

North Island Rhododendron Society



PO Box 3183 Courtenay BC Canada V9N 5N4

Vol.19 No.2 October 2004

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(Articles not credited are by the editor.)

Coming Events:

Oct 5

Executive meeting at the home of **Noni and Dave Godfrey**, 4686 Montrose Dr., Courtenay. (south end of Royston, Bayton on the map.)

Oct 12

Our guest speaker will be **Ingaborg Woodsworth**, who owns Mayo Creek Nursery at Lake Cowichan. She will speak on Rhodo Gardens in my Travels Around the World. She is also a specialist in perennials, and will bring plants for sale.

MEMBER NOTES

You will note some changes in the list of executive members. That is because I made some mistakes. Sorry. They are now correct.

Sept 7

A very enjoyable evening. First **Rob Argall** reminded us it is time to consider the bulb garden for early spring. There are always new daffodils and tulips to be bought, but don't forget the "little" bulbs - crocus, chionodoxa, scilla, alliums short and tall, and many others. Rob has a high fence around his property to keep the deer out.

Our guest **Garth Widemeier** gave an enthusiastic description of his travels in Nepal; and showed many wonderful slides of not just rhodos but the mountains - the buildings - the people, especially the cute smiling children. Nepal is a country only 60 miles wide. One can stand on one mountain-side, and look across a deep valley to another range of mountains, many almost as high as Everest. There are hillsides covered with 40 ft. Rhodo trees, covered with brilliant red or pink flowers. What a sight! Many thanks, Garth, our Rhodo members had a wonderful evening .

SLUG REPORT

Here is the last slug report for this fall, from my garden. Three years ago the property was absolutely covered with slugs - I gathered up 50 or more twice a day. The following two years there were fewer, and this year I found only 5 or 6 per day. There were almost none, of course, during the

extended period of hot weather, but as soon as the rain came in August, they appeared. I am talking about the monster black or brown slugs. The tiny ones eat where I can't see them, and the banana slugs live in the woods and do no harm in the garden. When these large slugs came into the garden about 4 years ago, they were all black. Now, they are various shades of brown, to match the dried leaves falling from the trees.

TIME TO FEED THE BIRDS

By Sept. 20 the first Juncos arrived in our garden, also increased numbers of towhees and various other sparrows including song and fox, white- and golden-crowned. The purple finches and Steller's Jays arrived also. Time to put out bird feeders if you don't fill them year-round. No need for poisons in the garden, the birds clean up the bad bugs and their eggs.

The latest copy of Amateur Gardening had a picture of a beautiful bird feeder, shaped like a globe with a column of bird food in the middle. It is made of gold, with diamonds for decoration, and costs 500 000 POUNDS ! Well over \$1,000,000. They didn't mention who bought it!

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

This summer is providing the best display of berries on the mountain ash trees that I have seen for years. Normally the birds gobble up the fruit of the red-berried varieties as soon as it has coloured, but not this year. The abundance of fruit of all types must be the reason, though it does seem that most of

our summer resident birds have left early. In any case, all the mountain ash, or rowan trees are looking entirely splendid.

Our native *Sorbus sitchensis*, the Sitka mountain-ash, co-exists with the introduced European *S. Aucuparia* in this area, and the scores of volunteers that appear on our property are no doubt hybrids of the two. Being very fond of the rowan tree, I save most of these volunteers, popping them into the hedgerow or a wild area. In addition, my garden has a few specimens of the eastern North American native *S. Decora*, with its vibrant fall colour, the Korean *S. Commixta*, which has especially splendid berries, and the white-to pink berried *S. Hupehensis*, both the species and the UBC selection 'Pink Pagoda'. My introduction to the species *S. Hupehensis* came on a September walk through Van Dusen Gardens. Their specimens are very large, and from a distance it looked as if the trees were festooned with huge white trusses of wisteria-like blossoms. A closer examination revealed these to be berries in abundance.

In spite of the beauties of the introduced species, I think my favorite rowan is a rapidly-growing volunteer that sprouted on top of a fence-post, a new and freshly-painted fence-post at that. After I carefully extricated it from that unlikely nursery and planted it in a back field, it has grown into a handsome little tree that feels a bit like a special friend.

Every summer I hear at least one gardener mentioning a volunteer plant that threatens to overtake a corner of their garden. *Impatiens hawkeri* is usually the culprit, though it is a handsome one. This tall (3 ft) annual has a thick, fleshy stem, quite reddish, and pretty,

pale pink, orchid-like flowers. The seedpods burst when you touch them, spraying seeds far and wide, so of course the plant is wildly invasive and persistent. However, it is easy to control. I have a patch in a shaded, half-wild part of the garden where it flourishes in the midsummer heat, providing some fresh colour in August. Before the plants bloom, I usually pull out about half of them, so the remaining ones have room to develop. Most of the seeds pop into a creek or the lawn, so they don't become a problem. Common names I have heard include the overused 'Poor Man's Orchid', and 'Touch Me Not', though there is another *impatiens* species, *I. Noli-tangere*, which also carries that name. In Sayward the name 'Hubert's Hoppers' persists, after my father, who first grew the plants from seeds my brother brought home from his travels.

GEORGE FRASER DAY Saturday 29 May 2004.

Dave and Noni Godfrey attended this event and kindly delivered a report for the newsletter.

Saturday, May 29 was the fourth annual George Fraser Day celebration in our former hometown of Ucluelet. For those members unable to attend, I was asked to provide a news article of the event.

After all the wonderful weather we have been experiencing, Saturday turned out to be the one day that Mother Nature decided to water the gardens. Oh well, true Westcoasters never let a little dampness get in the way of a good time.

At 10:30 in the morning, most guests gathered at the George Fraser Memorial Park on the waterfront, for the opening ceremonies. A piper and RCMP escort led the procession of dignitaries to the ceremony. It

was a very special occasion, as it marked the 150th year since George Fraser's birth. Following the welcome address by Ucluelet's Mayor, Dianne St. Jacques, the placement of Rhododendron trusses was made at the foot of the memorial stone by invited guests, as well as past and present members of the George Fraser committee. Only a few sprinkles began as the ceremony came to an end, and a walking tour of the former Fraser homestead and gardens began. Just enough moisture to dampen the ground, but not the spirits of those in attendance.

Shortly before noon, the guest of honour, the Honorable **Iona Campagnola**, Lt. Governor for B.C., arrived at the Secondary School Bandroom where a delicious luncheon was prepared. Invited guests, included NIRS President Harry Wright and wife Gwen, Dave and Noni Godfrey, and ARS President Mike Stewart and his wife, were part of the private receiving line to meet Her Honour and have photographs taken before lunch.

The community and First Nations Chiefs of the Ucluelet and Toquaht Bands made several presentations to Her Honour following the formal luncheon. In her address, she praised the committee for such a wonderful tribute to Mr. Fraser and all that he had accomplished during his lifetime. The Lt. Governor is a very warm and personable lady, who took the opportunity to speak with each of the 150 attendees individually, including the members of the school band who provided the music.

As a Life Member of the Ucluelet Lions Club and a founding member of the George Fraser Project, I had the privilege of introducing guest speaker Mr. **Bill Dale**, during the afternoon Heritage Fair at the adjacent UAC Community Hall. Bill gave an

interesting slide presentation and talk on **George Fraser**, his history, and his contributions to the Rhododendron Societies worldwide.

ARS President, **Mike Stewart**, made a special presentation of his book to Her Honour, before her journey back to Victoria. In departing, Ms. Campagnola expressed her great pleasure in having the opportunity to attend the event, and wished the committee well in future celebrations. Despite some rain, the day's celebrations were a tremendous success, enjoyed by all who attended.

BUYING RHODODENDRONS

The December 1990 issue of our newsletter had this useful article by **Harry Wright** - just as useful today as when he wrote it, and October is a good month for buying and planting rhodos. Thanks Harry.

"Too many of us are impulse buyers and especially after we have become addicted to rhodos. Once this condition begins, we can make many poor choices which in the long run cost us money. What seems to help me through the condition is to prepare a shopping list every winter. I spend many hours going through my collection of Rhodo books, and as a result of this enjoyable research, prepare a list of 12 plants which I MUST have. (Editors Note: 14 years on, I doubt if Harry has room for 12 more!)

My main concern is plant hardiness. I live in a low area with good soil, but it is a frost pocket, which means that early blooming plants usually have their flowers frosted and if a late flush of growth appears in late summer it can get burned by an early frost.

My second concern is foliage and habit. I enjoy my rhodos 12

months of the year and some of the special ones would not be discarded even if they didn't bloom because they are "good looking plants" year-round. The fact that each variety has its own plant habit, leaf texture and colour means that many rhodos can be used in the landscape.

In most cases, the mature size can be judged by the plant habit and leaf size; dwarfs and semi-dwarfs can be separated from the large leafed, taller growing ones. This is noticeable even in a young plant, and by proper placing at planting time they will not have to be shuffled every year or so.

I have been to many plant sales and it seems that when I ask someone why they bought a certain plant the answer is "Oh, I like the name". This is all very good for the seller, but usually the poor plant will suffer because the buyer doesn't know where to plant this beautiful creation.

The toughest part of a rhodo's life is the time spent in a plastic pot. So before buying, do a little home-work and find out the type of rhodo you want and what the rhodo expects - sun or shade, back of the border or front of rock garden. This way the plant will be content, you will be pleased, and your investment will be protected.

GARDENING HINTS FROM "FINE GARDENING" MAGAZINE

Fall is a good time to wander around the garden, and using old plastic labels or pieces of Venetian blinds, note plants to be cleaned up, dug up, or divided. Plastic bags with zippers, which had contained blankets or comforters, make fine mini-greenhouses for cuttings or seedlings. Now we have wild rabbits in the area, we need to protect newly planted tree trunks. Cut the tops and bottoms from soft

drink plastic bottles, drill a few ventilation holes, and snap a bottle around a tree trunk. Styrofoam "peanuts" are handy for the bottom of pots, but are inclined to "fly away". You can sew a few into pieces of landscape fabric, or use chunks or blocks of foam, cut to the size of the pot bottom. Instead of plant labels which the jays are inclined to toss around, use smooth small rocks. Print plant name on top and bottom so that after a year, when the ink has faded on top, you can reverse the rock. Use a 5-gal. Plastic bucket for storing and carrying tools around. Glue an old round cushion to the top, so that when you need "a little rest" you have a comfortable seat on hand. A lady in Michigan swears black pepper shaken on lily leaves and flower buds deters the deer. I wonder I have often waited in vain to see a new lily flower. They never bother my L. Auratum, but that is because the flowers are 8-12 feet above the ground.

Ferns are among the plants that withstand drought better than most. Here are some lovely ferns with coloured leaves. Japanese painted fern (*Athyrium nipponicum* var. *Pictum*), Autumn fern (*Dryopteris erythrosora*) and East India Holly fern (*Arachnoides simplicior* 'Variegata'). Here is a new one 'Ghost' fern (*Athyrium* 'Ghost'), which is a hybrid between the Japanese painted fern and Lady fern. All of these are hardy in our area. They make lovely rhodo companions.

EUPHORBIAS

People often ask the name of a low-growing euphorbia with masses of brilliant yellow flowers, one of the first plants to bloom in spring. It is *Euphorbia polychroma*. This plant dies down completely for the winter, and

soon after the first green leaves appear in spring, the flowers bloom. Snow and frost have no effect on it, whereas the 'evergreen' euphorbias sometimes get bashed down by wet snow. But talking of euphorbias, if I see a plant of E.'Jade Dragon'I will have to buy it. This plant grows to 30", and the yellow flowers have bright red "eyes". The general effect is of hundreds of little dragons peering out of their green neck ruffles.

I always pick up about 6 issues of Fine Gardening at a time at the library, and have noticed that for the past year or so, the magazine has changed - for the better I think. There are lots of hints from readers, and advice for people living in various parts of the US - north west, north east, south west etc. I find that most of the recommended plants can be grown here. Look for plants recommended for hot dry summers, for we seem to be getting more of these lately.

NOTES by the Editor

What did you think of our summer? Very hot and dry for months, then, suddenly, in late August, FALL!
I think that rain saved the lives of many plants. Most of the rhodos have fat flower buds on them, many other shrubs and trees look

as they should this time of year, and the lawn recovered nicely though it had not been watered at all during the spring and summer. Plants are remarkable creatures!

Now it is time to catch up on the autumn chores, like moving plants, dividing huge hostas, pulling out the few shrubs that died, and weeding. Some plants, that love the sun, became garden thugs. Some plants I wish I had never planted, for they have expanded, and seeded, and now cover some areas. The only thing to do is pull them out and cover the ground with bark mulch. Any bits that poke out in the spring will be pulled out again.

I lost several little rhodos - small plants with tiny leaves, and one Yak that got too much sun. Several rhodos were badly sunburned - Sir Charles Lemon does not like spring sunshine on his newly opened leaves. I must remember to cover him with a curtain every day in May!

Hydrangeas need special attention. I often mention we are on a shallow well, so water is precious and even with a sprinkler system each bed in our garden is lucky to have one drink a week in dry weather. So some of the hydrangeas looked very sad, with leaves that droop in the sun, and

few flowers. But H. quercifolia doesn't complain, nor does H. aspera. I must shove the hose into the rest as often as possible - are they worth the trouble in a dry garden? Probably not.

I am gradually replacing these miffy plants with ornamental grasses and artemisias. The garden will soon look much different. Grasses are wonderful, especially the various Miscanthus. They can grow into huge clumps, are decorative most of the year, and are hardy, They don't seed themselves (in this climate anyway) and stay in clumps. If they get too big, just chop a piece off the edge and share with a friend.

Some grasses are evergreen, but many disappear into the ground for the winter, and are easy to divide in January. I lost a huge Pampas grass one year, following the advice in a book that said to burn the old clump in January. The leaves, of course, have such sharp edges that cutting them down is dangerous to your arms. But the book didn't mention that on the West Coast, new pampas leaves are already sprouting in January! Miscanthus, on the other hand, can be cut back and divided in spring, (no sharp edges) for the new leaves don't appear until May or so