

# North Island Rhododendron Society

PO Box 3183 Courtenay BC Canada V9N 5N4

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*R. macrophyllum*

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Articles not credited are by the editor.

## 25 Jan 2005

Note change of date.

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Gwen and Harry Wright**, 769 Chaster Rd, E. Courtenay.

## 1 Feb. Note change of date.

Several circumstances have caused us to re-arrange dates for February meetings.

Our guest speaker will be **Roy L. Taylor**, a well-known horticulturist. He came originally from Alberta and started out as teacher in a one-roomed school. He then studied botany, spending summers studying plants in the field for Agriculture Canada.

During the 1960s he published a two volume "Flora of the Queen Charlotte Islands" and initiated many new programs at the University of B.C. Between 1962 and 1994 he was actively involved in many national and international associations; moved to California in 1994 to become Executive Director of the Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden as well as Chair of the Botany program at Claremont Graduate University.

The Taylors retired in 1999 and built a home in Lantzville, where he built a 2.5 acre northern Mediterranean garden. Dr. Taylor is now Chairman of the Milner Gardens, helps to manage the Bloedel Reserve on Bainbridge Island, Washington, and is a trustee of the Elizabeth C. Miller Botanical Garden in Seattle. This

program has initiated the plant recognition program "Great Plant Picks". He is associate editor of Pacific Horticulture magazine.

UBC awarded him an honorary doctorate of science in 1997 for his contribution to North American and International plant programs. Ed. Note: This is a brief summary of material describing the botanical life of this interesting man.

Dr. Taylor will be telling us about developing his new mediterranean-type garden in Lantzville. Considering the dry summers we experience, advice on what and how to plant dry-land plants will be very welcome.

## 11 Jan.

Though the weather on our island was not up to its usual standard, many members were able to attend a stimulating meeting, learning many new and old ways of "Caring for your Rhodos". Thanks so much, Terry Richmond, for braving the treacherous drive from Port Alberni.

## MEMBER NOTES

Some months ago, a member asked for information about the history of our club. Who were the first members and first executive? When did the newsletter start? From whence came the impetus to start a society? Much material has been collected but there is little information about the beginnings of the club. I have on hand all but the first 5 newsletters. Notes and

minutes of the early meetings are scarce. If you were among the first members, would you please contact Diana Scott or Mary Palmer with information.

I have read that in Britain, **Starbucks** has offered used coffee grounds to regular customers for use in the garden. What a good idea! Let's collect this valuable resource from all our favorite cafes and mix it into our compost.

## NEWS FROM THE SPECIES FOUNDATION

There have been many improvements since the last time any of our members visited this area. It would be a great place to visit again soon. They are always short of money to pay regular expenses (salaries are very low and regular volunteers do a great deal of the work). There is a new propagation house, which means many more plants will be available to members in future. A Tropical House is in the planning stages.

You can access an improved website ([www.rhodygarden.org](http://www.rhodygarden.org)) to see pictures of all the rhodo species. It is easy to get plants to Canada now, as orders from all members in Dist. 1 will be shipped en masse to UBC from where plants can be picked up. A new Yearbook, entitled Rhododendron Species, will hopefully be ready for sale this fall.

Instad of sending garden passes to each member society this year, a list

will be kept at the gate. Our members will not need to pay an entrance fee - just advise that you are a member of the North Island Rhodo Society.

All this information is given for a reason. Our club cannot afford to send more than the membership fee this year, but money is desperately needed, and if any of our members wish to donate, the money will be most welcome. How can we help? Perhaps a special collection from garden tours or cookie sales?

### **WINTER GARDENING**

A day or two before 4" of snow was dumped on my garden, I walked around to see what was in bloom. The Mahonia "Winter Sun" was lovely, had been blooming since October, also Viburnum bodantense "Dawn".. Giant Snowdrops were waving their flowers about, Viburnum Tinus had many blossoms too. Daphne mezereum - almost in bloom, Hellebore stems up 6" with buds showing colour, and Hamamelis "Jelena" and "Pallida" waving delicate petals. A giant Miscanthus still had leaves and flowers. (This morning, 14 Jan, the temperature is -12C and Hamamelis mollis has little yellow petals waving at me).

Amazingly enough, for the first time in many years, I am not complaining about heavy wet snow. This snow was so dry and delicate that it was a pleasure to brush it off the rhodos, and all the flowers mentioned above are still looking lovely.

The "Coastal Grower", Winter 1999/2000 had an article which suits my feelings exactly. I will quote some of it.

Dormancy in the garden? Have you ever walked through a winter garden and been amazed by the colourful array of plants blooming, in berry or with bark shining in the sunlight? ... Get out and explore local parks and gardens, looking for delightful plants and combinations that would fit into your own garden.

Dormancy in gardening? No, unless the garden is under snow or water.

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All the tender plants are actually better for winter planting. If you have time and material, put rotted leaf mold over the beds, to protect the soil from pounding winter rains as well as to improve the texture. Remember to water plants in the dry areas under overhangs, once a month.

(Not when the ground is frozen, of course). Plant up some "Winter Pansies" in a pot near the door. In my garden, NOT pansies, for the deer will eat them for breakfast, but violas, which they never touch. (not yet, anyway).

Many trees and shrubs can be planted in mild weather, and perennials can be divided and potted up, ready for plant sales in spring. Some tree pruning can be done also, but not all trees. There are several very useful pruning books in our library from which to get good advice. Rhodos can be fertilized. Norm Todd of Victoria advises light amounts in Nov. and Jan, as well as July, and larger amounts in March and May. Because we usually get our heaviest rainfall in Nov. and Dec., I might reconsider fertilizing during the winter.

### **SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD**

I asked Rose-Marie for more "adventures" as well as snippets and she kindly obliged.

...We do have wolves on Hardwicke Island again, after an absence of a few years - snow is a great revealer. There were wolf tracks quite near the house last weekend. It has been about 4 years since they were seen. Usually they don't worry or bother us, a kind of mutual ignoring of each other. Wolves don't worry the horses on their "own" turf either, but they do get spooky if we encounter them in the woods.

Sam (my little gelding, who thinks he is a herd stallion with his herd of one), always sniffs at predator sign, as if he's gauging how old it is. My only close encounter with a wolf was on horseback, and then suddenly not on horseback, resulting in a considerable concussion (I don't remember what happened as I was out cold in a mud puddle for a bit).

A good result though - Bruce promptly bought me a very good helmet and now I never ride without it.

### **MORE SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD**

2005 has begun with such wintry weather that I am already worrying about survival of favorite plants. Of course, the blanket of snow helps a lot. For once, Sayward had a lot less snow than Courtenay and points south, and what fell was very dry and powdery, so there has not been any snow damage - yet.

There are so many things to do outside that the gardener is probably suffering more than the garden by frustration alone. Having had an early start is such a help when the truly busy season begins. However, I have to content myself by looking at catalogs and reading.

My garden library received an excellent addition at Christmas. Under the tree was a copy of the new (2004) book by Diana Grenfell, The colour Encyclopedia of Hostas. It is an excellent reference, amply illustrated and with detailed advice on siting individual varieties. For example, of Hosta `June' she writes, "For the most subtle chartreuse and blue colour, grow in light shade in a cool climate, but a stronger, harsher contrast will be achieved if it is exposed to morning sunlight. Indeed, the difference between plants grown in good light and plants grown in shade is so marked they look like different plants."

When we do have mild weather in January, it is my favorite time to divide hostas and to take root cuttings of verbascums and dicentras. I have a very nice `volunteer' verbascum that I have been growing for some time. I have named it `Frieda' after my auntie, who says the colour reminds her of a favorite dress she had as a child. `Frieda' is probably a cross between the tall white V. chaixii and the smaller V. phoenicum, both of which have grown in my garden for a long time. The colour is a soft old

rose with a fairly large amethyst eye, and the plant blooms prolifically for months, especially of course with deadheading. It has thrown a few volunteer seedlings around the original plant, which have been true, but I prefer to propagate it by root cuttings. These are amazingly successful. Being a rather clumsy individual, I invariably upset my cutting container after I have sliced the fleshy roots into 2 or 3 inch pieces, so that I lose track of which was top and which bottom. At that point I remember that one is supposed to angle the cut on either top or bottom so that one can tell which is which. Fortunately the verbascum doesn't seem to mind, and sends up new growth (albeit more slowly) from upside-down bits as well as properly planted ones.

As I write this, it is the middle of January, and the holly trees and shrubs that were so amply laden with berries this year are completely without them. Since the cold weather began, the varied thrushes that populate the woods in my neighbourhood have been in the holly plants every day, with a little companionship from flickers and a few robins (which don't usually hang around here in winter). The birds seldom take holly berries before Christmas (which is convenient) but I think the reason is that they prefer the fruit after it has had a frost. Last year we had a heavy frost (November 2003), and the robins that were still here did indeed eat a lot of the holly berries then.

The cold weather has probably ensured that once again I will not see bloom on my empress tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*). Its large flower buds are set in the fall, but will not take too much cold. These buds look a bit like large, unopened lilacs, and are upright at the ends of the branches, on my tree all near the top. They are attractive but it is a bit sad that they are once again doomed to shrivel and fall before spring. Ah well, the leaves are so splendid that they are some compensation for the loss of all that blue blossom.

Ed. Note: Does everyone see Rose  
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Marie's column, usually every second week, in the Weekender newspaper? These articles are always different to those she sends us, but always full of interest and good advice for the gardener. I plan to use some of this information when she "shorts" me on snippets.

### **MORE VANCOUVER ISLAND RHODO HISTORY**

The historic garden at **Milner Gardens and Woodland** houses a collection of approximately 500 rare Rhodo species and hybrids. These plants were introduced into the garden from the mid 1940s to the mid 1960s. Most of the plants were supplied by the **Royston Nursery**, owned and operated by **Ted and Mary Greig**. The Greigs operated their nursery from 1935 - 1966 at Royston on the east coast of Vancouver Island.

The Greigs were well known and respected for their work in the correct identification and introduction of species Rhodos into North America. In 1966 Ted and Mary Greig were jointly awarded the ARS Gold Medal award for their contribution to the understanding and availability of the genus *Rhododendron* in North America.

That year, the Greigs sold the Royston nursery stock of approx. 8,000 plants to the Board of Parks and Recreation of the city of Vancouver. These Greig rhodos formed the basis for the species collection in the Sino-Himalayan garden at the VanDusen Botanical Garden and the "Ted and Mary Greig Rhodo Garden" in Stanley Park, Vancouver, B.C.

In 1990 **Mary Greig** was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Science posthumously from the University of Victoria for her life work with rhododendrons. This award was accepted for Mary Greig by **Veronica Milner**, whose private garden and home is now the Milner Gardens and Woodland.

The mission of the Milner Gardens is to preserve and educate, in particular for the visiting public and

students, so it is critical that the rhodo collection be verified and documented. Part of the public horticulture function is the propagation of plant materials for release, but before releasing these plants it so important to have them properly identified, recorded in the plant records system and correctly labelled in the nursery and garden. Many of the rhodos in the garden may be the only surviving form of a species or hybrid from the Greig collection.

### **FINE GARDENING**

**MAGAZINE** always has inspiring hints and articles that get me excited (on a snowy day) and eager to get out and get gardening - again!. Here are some thoughts by **Ann Lovejoy**, FG Jan-Feb. 2002.

Creating a low-maintenance garden. Consider how to eliminate or reduce repetitive chores such as mowing, trimming and edging to watering and feeding plants. Consider native plants and allies from similar climate zones, to adapt to the conditions you have. Make your own manure from plant waste - use shredder, worm bin, whatever you can rig up. Think - what do you spend the most time doing? What do you enjoy most about gardening? - then adapt your garden to please yourself. Replace a hedge (hard work trimming) with a fence. Is the perennial bed full of plants that give a short season of flowers? Add or replace with easy-going shrubs, herbs, ornamental grasses and bulbs. Replace thirsty fussy spots with drought-tolerant natives. Get rid of the lawn.

No ground-cover or perennial plant you can name needs to be watered, mowed and fed as often or as much as a lawn. They are great for kids to play on, but when the kids grow up, get rid of the lawn. Start by giving each lawn tree a wide skirt, to the drip-line or beyond, of native or regionally adapted plants. Use woodland plants that don't mind the company of tree roots. For year-round good looks, combine spring bulbs with drought-tolerant evergreen ground covers, mow once

or twice a year. For instance, spring crocuses and fall colchicums with Vinca minor. Tuck fading bulb foliage under the ground cover, give a good mulch spring and fall.

Next, make good wide paths, crushed gravel with pavers on top, 6-8 ft. wide for main paths, 4-5 ft. wide for secondary ones, so 2 people can walk side by side. Carve out side areas along the paths for sunny or shady seating places. Be sure to use crushed rock, not pea gravel. Keep gravel weed-free with vinegar-concentrate products which alter pH for up to one year. Get rid of the last of the grass by making beds really wide. Stuff them with plants - if you have weeds, you don't have enough plants. Ms. Lovejoy says "I fill the beds with a tightly knit matrix of border shrubs, perennials, bulbs and grasses. In each bed, about 1/3 of the plants are evergreen, 1/2 to 1/3 are native. The rest are chosen for drought-tolerance, adaptability, and a long season of good looks".

The secret to a thriving, healthy garden is to make beautiful dirt. Instead of feeding the plants, feed the soil with compost. Her soil is quite acidic, so she grows plants that enjoy acidic soils. She rarely feeds with anything but compost, with a spring booster of alfalfa pellets. Mineral supplements are added once a year, scattered under the compost layer. She picks plants that don't mind dry summers, uses drip irrigation for 2-3 summers after planting, then they are on their own. Newly planted perennials and vines get water for one summer, and fall-planted bulbs and herbs get none.

The climate of the maritime northwest is considered a modified mediterranean type. Modifications

include no sun, no heat, lots of rain. Similarities lie in the wet winters and dry summers. Look for plants from similar temperate regions sharing the same pattern...continued next month ...

Here are notes from an article written by Norm Todd for the Victoria Rhodo newsletter, some years ago. For people planning to attend the ARS Rhodo Conference in Victoria in April, these are suggestions for dwarf rhodos which will suit any garden. Most of these plants are not easy to find in generalized nurseries.

Most of these small alpine plants are lepidotes (scaly) as they need the scales to control the high variations in moisture that occur at the high altitudes where they grow. Plants not hardy in Victoria are not considered.

**ROSE ELF** may be easily obtainable, but it is compact, buds easily, blooms early, and withstands drought and cold better than most. What else do we need in a cute pink rhodo?

**MOORHEIM'S BEAUTY** possess all the good qualities of Rose Elf, but is a bit bigger.

**CHIKOR and CURLEW**, two of Peter Cox's yellow introductions. Chikor is easy to trim to a little bonsai.

**PATTY BEE** is a Berg cross of Yaku Fairy and fletcherianum. Leaves of clear green arranged in neat prostrate sprays and large clear yellow flowers.

**PRINCESS ANNE** is a Reuthe hybrid, with bronzy leaves in winter.

This one needs protection from hot sun.

**KEISKEI**s smallest forms have to be the best yellow for the rock garden.

**KIUSIANUM**, a little Japanese azalea, one of the best for sheer refinement, elegance and finesse. The colours range from purple through pink to white.

**IMPEDITUM** is a super plant, with easy disposition, lovely blue-green leaves, and often blooms in fall as well as in spring.

**INDICUM** **'BALSAMINAEFLORUM'** is a lovely evergreen azalea with long narrow leaves and fully double pink flowers. Alas, deer and rabbits think highly of it (for breakfast).

a cousin of impeditum, is almost a better plant, with cleaner flower colour and more distinct leaf.

**RUBY HART**, with the only red flower in the list, could replace indicum, though it is a larger plant.

So if you have room for only one or two small plants to take home from the plant sale, remember these little beauties.