

# North Island Rhododendron Society



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*R macrophyllum*

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Articles not credited are by the editor.

## 5 April

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Diana Scott, 6432 Eagles Dr. Courtenay. Drive down Coleman Rd., turn left onto Left Rd., and go past Whitaker Rd. where Brian Zimmerman and the Steeles live.

## 13 April

### NOTE CHANGE OF DATE

Harry Wright has an educational session planned. Be ready to work in pairs to identify various rhodos by slides or trusses.

## 8 March

Steve Hootman showed slides of many wonderful rhodos and gave advice as to what their preference of soil or aspect.

He told us where they live in the mountains of China and India, height of plant, leaf size - these plants were all species rhodos, which you could see are just as beautiful (and probably much hardier) than many of the hybrids. A very enjoyable evening was spent listening to Steve, the most enthusiastic and knowledgeable person we have met.

Ed. Note: A friend complained, the other day, that his 5 year old *R. pseudochrysanthum* hasn't bloomed yet. Most of the books don't tell us, but many species rhodos do not bloom for their first 10 or 15 years - after that time they bloom heavily and dependably.

Bob Argall reminded us that we should decide, very soon, what our preferences are for "Rhodo of the Year" 2008. Rhodos have already been chosen for the next few years.

## MEMBER NOTES

I joined an enthusiastic group of gardeners at the show in Nanaimo several weeks ago. There were many interesting booths of seeds, plants, garden tools and furniture, large pots, honey ... We attended lively lectures by Judy Newton and David Tarrant. Judy had slides of 10 each of large trees, small trees (large shrubs), 10 small shrubs, climbers, bulbs and perennials. She had interesting stories and advice on how to grow all these plants, some new on the market, all available at one of the many interesting nurseries on the Island.

David had picked huge bunches of shrub and tree branches in bloom, at UBC, and while telling us something about each one, made them into a giant flower arrangement. Most entertaining. David will be at the Horticulture Society meeting in the Filberg Centre, April 12 - the reason our regular April meeting night was changed to the 13th.

## ORCHID SHOW

April 15,16,17 are the dates for this showing of fantastic orchid

flowers, set up by members of the Central Island Orchid Society. It will be held at the Country Club Centre, 3200 N. Is. Hwy, Nanaimo. This is a judged show - the judges work Friday morning. There are plants for sale and lots of free advice by members of the club, as well as a huge section of beautiful flowers and plants, demonstrating the variety of species and hybrid orchids grown by club members.

## RHODO SHOW April 16

Mt. Arrowsmith Rhodo Society will be holding their annual Rhodo Show and Sale at the Qualicum Beach Curling Club, 644 Memorial Ave. If you can attend the Orchid Show on April 16, you can take in this Rhodo show on the way home (but get there before 2:00 p.m.)

## PLANT SALE April 23

The Oyster River Garden Society will hold its annual plant sale at the Black Creek Recreation Hall on Black Creek Rd. Doors open 10:00. Proceeds to aid various community projects.

## AMERICAN RHODO SOCIETY CONVENTION April 27 - May 1

Here is a chance to see and hear rhodo "experts" from around the world, and find many choice plants for sale. There will be lectures, garden visits and a Breeders' Round Table. Plan to spend a day or two at the fantastic show. Please bring back a report for the newsletter.

After rushing around to all these plant shows, please remember to save some energy for our own show (May 8) and tour of gardens in the Black Creek-Miracle Beach area (May 15). Remember also to sign up for helping at one of these venues.

I know everyone has some "garden treasures" that they want to share with friends. Bring a few pots of these to grace our Members' Table at the May 8 Rhodo Show and Sale. Dave Godfrey says "At this time of year, many are considering dividing their perennials or potting up new off-shoots. Please consider putting a few aside for the club's table at the sale. If members can't participate at the sale, they are welcome to drop their contributions off around 9 am at the hall, or arrange for another member to pick them up and bring them down".

Ken and Dot Gibson have sent along the sad news that Pat Berg has died. Many of us have met and enjoyed the company of Pat and Warren Berg at rhodo shows over the years.

A reminder that our Annual Meeting will be held at the home of Pauline and Dick Bonney, 2393 Seabank, Courtenay, on May 10. Bernie Guyader will be Noniminations Chair, and positions up for election include Secretary, Membership, and Program.

### **GARDENS WEST**

I have just received and read my April copy, and found to my delight that Leslie and John Cox, Black Creek residents and members of the Oyster River Garden Society, are writing articles and photographing garden plants for the magazine. They have a tiny garden, crammed full of fascinating examples of hundreds of plant varieties. Leslie

also produces interesting garden

products such as herbal teas and yummy lavender-flavoured cookies. Don't miss a visit to this garden - phone ahead 337 - 8051.

### **SAYWARD SNIPPETS**

I found out that a snippet sent to me for March ended up in cyber space for a few weeks, but because of the continued cool weather we are experiencing, it is not too late.

About 5 years ago, I purchased a plant of Wintersweet, *Chimonanthus praecox* 'Luteus'. It was one of those occasions (all too frequent) when I knew I was pushing my luck, but had to try anyway. *Chimonanthus* is hardy only to Zone 7, which should make it all right for Sayward, but many Zone 7 plants lose their flower buds here, if not their existence. As wintersweet blooms in the dead of winter, it is not a very wise choice for my frosty hollow.

However it is its very winter-blooming nature, complete with a heady fragrance, that has long made it a favorite plant. Years ago in Vancouver I daily passed an established wintersweet en route to the bus stop. Its wintertime fragrance was a delight, and the delicate, pale yellow blooms on bare branches were an effective contrast to the pink and red camellias with which it shared garden room.

*Chimonanthus praecox*, a deciduous species in a genus that includes some evergreens, becomes quite large, about 10 ft. wide and 12 ft. tall. It does respond well to being trained against a wall, and the sheltered location will protect the shrub and its winter blossoms. The flowers are reluctant to appear until the plant is well established, and are small, bell-shaped, and yellow with a purple or brown centre. The variety 'Luteus' is all

yellow. I have read that the spicy fragrance lasts well on blossoms cut for indoor use, but I have not had quite enough blooms to test that information.

My wintersweet grows in the corner formed where my porch meets the house, a southwest exposure. It is indeed very sheltered, and it will provide a challenge to my pruning skills to train it in a reasonably attractive way. I haven't pruned it yet as I wanted to wait until it had bloomed, and then prune afterwards. Not that I expected it to bloom. The last few years I have watched it grow quite greedily into all the available space, and repeatedly questioned my wisdom in planting it there, or planting it at all, as the promised flowers did not appear.

This winter put an end to those doubts. A few weeks ago I was walking and working around that area of my garden all afternoon, and was constantly aware of a pervasive, exquisite fragrance. It reminded me of *Sarcococca*, *Himalayan Box*, but I don't have that in my garden. I remained mystified until that evening, when I remembered my wintersweet, turned on the porch light and looked at it. There were about 10 delicate, pale yellow blooms. They are fortunately quite persistent, still there and still fragrant, with the particular magic of winter flowers.

Winter magic and winter flowers of course bring to mind the wonderful hellebores. I probably rave about them too often, but must once again share my enthusiasm for a particular one. Last year I purchased an apricot helleborus hybrid from Don McWatt at Island Specialty Nursery. I gave it pride of place, planting it near my front walk in a bed expanded to accommodate new treasures. By the end of January, this plant, originating in the warmer,

drier world of Don's Chemainus nursery, was showing four chubby flower buds. As I write this on Valentine's Day, they are opened, an even lovelier shade than I remembered, and more buds have emerged. Beauty and vigour together, a perfect plant indeed.

**WELCOME** to the following "new" members of the club. We are happy to find you have joined our group, and hope you are enjoying contact with other garden and rhodo enthusiasts. Christine Aldred, Christine Farah, Paul Houghton, Isabel Petch, Brian & Barb Staton, and Frances Thornton.

That brings me to also remind members that if you don't receive a copy of the newsletter 10 months of the year, please advise the Membership chairman. Unfortunately there are glitches on Snail-mail and Email, at times.

### **PRUNING**

I always buy a copy of Lois Hole's Spring Gardening reference magazine. I was sorry to hear of the death of this lady several weeks ago. She has always been an enthusiastic gardener, has written several books on horticulture, and was, for the past few years, Lt. Governor of Alberta. She will be sorely missed by the gardening public.

In the 2005 copy of the magazine, there is an article on pruning by Christina McDonald. Several items are of use to gardeners everywhere.

"Why prune at all? The experts give 5 reasons - to remove dead wood, control disease and insect infestations, improve structure and direct growth, maintain vigour and form, and promote flower and fruit production.

Never remove more than 1/4 to 1/3 of live wood in one season. Exception to this rule would be

cutting back hedges. After removing dead or diseased wood, remove branches that cross or rub, weak branch attachments, water sprouts and suckers from the base of the plant.

When pruning trees, young or old, never cut flush to the trunk or leave long stubs. Find the branch collar or branch-bark ridge in the region where a branch joins the trunk (a zipper-like strip of branch in the crotch). Direct growth up and out to promote even canopies and proper air circulation. Be prepared with a sharp, clean tool in hand". After cutting into diseased material, wipe your tools with a bleach solution to prevent spreading the problem.

### **MORE SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD**

These are the latest sent by Rose-Marie.

Mary expressed an interest in knowing how Indian Plum (*Oemleria cerasiformis*) fares here in Sayward. This pretty native plant, a deciduous, early-blooming shrub, does not occur naturally (perhaps, no longer occurs naturally), north of the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island. About 10 years ago I salvaged some plants from a road construction pushout in the Cowichan Valley, and planted them in a small woodland at the edge of my property. The shrub usually grows in more open sites, but I chose the woodland as I thought the shelter might be necessary.

All my *Oemleria* plants survived, and while their growth was slow for the first few years, they are now coming along very well. The largest one, which predictably is also in the most open site, has been in bloom since March 2. There has been modest fruit-set, but no volunteer seedlings - yet.

*Oemleria's* charm for me is that it

leafs out very early, often by mid-February. The new growth is a remarkably bright green, very welcome in a wintery world.

A few weeks ago I visited Harry and Gwen Wright, and was treated to a leisurely garden stroll that reminded me how much I enjoy visiting gardens in winter. Good gardens shine in the winter months, and allow one to see not just their support structure, but the interplay of form and light that a gardener both sensible and sensitive is able to make the most of. White Himalayan birches (*Betula jacquemontii*) against dark conifers are breathtaking anywhere, but Harry and Gwen have placed them so that they draw the eye when you least expect them, glancing up from another preoccupation or turning a corner in a marvelous, meandering path. Their birches catch the low winter light and reflect it, brightening the garden's world.

Our Sayward garden club is working hard to establish a viable organization in a small community. We have our setbacks. Last Saturday I had organized a workshop for older gardeners with Campbell River physiotherapist Klari Varallyai, who did an absolutely outstanding presentation. Very few people attended, and then the power went out just as we got started, so that was rather disappointing. However, those of us who did turn up went away with a lot of good information to help our bodies survive the springtime activity onslaught. I was reminded of the maxim that Kim Hammond, who organizes the Qualicum Beach Seedy Saturday, always puts on her correspondence: "the world is run by those who show up".

Our club is planning another garden tour this year, on July 23. It is a bit later than usual, as Darlene Huber's spectacular hillside garden won't be available until then - Darlene's

younger daughter is getting married in the garden on July 16.

We're also thrilled that Tony and Carol Quin of the Hornby Old Rose Nursery are coming to our April meeting. And most of our club plans to carpool to Courtenay to hear David Tarrant on April 12." Ed. Notes:

If members are planning garden tours this summer, don't forget the Sayward gardens. Roses there are really spectacular, and it is amazing what people can do with all the extra water they live near. And Darlene Huber's hillside garden (as well as all the rhodos and roses she grows "on the flat" is truly amazing. An afternoon could be spent just in that garden. Take a lunch and relax!

### **SLUGS**

Here I go again. The latest copy of Amateur Gardening has some hints that you might not have thought of yet, for getting rid of these pests, who can wreck your Hostas.

First, when you buy a Hosta, choose those that are strongly upright, such as 'Gay Search', 'Krossa Regal', 'Regal Splendor' and 'Snowden'. Their leaves are way above the ground. Others, like 'Big Daddy', 'Devon Green', 'Halcyon', 'June', 'Sum & Substance' and 'Whirlwind', develop tough, leathery leaves that are less palatable to these mollusks.

Damp, shady, sheltered sites are desirable homes for slugs. Most hostas are happy in quite sunny positions as long as they have moist soil and lots of organic matter.

You can go on slug patrol every night, flashlight and bucket in hand. Lures such as beer traps or grapefruit skins need to be emptied and refilled every morning. Slug pellets can be used - but small animals might eat them and get sick. Circle each plant with bran instead - slugs love it but it will kill them. Razor-sharp mulches such as eggshells help. If you are still overrun with slugs, grow the plants in pots, with Vaseline or copper strips around the top edges.

I can add a few suggestions - I save egg shells all year, and when I run out of egg shells I use ground oyster shells (used for chicken grit) from Black Creek Farm & Feed. I sprinkle a few puffs of diatomaceous earth on top of the shells. This job is done as soon as hostas start to push out of the earth in spring. My hostas had few slug holes last summer - but it was so dry for months that there were fewer slugs than usual.

### **BOOK REVIEW**

For the last few years, gardening books and gardening magazines have proliferated like slugs and earwigs. Many of them have hundreds of beautiful photos, but not very much printed matter. And of course prices have skyrocketed. I am now looking at books purchased 10-20 years ago, that have fewer color photos but much more useful gardening information to offer. For some years I complained that the only difference between "old" books and newer ones was that the herbicides and insecticides recommended changed. Now, with

fewer and fewer of these products on the market, we can happily go back to 100-year-old books and use less harmful products like vinegar and boiling water to discourage pests.

The Well-Chosen Garden. Christopher Lloyd. pub. Elm Tree Books, 1984. This book cost 12.95 in London at that time. The book contains 40 interesting chapters, such as "Grasses for Ornament", "Making use of Shade", "Fitting in Ferns", "Two-Tier Gardening", all useful material for gardeners to read today. There are photos illustrating "Girth Control", a lovely picture of hostas, ferns and a hardy orchid in the chapter on shade, the use of moss and cyclamen cum under a huge old tree - I am sure I can find far more useful information in this book than in half a dozen new magazines. Perhaps it is time to haunt the 2nd hand bookstores, and look for written content, not shiny pictures. Or look over some of these older books next time our club has a book sale.

I note Christopher Lloyd is still welcoming garden tours at his home, "Great Dixter", and still writing (Horticulture magazine).

### **MEMBER NOTES**

Don't forget to bring a few plants or other garden-related materials for the Revenue Table each month. It is now late March and all kinds of plants are popping out of the ground. When you divide and pot up plants for various sales, set a few aside for the club.