *Alniphyllum* or *Euodia*? They all sound like plants I just have to have! Have you seen *Cotoneaster bullatus*? "This has the best leaf of the genus, with rich red fall colours, although it is semi-evergreen in warmer places. The red berries hang out over the leaves looking very attractive to us and to the local bird population."

Actually I have seen this one, because I pulled some berries off a plant in **Falmouth**, Cornwall, and now have a lovely example of the shrub. It never gets a bit of water all summer unless it rains, yet every year it is loaded with huge berries (which our birds don't care for).

Look for this book in the library, and look for others in the series, *Trees and Shrubs for Fragrance*, and *Trees and Shrubs for Flowers*. They would make tempting Christmas presents.

Ed. Note: **FURTHER COMMENTS ON "NEW" SHRUBS IN THE NURSERIES:**

If you are interested in buying something "new" and exotic, you had better take a book along when you shop. I can recommend **Hillier's Manual of Trees and Shrubs**, pub. David & Charles, printed and updated many times since 1972. I found a 1998 Pocket Edition which is handy to keep in the car. Another useful book is *Shrubs*, Martyn & Rix, pub. by Random House 1989 (originally pub. by Pan Books in England).

I hope these authors will print a new edition soon for it is not quite as complete, though the photos are very useful.

I lack a good American Tree & Shrub book, which is necessary because many native Eastern American shrubs and their new garden cultivars are in the nurseries, as well as the dozens coming from India, China, Korea, Japan ...seeds brought back by a new generation of plant explorers. In Campbell River, two large nurseries (Mystic Woods and C.R. Nursery) always have a corner of unusual plants for sale. A few days ago I spotted two climbers at Canadian Tire - (on sale, very cheap) that I had to go home and look up - *Holboellia* and *Trachelospermum*, both evergreen climbers, perfumed white flowers, hardy in our area. A good reference book, in the car, is a necessity!

Rose-Marie has presented us with notes on several other rather unusual shrubs in the latest:

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD.

"A deciduous shrub that is fairly new to my gardening experience is *Itea virginica*. When I acquired the dwarf cultivar '**Little Henry**' through a mail order supplier about 5 years ago, it was so small that I scarcely noticed it in the garden. This year it has finally grown large enough to be noticed, and I've

enjoyed it enough to acquire another selection, named 'Merlot' for its handsome fall colouring.

Itea virginica, common names **Virginia sweetspire** or Virginia willow, is native to the Eastern United States. It is tolerant of a wide variety of conditions, but does well in wet areas in the wild where it apparently forms thickets that are particularly handsome when the plant is in bloom. The white flowers are in upright racemes and are indeed sweetly fragrant. Its other claim to the gardener's attention is showy, dark red fall leaf colour. Both flowers and fall colour are best in full sun, but the plant is comfortable in shade as well. Both of mine are in such full sun as Sayward offers, and bloom well. Their colour this fall is very striking.

Itea likes fertile soil that it is moist but well drained and slightly acidic. It will apparently tolerate dry conditions and even drought. If pruning is required it should be done right after bloom, as the plant flowers on old wood. The most readily available cultivar is 'Henry's Garnet'. The species and its horticultural selections grow to about 4 or 5 feet high and wide, with 'Little Henry' remaining a demure 1 to 2 feet each way. I have 'Little Henry' planted with heathers and dwarf rhododendrons, the plant sizes harmonizing nicely. The itea's leaves, like dark green, glossy willow leaves, are a pleasant contrast to the ericaceous plants and the flowers come when none of its

neighbours are blooming.

There are evergreen species of Itea as well, native to Japan and China. The most common is **Itea ilicifolia** (for its glossy, holly-like leaves). This plant boasts large, drooping panicles of fragrant flowers and long, arching branches and is a little less hardy than the deciduous species. Virginia sweetspire is hardy to zone 6, and the evergreen species only to zone 7.

Sayward is allegedly in zone 7, but in my frosty hollow is only there in gentle years, and I tend to select plants hardy to zone 6 at least. That is, when I am being sensible, which is not necessarily a consistent quality when I'm looking at new plants. Last spring I succumbed to the lure of the paper bush, **Edgeworthia chrysantha**, a shrub that combines two of my favorite plant qualities - fragrant flowers and peeling bark. A zone 8 plant, it is finicky. It is absurd to think it will tolerate Sayward's wind, rain, cold snaps and weeks of dark weather. Not that I would place it in the garden. It's in a pot on my covered porch, near the back door where I can whip it inside on nights that threaten hard frost.

When I first brought the **edgeworthia** home, it struck me that this is most definitely a 'Bernie kind of plant', so I consulted guru-Guyader about it right away. Always polite, Bernie clearly empathized with yet another gardener's falling for a plant that sets us up for failure. It was another one

of those moments when a Robert Browning quotation brings solace: "Man's reach must exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for".

I heard the bells on Christmas Day

Their old familiar carols play,

And wild and sweet

The words repeat

Of peace on earth, good-will to men.

Longfellow, 1897

MERRY CHRISTMAS

It's Christmas and we think of
Snow, turkey, sprigs of holly
and stockings,
Music boxes, wise men and
a holly,
Santa Claus, shortbread,
chocolates and puddings,
Shepherds, stars, poinsettias
and candy,
Angels, babies, Joseph and
Mary,
Churches, wreaths, children
and sleighbells,
Frankincense, friends, gifts
and sherry,
Carols, lights, cake, chimneys
and candles,
And our friends.

MERRY CHRISTMAS