

North Island Rhododendron Society

PO Box 3183 Courtenay BC Canada V9N 5N4

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Articles not credited are by the editor.

2 Nov

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Dave & Marleen Crucq**, 2301 Seabank Rd., Courtenay.

9 Nov

Les Clay, of Langley, who has often brought plants to our annual show and sale, will tell us about growing species rhodos in the garden. Les will be bringing rhodos for sale.

12 Oct

It is not too early to start considering plans for the spring of 2005. Because of the ARS Conference in Victoria April 27 to May 1, our local rhodo show (May 8) and tour of gardens (May 15) will be a little later than usual. Where do we fit into all this activity? We will be asked to help at the conference, and we are looking for people to organize our garden tour.

Norma Buckley of the Victoria Rhodo Society told us of plans for the conference, to be held at the conference centre which is attached to the Empress Hotel

in Victoria. Several nearby hotels have offered special rates, there will be a social event in the Royal B.C. Museum, and **Iona Campanola**, our Lt. Governor, will be giving a tour of Government House and the garden there. There will be tours of famous gardens such as Abkhazi and Butchart, and speakers from several rhodo-growing countries including New Zealand, Tasmania and Scotland.

This conference will be a 5-Star event. It will be 16 years since it was held on Vancouver Island. By the way, 2005 is the 60th Anniversary of the ARS and the 25th Anniversary of the Victoria chapter.

Ingaborg Woodsworth, of Mayo Creek Nursery at Lake Cowichan and our main speaker for the evening, gave us an interesting and stimulating visit to many gardens in the world where rhodos bloom in great profusion. These plants

seem to adapt very well to many varied countries and climates, far from their homes in the mountains of China and India. Ingaborg had a story to tell about every garden (there were dozens) and the slides shown demonstrated many and varied ways that rhodos can fit into any garden from a huge park to a tiny rock garden. Thank you so much, Ingaborg, for visiting our group.

MEMBER NOTES

This time of year, it is fun to spend time at a nursery, deciding what flowering bulbs to put where in the garden. Some members have a large fenced property (so they can grow tulips) and others have only a tiny garden or a patio. I have found over many years that tulips are always eaten by deer, daffodils not as often, species crocus self-seed all over the garden, and hyacinths in pots get frozen if left out in -15C weather. So by the time all these items have been considered, I must adjust my wishes and wants to the

possibilities in my yard.

Much good advice was found in the Oct. 1996 copy of Horticulture magazine. After an early Nov. blizzard finished outdoor gardening for the year, the writer, **Rob Proctor**, decided the smart thing to do was to plant many bulbs in pots. The ideal temperature for chilling bulbs is between 33 and 45 F (about 2-5C), so a root cellar is an ideal place for the pots. An unheated garage or potting shed will do also. (My method used to be to dig a trench, place the pots in it with a board on top, fill in with soil. This works well in our climate when we don't get a foot or two of snow on top).

There are several reasons for failure of bulbs in pots, says **Mr. Proctor**. Improper storage is the first. Too high a temperature means the flowers abort, too low and the bulbs can freeze. Tiny bulbs particularly become dessicated if left too long before planting. Too much or too little water can cause trouble. Moisten the soil when you plant the bulbs, then keep the rain out and check once a month - add a bit of water if necessary.

When the plants show an inch or so of growth, gradually, over several weeks, bring them into the light and warmth. By the time they are several inches high, give them as much light as possible.

Some of this advice is difficult to follow in our climate for we usually have many months of dark days with rain or fog, rather than the bright snowy weather enjoyed by the rest of the continent. Give them the best conditions possible in your house, and don't depend on having flowers for Christmas. In fact it is much nicer to have their cheery faces in January and February.

By the way, if you are blessed with a cool conservatory or greenhouse, try adding a few forget-me-not or wallflower plants for "ground-cover", or have a trailing ivy or two hanging over the sides of the pots.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD (with additions by Editor)

Rosemary sent several very short snippets this time. **As I send this I hear kildeer calling outside in the morning dusk, rather lovely. Well, I think they are kildeer. Ed says that starlings often sound like kildeer, but I refuse to believe that's what makes this lovely call. I see very few starlings hereabouts (isn't that nice?).

Kildeer have a lovely haunting call, and **Rose-Marie's** extensive grassy fields are just the kind of place they enjoy. On one Christmas bird count, we found dozens of these birds on a field at the UBC Farm.

This reminds me it is time to tell everyone to clean and fill the bird feeders. I have found the local winter residents all love black oil sunflower seeds, the pine siskins have given up their interest in thistle seeds, and cracked corn is welcome and cheaper than chick scratch, which is ground too fine these days, so that much of it is wasted. As for the bird seed mixtures - my birds throw the millet seeds away, so much of this is also wasted. I have fed up to 20 jays, 100 juncos, and various other assorted birds in this garden for over 30 years so consider myself and my birds experts.

After reading the rest of **Rose-Marie's** letter, I know why the snippets are abbreviated this month. **We have just taken delivery of a brand new cross-country cart for our horses. During the winter both they and I will learn to use it well and safely, and the next time a club member comes to Sayward perhaps we can take you for a little tour of Hardwicke Island behind one of our charming Fjords.

Thanks, **Rose-Marie**, we look forward to this.

Harry Wright has turned in several interesting articles.

HIPOINT

On the 30th of June 2004 I made my last trip to the garden called "HIPOINT". For those that don't know, this

was the name **Ernie Exner** gave to his rhodo garden. Ernie said that his garden is the highest point in Comox, hence the name.

I knew he had some of the Royston rhodos and his family gave me permission to remove any that the Rhodo society could use.

There is a plan to include another bed at the **Comox Valley Rhodo Garden**, and this would be planted with Vancouver Island hybrids.

As we all know, as time passes plant tags seem to disappear or get misplaced and some plants are difficult to identify. It didn't take long before I had located Royston Rose, Royston Peach, and Royston Reverie. Royston Summertime is in the garden but I could not locate it. R. Peach and R. Reverie are 5 ft. plants and R. Rose is 3 ft. Paul Wurz and I dug them up, brought them to Haida Gold Gardens and now they are resting peacefully in pots, waiting to go to their new home at the Rhodo garden, in a couple of years.

Some of the other rhodos that came from the **Greig Nursery** include Last Rose, augustinii "Marion McDonald", Len Living, Harry Carter, Butterball, George Watling, Buchanan Simpson, Veronica Milner, and the Royston series, Blue, Copper, Opaline, Yellow and Red.

If anyone has any of these plants or ones that I haven't mentioned, that came from the **Greig Nursery**, I would be interested in hearing from you.

Several years ago, I started copying an article "Rhododendrons on a Western Shore", by **Leslie Drew**, published in the RHS Rhodos 1991 with Camellias & Magnolias.

You will find the first parts of Ms. Drew's article in copies of our newsletter, Sept. 2001 - March 2002.

"In gardening generally in B.C. during the early decades of this century, the accomplishments were such that plant hunters visiting on lecture tours were impressed. Col. Bailey, E.H.M. Cox, Frank Kingdon-Ward, and Dr. Joseph Rock among them were full of admiration or clearly astonished at the diversity of plants and the expertise with which they were grown.

The prevailing trend was toward alpines and rock gardens, whose developers would later establish and from time to time infiltrate organized rhodo circles. Gradually, though, rhodo species and hybrids came to be appreciated for private gardens, as new forms and the products of carefully chosen crossings by the great British hybridizers - **Lionel de Rothschild** especially -

became available. Sybil McCulloch recalls her introduction to the genus during the Second World War, when **Mrs. A.C.U. Berry** of Portland, Oregon, lectured in Victoria and showed slides of the first flowering of plants she had grown from seed collected by Dr. Rock: 'I suddenly realized that there were rhodos other than 'Pink Pearl'.'

After the war, most of the plant stock for B.C. came from Holland, until stringent regulations about soil importation dried up this source. Then the Pacific Northwest took over, led by work in its universities and by hybridizers in Washington and Oregon such as Bill Whitney, Hjalmar Larson and Halfdan Lem.

As the almost exclusive suppliers, the American nurserymen found a surprisingly lucrative market right at their back door. The population of BC is now 3 million and every gardener wants at least a few rhodos, especially new medium- and small-sized hybrids.

By now, collectors and hybridizers have learned much about the diverse growing conditions within the generally favorable south coast climate. The soils vary greatly, moisture-retentive loams on the Fraser Valley delta, rock outcrops on the Gulf Islands, thin soils on most parts of Vancouver

Island. In their attempts to compensate for disadvantageous soils, growers here have not had the wealth of deciduous native trees compared with, say, England or the American Northeast.

The rainfall, while high from autumn to spring, can be extremely low in summer months. In a rainshadow region such as the southeastern tip of Vancouver Island, the 30-year average rainfall for July is less than 2.5 cm (1 in) and scarcely more in an average May, June and August.

Growers are rather envious of **Ken Gibson** on his conical hill of rhodos at Tofino, on the west coast of the Island close by **George Fraser's** old haunts. Tofino's average annual rainfall amounts to 322 cm (127 in), from a winter high of 46 cm (18.2 in) to 8cm (3.3 in) in July. With an average temperature of 6.4C (43.5F, Gibson is able to grow most *Maddenii*s outdoors all year.

For other growers, however, the light summer rains are worrying. 'As our human population increases, we will have more water restrictions in summer', a correspondent

writes from Seattle, where the average July rainfall is also less than 2.5cm (1 in). I think that we in the Pacific Northwest should give more attention to drought-resistant plants'. His words have a bearing on what **Dr. Hermann Vaartnou** has learned in growing big-leaf species in his sheltered Oak Bay garden - that they reach flowering age and fare just as well as in every other favorable climate, given enough light and plenty of water in the summer months. This possibility of a water shortage in the future (and the more immediate threat of powdery mildew, of which **Kenneth Cox** gave warning at the ARS convention in Victoria in 1989, are the major concerns today."

Ed. Note: More than ten years have passed since the above was written, and the remarks regarding summer drought and powdery mildew are of more concern every year. As we all know, we have just gone through 4 VERY dry summers on this coast, but the 30-year averages and the 60-year averages tell the same story. Powdery mildew attacks some rhodos and not others. I dug up **R. Virginia Richards** and threw her on the burning

pile. I chopped R. Unique down to 6" stumps, and this (very dry) summer she sprouted many new healthy leaves. Go figure!

MORE GOOD IDEAS FROM FINE GARDENING MAGAZINE

Months ago I lost my favorite little "scratcher", but my husband found it just as we lit a bonfire. How did it get into that pile? This winter I am going to follow some good advice, and will clean all my hand tools and paint bands of bright colours on the handles. How about using dental floss for tying delicate little tendrils of climbing plants onto their lattices. The stuff is almost invisible. A small envelope moistener from an office-supply store makes a handy weed-killer container. The bottle is easy to fill, and the foam applicator is easier to use than a paint-brush or eyedropper. I found this one incredibly hard to believe (FG #91) but it is worth trying. The writer spread a good dollop of clear silicone caulking compound onto each knee of a new pair of jeans, and they lasted 19 years in the nursery business.