

North Island Rhododendron Society

PO Box 3183 Courtenay BC Canada V9N 5N4

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R macrophyllum

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Aug 31 Executive meeting at the home of **Paul Wurz**, 4367 Gordon Rd., Campbell River. All executive members from the past year, and newly-elected people, are invited.

Sept. 7 Regular meeting, with guest speaker **Garth Widemeier**. Please note change of date. Garth will be giving us interesting information on a recent visit to Nepal.

June 12 A lovely picnic was held at the home of **Pauline and Dick Bonney**. The weather was not perfect, but when did that deter a gardener? The garden looked lovely, the food was good, and everyone enjoyed the evening. **Paul Wurz and Don Law** were presented with ARS Bronze medals. Both men have given years of work to the Society, and both were well deserved of the medals.

MEMBER NOTES:

Dave Godfrey reported on a work party at the Rhododendron Garden on Saturday June 19:

“About 18 members came out to

deadhead the plants and replace aging wooden borders along the paths with new rocket bricks.

The weather was gorgeous, and working in the shade of the trees made it even more enjoyable. With about 3/4 of the the path work finished by noon, it was decided that a follow-up work party would be held the following Monday to complete the task. A smaller group of 6 members made short work of the remaining bricks and had the job completed in less than two hours.

The City of Courtenay, which supplies most materials for the garden maintenance, will be asked to top dress the paths with fresh gravel and the gardens with mulch. The attractiveness of the new brick borders along the paths will surely appeal to those who travel through the area. Members are encouraged to visit the garden for a look at the new improvements, and if a weed is found, please pull it.”

SUDDEN OAK DEATH UPDATE

A June issue of Amateur Gardening has given us the latest information on Sudden Oak Death. It is thought that one cause for proliferation of this problem is that people in many countries of the world have become passionate about gardening. Plant - and soil - and plant destroying fungi such as *Phytophthora ramorum*, are being moved from one country to another at a terrifying rate.

“This disease was first identified in 1995 in California, when trees started turning brown and weeping deep red sticky sap from cankerous wounds on their trunks, before dying. By 2001 it was estimated tens of thousands of mature trees had died and whole forests were

wiped out. Its spread was confined to the Western States of the US so the EU banned imports from affected areas.

Unfortunately this move proved fruitless. Comparisons between the disease in the US and that identified in Europe in 1993 among rhodos and camellias in Dutch and German nurseries proved that two different strains of the same organism were at work. By 2003, over 300 nurseries and garden centres in the UK were found to be carrying plants infected with the European strain. It was also being hosted by wild (*Ponticum*) rhodos before infecting valuable trees.

The two strains differ in the way they affect the plant. The US type infects mature trees through the bark, killing the plant's transport system for nutrients and moisture, leaving the tree to starve to death. It seems to be spread via infected soils and composts. American scientists blame composts imported around plants from Asia for the outbreak.

The European strain, also probably from Asia, causes leaf blotching and stem dieback, and although more vigorous, doesn't always result in plant death. But it is much more mobile, producing infectious spores that can exist in the soil for years or travel by wind or water..

Across the US, Europe and Australia thousands of plant species including oak, horse chestnut, beech, rhodo and camellia are known to be susceptible. Fungicides are effective at suppressing but not wiping out the disease. To combat spread scientists are calling for stringent controls on plant movement, quarantine periods and a move toward local production and

propagation “.. The Canadian Agriculture Dept. has always been very strict about bringing plants in soil into the country. For the past several years they have not allowed certain plants such as rhodos and camellias in from California and Oregon. Bare-rooted plants or cuttings, wrapped in damp paper, in a plastic bag, will probably be allowed, but with a devastating fungus like this trying to sneak into the country, it is best to buy locally from a nurseryman who propagates cuttings from his own established plants.

DR. JACK ELLIOTT

Anyone with an interest in Alpine plants has heard of this man, who in 1944 was one of the first people to join the fledgling Alpine Garden Society in Britain. His elder brother Roy was Editor of the AGS Journal for many years. Jack was President of the AGS in 1985, then President of the Hardy Plant Society. He wrote for many gardening journals, also many books including “Alpines in the Open Garden”, “Bulbs for the Rock Garden”, “The Smaller Perennials” and “The Woodland Garden”.. He died in March at the age of 79.

POTS THAT ROT

“A new biodegradable plastic pot made from polymerised vegetable oil could spell the end of mountains of unwanted containers. ECOVAS plant pots should break down after 6 months and can be composted with other garden waste. They are manufactured by injection moulding, which produces a stable product with a smooth surface”.

Note: These two items from the June 2004 issue of “The Garden”, journal of the RHS.

REVIEW OF SUMMER 2004

I know - we are only about half-way through this dry, dry period, the 3d very dry summer in a row. Looking back through my weather notes I know every summer is dry here. We can depend on at least 3 dry summer months. However, this

year, every month starting with February has been dryer than average, and I am at the point where I will dig up some rhodos in the fall, and replace them with heat-loving grasses and artemesias. Everyone is complaining about water - lack of. Our well is very low, so each garden bed gets a drink once a week. People whose water is metered are complaining also. People with green lawns this summer - well, you can imagine what the rest of us are saying. Native plants, of course, are revelling in the heat and turning out masses of berries. I weep for gardeners who lost their Cordylines last summer. Give them up? Or start again with a small plant that can be taken into a protected corner for the winter? Ah, that’s what makes gardening one of the least boring of activities. The new cordyline will be safe for 5 - 10 - 20 - years, who knows.

MY RHODY’S TOO BIG

June seems a long time ago, but I did write the first part of a useful article from the Vancouver Rhodo Society newsletter of April 2000. Here is the rest of it, describing ways to cut down the size of a plant.

1. Prune it. Is the plant too oppressive or too crowded? Prune for good health and good looks. First take out dead wood. Take out a few rubbing/crossing branches. Take off some of the lowest branches. Concentrate on thinning out the worst, most interfering branches which crowd into nearby shrubs, the house, window, gutter or walkway. This might just do the trick.

2. Move it. Moving is the only logical solution for situations where shrubs have been planted too close together to begin with. Rhodos have broad, flat fibrous root systems, a dream to move. It may require 3-4 strong backs and a tarp to slide the plant out of its old home and into the new one. Don’t be afraid to cut off 50% or more of the roots, give it immediate watering, and copious

watering for the first year after moving. This job can be done any time of year except in frosty or very dry conditions.

3. Selective reduction. Is it under a window? Thin and shorten a little every year. Locate the tallest branch and follow it down inside the shrub to where it meets a lower and shorter lateral. Cut it off there. Repeat with the next tallest branch, and continue until you feel you have gone too far. Quit, and come back next year.

4. Stop it in its tracks. If the plant borders high traffic areas such as paths or stairs, try snapping off the new growth. After the plant has finished blooming, you can pinch out the new end-bud or let the new supple shoot extend and snap it off soon thereafter. This must be done every year to restrict growth.

5. Arborize. A too-big rhodo can be trimmed up and turned into a nice small tree. The plant should be very big and old, and have a thick curvaceous trunk. Cut out all dead wood, and perhaps thin the upper canopy in order to prevent a “lollypop” look.

6. Adjust your attitude. Most often the only reason a rhodo is too big is because someone said so. A personal opinion. In this case, the cheapest and best solution is to learn to appreciate “mature” plants.

JAPANESE FISH CAKES (Basic recipe)

Noni Godfrey’s fabulous fish cakes were a big hit at the annual party in June, and many people begged for the recipe. Here it is!

4 cups ground fish (half white fish, half salmon)
2 tbsps. Salt
2 eggs (one at a time)
1/4 cup cornstarch dissolved in 1/2 cup water
1/2 cup sugar
1 tsp Accent (optional)
3/4 cup milk

3 green onions (chopped finely)
 2 carrots (grated finely)
 1 tbsp. Parsley
 1-2 tsp. Sesame seeds
 Mix all ingredients in the order given- mix with hands. It helps to chop the onions and grate carrots ahead of time. Noni normally triples the recipe. (If you're going to go to all this trouble you might as well make lots!!!)
 Noni & Dave have made them with fresh fish and thawed fish. After preparing the fish mixture, package in Saran wrap and double wrap into Ziplock bags and freeze if not used right away. Noni normally packages into 3 packs per each basic recipe.

For cooking, thaw or use directly from preparation. Shape into 4-5 inch logs and flatten - roughly 2" wide by 1" deep. (Will be sticky on fingers!). Each package makes about 4-5 logs.

Fry in approximately 1/3" of preheated oil in fry pan. Turn over after about 5 minutes and cook the other side the same. They will be fairly dark when cooked. Drain well on paper towels, cool on cake rack. Refrigerate, and slice the flattened logs when cool.

EUPHORBIAS

I am constantly on the lookout for plants that will be happy in dry soil and dry summers. Euphorbias seem to fill the bill. Mine have had almost no water this dry summer, yet look as handsome now as when they were in full flower. Helen Chesnut (Colonist, 10 June 04) described some of the new forms of E. Characias (of which C. Wulfenii is the most commonly grown). "Several interesting named varieties of E. Characias have become available in recent years. All of them have more compact habit than the species and subspecies wulfenii. A sampler:
 Portugese Velvet grows to 36", large mounds of velvety blue-grey leaves and bronze-gold flower clusters.

Black Pearl, heads of green bracts with black centres, 24-28".
 Burrow Silver, also 24-28", grey-green leaves edged in creamy yellow, whitish flowers with golden eyes, a slow grower.
 Humpty Dumpty, same size as Black Pearl, has greenish bracts with bright red eyes.
 Forescate, 16-24", is a miniature E. Wulfenii with big heads of chartreuse yellow bracts.

The plants have a bold impact in the garden, whether used as single specimens, massed in ornamental beds or grown to mix with shrubs and small trees. They are good container plants, and flower stems are excellent for cutting. Evergreen euphorbia plants are easily maintained in mint condition simply by cutting the flowering stems back hard, leaving about 6" stem, after blooming. Take care not to touch stems that have not flowered. They will bloom the following spring."

Ed. Note: I learn something every time I read Helen's column. I had complained that snow bashes down the tall evergreen stems of some of these plants. I should have cut back the ones that had bloomed. Of course the easiest ones are those that die completely back into the soil for the winter, such as E. Polychroma, one of the first plants to bloom in spring.
 And remember to always wear gloves when working around euphorbias - that milky sap irritates the skin of many people.

PROVEN RHODO PERFORMERS

Have you made up your list of the best rhodos in your garden, for Harry Wright's list?
 Here are some that never fail in Nanaimo gardens.
 Point Defiance
 Nancy Evans
 Teddy Bear
 Sir Charles Lemon
 Lem's Cameo
 One Thousand Butterflies
 President Roosevelt

Loderi King George
 Hon. Jean Marie de Montague
 Augustinii

Deciduous Azaleas Cecile, Klondyke and R. Luteum.
 Evergreen Azaleas Hino crimson, Hino white and Vuyk's Rosy Red.

You may not agree with all of these. What are your favorites?

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It seems like ages since our last official NIRS rhodo activity which was the Potluck social, held at the Bonney's. In spite of some spattering of showers the evening was a great success, and enjoyed by all those that attended. Your garden was at its finest, and most of us did manage to get a garden tour - thanks Pauline and Dick!

As your new President I would like to pass on thanks for those members who have finished their term on the Executive. Bonnie in charge of the library, Dick in his position on the revenue table, Ann in charge of ways and means, and Gwen and Evelyn in Social - without your assistance it would have been difficult to operate. This will be the first term since NIRS was formed that Harry will not be on the executive. He is getting a very well deserved break, and I am sure his intense involvement will continue. Congratulations are in order for Harry is the new Director of District 1.

I would also like to welcome the new members of the executive, and am looking forward to working with members who have not been on the executive in the past.

Hopefully, all the rhodo and garden enthusiasts have managed to keep their plants watered and healthy in our wonderful but very dry summer. Hoping for rain doesn't occur often in this climate. This is always a very interesting time to walk

through the garden and see the new bud set for next year. If mildew is going to be a problem on your plants it is likely that it will start showing up.

If you haven't heard, the new Executive Director of the ARS is a Canadian!

Finally, I would hope that all our members will be filled with enthusiasm, and become involved in our rhodo society in the following year.

Paul Wurz, President

MEMBER NOTE

The ARS has a new Executive Director, **Laura Grant** of Toronto. Now perhaps we will have more connections to our rhodo friends in Eastern Canada. Our closest friends and neighbours have always been in Washington and Oregon, so it will be interesting to learn more of soil conditions and weather in Ontario and east. Maybe we can exchange news letters.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

Rose-Marie has sent information on this dry summer (even in Sayward) and how her plants are coping.

“As this extraordinary growing season winds down, I am still marvelling at weather that began in April. There doesn't seem to have been a spring and summer like this in living memory. Whether it's the result of global warming, an aberration, or simply part of a cycle, as gardeners our concern is with making the best of this sudden change in our environment's rules. Sayward has had more rain than our southern neighbours, but as I write this in mid-August, my grass is brown, birch and alder leaves are falling, and watering is becoming a serious issue. I think my well can stand up to it, but watering is so seldom required here that the

challenge is to find enough hoses and sprinklers, and the time to arrange them.

It's interesting to see which plants are coping and which aren't. The hostas are usually looking rather tired by this time, and this year most look very tired indeed. The exceptions are 'Frances Williams', 'June', 'Halcyon' and 'Paul's Glory'. A wildly expensive perennial I couldn't resist last year, *cimicifuga simplex* 'Hillside Black Beauty' is proving itself worth every penny, standing up to sun and wind, in a bed that has not once been watered, with remarkable elegance. Near it is *Brunnera macrophylla* 'Jack Frost', another expensive perennial introduced in recent years. It too is justifying its price and popularity - a beautiful, garden-worthy plant indeed.

At the other end of the scale, the perennial lavateras have been disappointing. They should love this hot weather, but most were nearly killed during the winter, and by the time they struggled back into existence, it was too late to put on the dramatic show we have come to expect from them. I've placed annual lavatera to fill in the gaps around them, and they are doing the job admirably. There is a new annual lavatera on the market that is shorter (Novella series) but I am partial to the big, vigorous 'Silver Cup' (pink) and 'Ruby Regis' (deep rose pink).

Fortunately, all the rhodos seem to be coping with the heat and drought. The surprising exceptions are mostly deciduous azaleas, all of which are looking quite beleaguered even when well-watered.

The hibiscus are having a banner year, blooming prolifically and

beautifully over a month earlier than usual. *Hibiscus syriacus* 'Blushing Bride' was on the verge of deportation two years ago - by the time it bloomed, the rainy season turned all its double pink flowers to soggy browned ones before they fully opened. This year, it has been a mass of stunning bloom since the end of July, even providing large bouquets for the house.

I read in Canadian Gardening that a new hybrid tea called 'Halle' won a Gold medal at the World Rose Convention in Glasgow last year. I wonder if anyone knows the origin of this plant's name, as I am curious if it was named after a legendary German horse that jumped its rider to every prize in the sport in the mid 1900's. In Europe anyway, horses and horticulture often find room in the same heart. Rosemary Verey, for example, was an elite equestrienne before an accident ended her competitive career. Here in Sayward, when I'm behind on the weeding or deadheading, it's usually because our two Fjord horses have carried off the gardener in body as well as in spirit.

On the subject of roses, most of mine are having a banner year, apparently loving the sun and heat. Even the single-blooming 'Constance Spry' has been blooming all summer, on new growth that is constantly appearing. All the English shrub roses are in constant bloom. A surprise, however, is 'New Dawn'. That reliable climber normally blooms almost non-stop from June through November, yet this year it hasn't produced a flower bud since the end of July. Perhaps, like many coastal dwellers, it's simply not at its best in the heat