NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay, B.C., Canada V9N 5N4 Vol. 18 No.10 June, 2004

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
MembershipDave Crucq 339 7845
Revenue Table Richard Bonney
339 7594
Sunshine lady Gloria Guyader
338 5267
Editor Mary Palmer 923 6629
Articles not credited are by the editor.

June 1
Executive meeting at the home of **Paul Wurz,** 4367 Gordon Rd., Campbell River. Take the first road to the left after passing the pulp mill, and follow the signs to Mystic Woods and Hidden Acres. Come early in order to take a quick tour of the garden.

June 12
The annual picnic, at the home of **Pauline and Dick Bonney,** 2393 Seabank Rd., Comox. Come anytime after 4 p.m. in order to take a tour of the garden (always a new bed or new flowers to see). Bring chairs, plate and utensils, and a potluck item.

May 11
The Annual Meeting was held in the garden of **Madeleine's and Len's** home. Several hundred rhodos in full bloom were admired while members wandered around the impressive garden.

It was noted that, probably because of the spell of hot weather in early April, many plants are blooming several weeks ahead of their usual schedule.

Members finally settled down for coffee, cookies and a business meeting. It was noted that the plant sale and garden tours were very successful. Don't forget the Sept. meeting may well be a week earlier than usual, so watch for information in the newsletter, which will come out early too.

Nominations Chairman **Bernie Guyader** took the floor for election time. "New" executive members include **Paul Wurz**, President, **Bob Argall,** Vice-Pres., Ways and Means, **Dave Godfrey,** Library **Nonie Godfrey,** Social **Bernice Morrison**, and Revenue Table, **Gloria Guyader**. Still needed - one or two people to handle Programs.

President **Harry Wright** thanked all the people who have worked diligently over some years, keeping track of finances, lining up gardens and speakers, providing food, plants, money, books to stimulate our minds, and everything else that is needed to keep the club viable. Many many thanks to all. Diana Scott was winner of a large R. luteum to brighten her spring garden.

MEMBER NOTES
The Editor has a complaint. Every once in awhile, she makes a mistake, or forgets a detail, or - horror of horrors, part of an article gets left out or chopped off. The complaint is that almost nobody ever says a word about these glitches.
Does that mean nobody reads the newsletter? Please, tell me when I make a mistake.

A case in point. In reporting on the April meeting, I left out a note about the entertaining poem that Marjorie Corsaut wrote, and read, describing her garden and the pleasure she derives from it. I am sorry, Marjorie.

It is time, again, to thank all the elves who help with the newsletter. Rose Marie never fails to provide Snippets, Bernie and Harry provide informative articles regularly, Bernie looks after the Emailing and Jane the Snailmailing of the newsletters, and Ray turns my scribbles into a readable paper. Thanks, everyone.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD
Rose-Marie has had a crisis of conscience in the garden.
"I have received a copy of a new calendar put out by the Ministry of Forests as part of an awareness-raising campaign regarding invasive alien plants. Living on Vancouver Island, we are witness to the proliferation of broom that makes us aware of the hazards of introduced species, and it's interesting to see what other plants are included in this hooligan category.

I confess to smiling gleeful agreement when I saw St. John's wort (Hypericum perforatum) listed. H. calycinum, the garden species of this bandit, was the bane of my life for many years after I stupidly accepted a small piece of it from a neighbour. It isn't difficult to understand why this

plant has become a threat to natural habitats as well as agricultural land in the southern interior of the province.

Fuller's teasel (Dipsacus fullorum, syn Dipsacus sativum) makes the list as well, and that makes me wonder if I should discontinue my practise of growing a few plants of this biennial every year. I can rationalize by remembering that I harvest the large flower heads before they set seed (they make splendid indoor decorations for winter), and I have never had a volunteer plant appear anywhere on my property. But that is rationalization. There are plenty of other handsome plants that dry well for winter vases, so I think it is time to remove teasel from my decorating scheme.

My biggest guilt-inducer is my fondness for English Holly (Ilex aquifolium). I have many holly plants scattered around, both pruned in the garden and unpruned in hedgerow and wild areas. They do provide food and good winter cover for birds. But so do other holly species, and other berrying plants, and volunteer English holly is very obviously becoming invasive even in fairly remote Sayward.
I have yanked at least 50 volunteers out of my shrub beds this February alone. On Hardwicke Island, where there are only a few plants of English holly established in gardens, there are literally thousands of volunteer plants coming up as understory alongside our walking and riding trails.

I will add that none of these volunteers seem larger than a few feet at most, so I wonder if they really do survive to mature and bear fruit. The garden parents were all planted in the 1940's and 1950's and are prefectly splendid - I imagine I would not be very popular if I suggested removing them. In my own Sayward garden, I am determined to replace at least some of the I. aquifolium with garden hybrids that are sterile or less inclined to proliferate, such as the lovely blue hollies (Ilex x meserveae). But then, there's that large old holly, draped with a red-flowered honeysuckle, that feeds migrating flocks of robins in spring each year..."

Ed. Notes: I must add personal observations to the above.
On Broom, (Cytisus scoparius) we cut down several acres of it on our property several years ago, and it is now an ongoing job to remove seedlings - by the million. I have found that Roundup, or an acetic acid-based product named Ecoclear seems to kill completely the "baby" plants, several inches in height, but once a stem of 12" or more has grown, the only way to get rid of them is by pulling the plant out by the roots, or cutting it to ground-level (and it may sprout out again). At the moment (24 May) our whole countryside is covered with this beautiful pest. Please do your part in removing it. It is a year-round job, cheaper and healthier than spending time in the exercise room!

Hypericum perforatum (according to the books) is very fond of hot dry locations such as farms in the Okanagan, but I do not think it is rampant on this part of Vancouver Island - yet. But H. calycinum, now that is one of those garden thugs that are passed from one innocent gardener to another. It is wonderful on a dry bank where nothing else will grow, otherwise, pull out every bit you see!

Teasel - years ago there was a big patch of this along the beach at Union Bay, where flower arrangers made forays every fall. They are hard to find now. There were plants in my garden, but after 4-5 years they have disappeared, and I have none at present. Not a problem plant in my opinion.

Holly - yes, woods in the Oyster River area are full of them partly I think because in the early 70s a UBC student planted quantities of various kinds of holly as a summer project. There is still a large holly hedge on the farm, and many little trees in the woods along the river, and in our woods. None have grown to any size yet.

There are many other "pest plants" that we should try to control, and many of these were imported from Europe. In travelling around Scotland I saw almost no broom bushes, though they reputedly came here from there in the first place, but their "pest plants" are gorse, a broom relative with horrible spines, and Rhododendron ponticum.

GARDENING IS NEVER BORING

I have been looking over the pamphlet "Great Plant Picks for 2004", and thinking of the plants I have lost this past winter. Was it last summer's drought or the sharp frosts we had occasionally this spring that put paid to some plants and gave others a shock from which they may never recover? Several hydrangeas looked terrible and had to be cut back severely, but I noticed many looked the same in local nurseries. H. aspera and the oak-leaved hydranges look great, but several others were cut almost to the ground. Several rhodos with small evergreen leaves look very spindly. Harry - Help! Cut them back or dig them out?
No signs of my "hardy" fucshias.

We arn't the only ones - England seems to have had a similar winter, for in Amateur Gardening of May 1, a writer says" the harsh weather we had in Jan-Feb is likely to have taken its toll. Any trees or shrubs that

aren't showing signs of growth yet, particularly those in containers, are likely to have succumbed to the bad weather.

The best way to be absolutely sure that the whole plant, or part of it is dead is to use a thumbnail and scrape away a small section of bark. If it's brown underneath the plant is dead; if green, it's still alive. Then simply prune back to living tissue; don't leave dead wood attached in the hope it will sprout - it won't! The longer you leave it the greater the chance that diseases will take hold.

Think ahead to next winter and what to do to avoid the same thing happening. Protect the roots of potted plants by insulating the container with bubble wrap. Fleece can protect the tops of tender plants. If waterlogging was the problem, stand pots on bricks or pot feet".

I'd like to add - check the hardiness zone when you buy plants. We are sometimes in Zone 8, or even 9 if you have a protected corner near the "salt chuck", but to be really safe, expect to be in Zone 7 most of the time. Some of the beautiful plants that are gradually creeping up the Pacific Coast and are in nurseries everywhere may be hardy here for a few years, then one blast of cold east wind, or one night of -10C and they are gone. For instance, there are very few cordylines left around Campbell River this spring. Some were many years old but this winter finished them off.

SIR JOSEPH DALTON HOOKER

Talking of winter, have you given thought to the trials some of the plant hunters went through to bring us the beautiful rhodos we admire today? J.D. Hooker(1817-1911) whose father, Sir William, was a director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, was one of these.

Joseph went to the Antarctic when only 22, and fell into the frozen sea and was nearly crushed between the ship and ice. This didn't deter him; he next went to the Sikkim Himalayas with rhodos high on his `most wanted' list. Travelling up the Ganges River, he was joined in his cabin by rats and cockroaches who ate his stores.

Once, his friend Archibald Campbell was held hostage and tortured; separated from each other, he and Hooker communicated by notes hidden in a teapot. He climbed to 18,000 ft. in search of plants, through jungle and monsoon. Few collectors climbed higher, but the rewards were huge. His search was so thorough, no major new rhodos have been found there since.

Hooker's 25 new species made more impact then any other plants introduced in the 19th century, becoming the trendy, `must have' plants on country estates and creating hundreds of new hybrids. While collecting, he drew maps, sketched local people, and made scientific observations.
This material from Amateur Gardening 13 March 04.

FERTILIZING THE ORGANIC WAY

Nearly all of this article, by Terry Richmond, was in the May issue. Here is the last paragraph.

"I fertilize in early spring around the end of March, using all the organic fertilizer and soil amendments that I can obtain. When I combine ingredients, I try to duplicate natural fertilizer analysis. For instance, in canola meal (6-2-1) and in fish meal (3-2-1) the nitrogen is 2-3 times that of phosphorus and 3-6 times that of potassium. Three advantages of organic fertilizers over their chemical counterparts is their trace element and humic content and in their extended time release of nutrients.

A NEW IDEA FOR COMBATTING ROOT WEEVILS

Donald King, writing in the Seattle Rhododendronland Newsletter of Nov. 2003 says:
"Well, this is not new as it has been around for 100 million years or so. For centuries, stored grain has been protected from insect attack in much of the less developed world by adding some form of powder or dust to it. Common materials include plant ash, lime, dolomite, certain types of soil and diatomaceous earth (DE).

DE is the fossil remains of diatoms. Diatoms are unicellular algae, whose silica cell walls survive after the algae die, and they accumulate in large numbers at the bottom of rivers ad lakes. Deposits of diatomaceous material were formed underwater in past geologic time and, now exposed above water, are found in all parts of the world.

DE (horticultural grade) has the quality of killing insects. Unfortunately it kills good insects as well as bad (as do nematodes and chemical sprays), so it should not be used indiscriminately. DE is 100% ecologically safe to the environment and non-poisonous to man and beast. In fact, if you have eaten anything made with flour (like Bisquick), you have eaten DE (food grade).

DE works by slicing open the exoskeleton of insects, causing them to "bleed" to death. Actually, their insides leak out, they dehydrate, and die. If you have a certain plant which is being affected by these evil weevils, you may want to apply some DE at the base of the plant; but use it carefully as you will not want to kill beneficial insects elsewhere in the garden. Also, be careful not to inhale it. Visit the following web site

for additional information and an interesting picture of a diatom. www.pbre.hawaii.edu/bemf/microangela/diatom.htm

MY RHODY'S TOO BIG

This article was in the Vancouver Rhodo Newsletter, April 2000, and had been reprinted from "Plant Amnesty". Here is the first part of the article, on pruning rhodos when/if needed.

"The problem with rhodos is, well, they're touchy. Sometimes you head back a branch to a node, and when you return next month you find that, instead of sending out new shoots, the branch simply gave up and died. On other occasions people reduce their rhodos to the height or width they want, only to discover that by the time the plants have developed decent, full leafy crowns, they're back to about the size they were before.

The hardest to prune are old previously chain-sawed rhodos. The new growth looks like spaghetti. Although many can be brought back to a semblance of beauty with years of rehabilitative pruning, these casualties are often so indisputably ugly that removal is a more realistic solution. Just to confuse matters, radical reduction sometimes results in growth which is bushy, compact, healthy AND shorter. Much depends on whether the species in question is healthy and of a compact habit to begin with, and if it receives sufficient sunlight to re-establish.

Another commonly seen situation is that of a large-growing, open-habit rhodo which someone is trying to keep shorter and more compact.The hapless pruner tries in vain. Even when following the `rules' by selectively heading back branches to shorter laterals, the result is a `funny-looking' plant, which is to say it started to grow in a roughly V-shaped pattern. With the above caveats in place, let's review solutions to the too-big rhodo". Continued next time...

NATIVE AMERICAN AZALEAS

Have you noticed the deciduous azaleas this spring? Mine have masses of flowers, which, despite the hot weather we have had since early April, are in bloom week after week. A. occidentalis, with its strongly perfumed white flowers with pink and yellow decorations, is a native of the Pacific Coast, mainly Oregon I believe.

This article, though, is about the native azaleas which grow from Nova Scotia down the East Coast of the U.S. The May 1992 copy of "Horticulture" magazine described these beautiful plants in an article written by Richard Bir.

"Conjure a vision of rhododendrons, and the mind's eye invariably pictures dark evergreen foliage contrasted with perfect trusses of large, striking blooms. What we imagine are hybrids, which are marvellous plants when grown in the proper conditions. There are, however, in the genus Rhododendron, a great many species whose requirements are a little more flexible. This is especially important if you have rather soggy soil. Consider growing some of this country's native azaleas.

These species sport subtle pastel flowers rather than the startling splashes of colour we've come to expect from azaleas of oriental origin, and some wonderful fragrances as well. They look best on the edge of a woodland setting with contrasting evergreens to accent their blossoms. The following North American species all flower from early spring through mid-summer, tolerate wet conditions that would rot all but the toughest hybrids, and can be grown in gardens from New England to Florida. ----

Ed. Note - and our gardens on the Pacific Coast, too, given the correct conditions. Sayward gardeners - here is your chance. I saw many damp creekside gardens in Sayward.

R. vaseyi (Pinkshell Azalea). Thousands of these cover the roadside along the Blue Ridge Parkway of North Carolina. The sunlight sparkles on water dripping from the cliffs and puddling around the bases of the azaleas. Lovely pink flowers on leafless branches in spring, and brilliant burgundy leaves in fall give two seasons of colour.

R. viscosum (Swamp Azalea or Swamp Honeysuckle are common names). Native to mountain, piedmont, and coastal plain swamps and wetlands from Florida to Maine. In the wild it produces runners but this is not likely to happen in a typical well-drained garden. Lovely scented white flowers and bluish foliage give a striking garden accent.

R. atlanticum (Coastal Azalea). A spreading dwarf with pink buds opening to dainty white flowers, native to pine barrens and woodlands from Delaware to Georgia.

T. arborescens (Sweet Azalea) is native to mountain and piedmont swamps, streambanks and moist woods from Georgia to New York. White petals and a strong heliotrope-like perfume make this a distinctive shrub or small tree.

All of these azaleas are dependable performers in the warmer parts of Zone 7 and 8. They are all deciduous. They prefer sun for just a few hours each day and though they tolerate wet fet, they do not like to be in soil that is regularly flooded.