

North Island Rhododendron Society



PO Box 3183 Courtenay BC Canada V9N 5N4

Vol.19 No.5 January 2005

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4 Jan. 2005.

Executive meeting at the home of **Gloria & Bernie Guyader**, 1965 E 6 Ave., Courtenay.

11 Jan. 2005

Caring for your Rhododendrons", a discussion with panel members **Harry Wright, Paul Wurz, and Terry Richmond** from Mars Rhodo Society. Bob will act as moderator and all members should participate with questions and suggestions. Subjects such as preparing the planting medium, mulching, fertilizers, Rhodos for containers, pruning, transplanting and pest management will be covered.

What, in your opinion, are the most reliable rhodos for growing in our coastal area? Bring a list, as well as a list of questions to ask.

The goal of this presentation is to demonstrate that there is not just one right way of growing rhodos. Three expert breeders will advise us just how they care for their rhodos in three different gardens.

14 Dec 2004

Diana Scott kindly sent this report:

The Annual Christmas Party was a great way to end our 2004 season. The "sweets and savouries" were particularly delicious this year, with a number of new treats in addition to the traditional favourites. Dave and Noni Godfrey set the tone by providing background Christmas music

which prompted the occasional outburst of song from a number of members! **Evelyn Wright** along with **Dave and Noni** kept us sharp with a couple of seasonal games and John Shaunnessy led the masses in our Carolling Chorus.

Dave Crucq ably orchestrated our gift exchange which provided the opportunity to show just how gracious and giving we are as a group. We are pleased to say the honour of housing our treasured pig now goes to **Paul & Lynn Wurz**, who are no doubt delighted at the beautiful restoration job it had while residing with **Don & Dorothy Law**. We can hardly wait to see how it will look when it returns next Christmas! We had a lovely evening and headed home full of yummy treats and a festive spirit!

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

The most recent big storm blew away most of the fall colour in my garden. It has been another splendid year for autumn leaf display, but as the years go by I note that many plants are not necessarily consistent from year to year. Since I planted a red oak (*Quercus rubra*) 8 years ago, I have enjoyed its annual vibrant red colouring in the early fall. It blazes magnificently and then drops its leaves almost all at once, usually by mid October. This year it began to turn red, then stopped at a deep burgundy. The scarlet oak (*Q. coccinea*) that grows near it

conveniently turns colour after *Q. rubra* to prolong the display, but that one is just a deep burgundy this year as well.

Some of the Japanese maples seem to have held their coloured leaves for a shorter time this year, but as there are too many for me to have noted dates, that is not a scientific observation. The colouring was exceptionally fine this year, as was that on *Acer greseum*, the paperbark maple. The *Forsythia* has been an especially luminous yellow, and the golden ninebark, *Physocarpus opulifolius* 'Dart's Gold' is still bright, indeed spectacular, in mid November.

That last storm also brought 5 inches of rain (scientifically measured) in 24 hours, which meant that the Salmon River flooded again. This after more than a decade of good behaviour. Many of my neighbours had flooded basements, but the river did not come up high enough to reach my bottom field. It is welcome there, as it leaves a nice deposit of alluvial silt all over the plentiful leaf fall, great for the compost! I don't wish anyone a flooded basement or driveway, but I can't help but be struck by the sight of our normally-placid river rushing and roaring to the sea.

In the last newsletter Mary noted that species crocus self-seed all over her garden. How I wish they would in mine! The wretched jays

(yes, I know they are beautiful) have developed in uncanny appetite for them. Last year I planted over 100 replacement bulbs and covered them with black plastic trays. I didn't remove the trays until the crocus bloomed, but within 2 days the jays had figured it out and ripped out every bulb, leaving only the wilted flowers.

This year I replanted, covered the bulbs with fine netting, covered that with dirt, and felt reasonably secure. A week later the jays had somehow ripped them all out, leaving only the new shoots as evidence. Yes, I've replanted again. This time I topped the net and dirt with more black plastic trays, and covered those (because they're so ugly) with fallen leaves. To be continued....

The **Sayward Garden Club** has just begun its second year. For a small community our club is quite large (about 30 attend each meeting) and active. At our October meeting, **Hart Wellmeier** of Wrenhaven Nursery in South Surrey did a rhodo presentation, showing slides of the many full-grown species plants in their extensive gardens. Hart's sense of humour tempers the awe his knowledge inspires, so he did indeed get our season off to a great start.

Hart's ability to identify rhodos continues to defy belief. He visited on Hardwicke Island, where we have been trying to establish a rhodo planting on a large, steep bank behind the house. Near the top of this bank we had planted a good-sized Mrs. Furnival, one of my favorites. The Hardwicke deer decided they liked it for a time. Just as it was starting to recover, a windstorm brought down half a big cedar growing above it and left only one branch on Mrs. F.

Then this summer, Sam, (a

monkey disguised as a horse), wriggled through the fence in the dead of night, poked his head through the bedroom window, and when he was sure to be seen, galloped up the path that ends at the top of the bank, right at Mrs. Furnival. He didn't stop. Well, the single branch was shortened a bit and has only 2 leaves left. When Hart surveyed the bank on his arrival, he looked up to the top (at least 50 feet) and said "What happened to Mrs. Furnival?"

Ed. Note: Life is SO full of adventures in Sayward - Rose-Marie, tell us more!!

BOOK REVIEW

I found a wonderful new book in the Campbell River library. *Native Trees for North American Landscapes*. Sternberg with Wilson, Timber Press 2004. This book is all about Eastern North American trees. Many can grow on the West Coast, and some can be found in our parks and large estates. But apart from a few evergreens, all the trees listed are deciduous hardwoods that flourish in the deep rich soils of Eastern Canada and the U.S., and most would have a tough time in our sandy acid soil and warm wet climate.

This book is comprised of descriptions and excellent photographs of many beautiful trees, often showing bark, flowers and general shape and size.. "96 trees are profiled as featured species, while the remainder are mentioned more briefly as similar and related species". Advantages and limitations of each tree are mentioned, as well as background information on ecology issues and tree care.

Many trees mentioned are suitable for small gardens, and because our nurseries are beginning to stock some of these plants with (to us) unfamiliar names, the book is stuffed with valuable information

for any tree-lover.

If you love trees and books, this is the one for you. It would be a useful acquisition for our club library.

CHRISTMAS PLANTS

Did you receive a flowering plant for Christmas? Keeping it long-lived and healthy can be a problem at times. If they come from a warm humid nursery, then into a store or garden centre with cool dry air, it might take awhile for them to adapt to your home. Many plants appreciate bright light (no sun), a dish of pebble-filled water for the pot to sit on, and soil slightly on the dry side for a week or two. A good drink once a week is usually the most they need in winter.

Cyclamens must have a dish of water and pebbles under the pot, and bright light in a cool room. The healthiest cyclamens I ever saw were, years ago, in old houses with no central heating. Now, I am happy to have hardy cyclamens in the garden.

The latest "fad plants" are orchids, and of those, Phalaenopsis seem to be the easiest to grow in the house. Again, a dish of water and pebbles (or a smaller saucer inside a larger one with water in it) is essential to provide humidity. They need little water otherwise - a good drink once a week is fine. Fertilizer at 1/4 the usual amount, several times a month, is all they need. Bright light year-round but no sun. Place them under fluorescent lights in winter.

These plants are sold everywhere now, even in grocery stores. The price can vary from moderate to expensive but because the flowers are so long-lasting, they are worth the cost. If you treat them as a spray of daffodils or a hydrangea that can be placed in the garden in the spring, then the plants need very little care. But if you plan to

keep the plant, then follow the directions above, and if you can give it a temperature 10-15 degrees cooler at night than in daytime, you can depend on more flowers in 6-12 months. They don't need repotting more than once every year or two. Use a mix of bark, charcoal, maybe a few small rocks or perlite - no soil of any kind, for instant drainage is essential after watering.

Orchids are fascinating plants. They can be found in every continent except Antarctica, but mostly in the tropics. Most are found in the lush tropical forests of South America, Southeast Asia, and New Guinea. But they also grow at higher elevations, up to about 14,000 feet in the Himalayas and South American mountains. Some can be found growing in trees near various Rhododendrons.

Most are epiphytes, that is they grow on other plants, usually in masses of moss and detritus on tropical trees. They don't derive nutrients from their hosts, but from material lodged in wet mosses that grow on the tree branches. Some orchids are terrestrial, rooting in humus on the ground; some even grow on rocks. It is easy to see why they prefer very sharp drainage.

If you are lucky enough to receive one of these plants for Christmas, you will find it very easy and rewarding to care for. If you become "hooked" on Phalaenopsis orchids, you can have flowers year-round. Each flower lasts on the plant or in water, for months. Each stem often puts out another flowering stem further down, so don't be too quick to cut a long stem off.

TOP TEN SHRUBS FOR FIERY AUTUMN FOLIAGE

According to Amateur Gardening, 13 Nov. 04, these shrubs are the best. What do you think? Acer palmatum, and Acer tataricum are

up at the top of the list. Don't plant maples where the cold east wind can scorch the leaves. How about Amelanchier lamarckii (we call them Saskatoon Berries, but our native plant doesn't have brilliant fall colours). Cornus alba is listed, but many other Dogwoods also have bright fall colours; Cotinus 'Flame' has fiery orange-red autumn leaves as well as smoky pink-purple flowers. We all noticed the Euonymus alatus this fall - a brighter red than usual I think. Fothergilla major is another. Mine is probably in too shady a position, for the leaves changed to pale yellow. Hamamelis x intermedia is another show-stopper. Varieties such as 'Jelena', 'Diane', 'Arnold Promise' and good old species 'mollis' are all outstanding.. Most have flowers in the darkest winter days, regardless of weather, healthy green leaves all summer, then in fall, leaves are either bright yellow or lovely shades of yellow, orange and red, which hang on for weeks. By the time they are all gone, the flower buds are swelling again. I always count on 'Jelena' to open a few flowers for Christmas. For all-year displays, I think Hamamelis has to be top of the list. The next plant on their list is Rhus typhina, which provides bright orange-red leaves in autumn. In my opinion, the variety 'laciniata' gives an even more brilliant display. And finally, Liquidambar styraciflua, a conical tree which can grow to 80 ft. Moist soil and plenty of organic matter are needed, but they do well even here in our dry summers, as long as they get water the first couple of years.

That's quite a list; all these plants are hardy here, and most of us already have one or two in the garden. Think of another in this group when you are planning to buy a shrub or tree.

RHODO "DO'S" AND "DONT'S"

These hints came from a

Vancouver Rhodo Society Newsletter, Feb. 2000, and should give some food for thought, as well as tips for questioning "the experts" at the January meeting.

DO: **Break up the rootball of a container-grown plant very well before planting it; once roots circle around inside a container they seem unable to break the habit.

**Fertilize lightly with iron-sulphate before they flower in spring.

**Twist off vegetative growth at the tip of stems during the winter months to encourage branching from dormant buds below the tip (don't pinch off flower buds!)

**Deadhead flowers after blooming, if you can reach them.

**Occasionally check the pH of your soil.

**Lime and chlorine can affect the pH of water - check this also. A "rain barrel" is a great asset, especially in our increasingly dry summers.

**Give rooted cuttings and seedlings extra protection for the first couple of winters.

DON'T **Fertilize after early July.

**Mulch with large leaves such as maple (Acer macrophyllum) or peat moss, which pack down to form a waterproof mat.

**Plant rhodos near trees that compete for nutrients or provide excessive shade.

**Tannic acid from walnut leaves and roots will kill a rhodo. Do not plant near a walnut tree.

**Prepare the soil well with organic matter and ensure good drainage.

**Cultivating soil surface around rhodos can kill the surface roots.

**Do not overwater the plants. They came through the past few very dry summers in good shape. Water is precious.

A calendar of the rhodo year, from "The Yak", March 1998.

January: Use small amounts of dolomite around each rhodo,

which will increase calcium and magnesium and help the rhodo assimilate other nutrients. (2 tbsps. per each large plant every second year).

February: Small amounts of "Fritted trace elements" will help create darker foliage and help assimilation of fertilizer.

March: Fertilizer can be applied - sparingly.

Ed. Note: More of this later. Ask "the experts" if they agree with this regimen.

WINTER BLOOMERS AND GARDEN PERFUMERS

There are several winter-blooming shrubs that can stop you in your tracks on a dull winter day, with their lovely perfume, often from tiny, almost unnoticeable flowers. *Sarcococca*, winter-flowering honeysuckles (*Lonicera fragrantissima* and *purpusii*), *Daphne* (*odora* and *mezereum* bloom very early), *Viburnum bodnantense* "Dawn" bloom from October to April, *Hamamelis* (*mollis* has a strong perfume, the others, lighter), *Chimonanthus praecox*, *Stachyurus praecox* (not quite hardy here), and *Cornus mas* with its huge bunches of tiny tiny yellow flowers - all so bright, so perfumed, so welcome in winter, that they are worth the cost, which can be quite high. *Daphne mezereum* always has seedlings spread around which friends and plant sales are happy to receive, but the rest are expensive. In my experience, they are all long-lived and grow bigger and better every year.

SOME GARDEN NOTES

This year I found many bright orange seeds on my *Magnolia stellata*. This is one way to germinate them. Mix seeds with vermiculite in a plastic bag, place

in a tin box (to discourage mice) in the coldest part of the garden.

Retrieve the seeds in March, sow in potting compost in 4" pots and place in the cold frame. Seedlings will soon emerge.

Don't use salt on steps and paths when they become icy. Use 46-0-0 fertilizer or sand instead. Both will help discourage the ice, and when swept into the garden later, will do no harm to plants.

CYCLAMEN COUM

This darling little plant blooms in the winter. If covered with snow, it simply waits a few weeks, then suddenly you will spot the brilliant pink, magenta or white flowers under a rhodo or in a gravel patch. There are about 20 species of cyclamen and *cuum* is one of the hardiest.

Watch for the little pea-shaped fruits on coiled stems like little pig-tails. (This also applies to *C. hederifolium*). As soon as these seed-heads bow down to the ground, nearby ants will scurry around to steal the seeds, which have a sugary coating. The ants carry away the seed, lick off the sugar, and drop them. And that is why there are cyclamen plants here and there around my property, not planted by moi.

We are in the midst of an "easy" winter, which may not last, but in the last week of December I am still raking leaves off parts of the lawn and putting them into rings of fencing materials where they rot down rapidly. You can also rake them into a plastic bag, punch a few holes in it to let the rain in, and within a year they will be nicely changed into valuable leafmold. Rake leaves out of the pond, where they can rot down into a slimy mess, not good for the fish.

Remove leaves from rockery plants and small rhodos also.

Scrub cement paths to remove algae - I have found carbonate of soda (washing soda) the most effective. It does a great job of cleaning algae off greenhouse roofs and boats too.

Check ties and labels on trees and shrubs - between wind and Stellar's jays, the labels may be gone by spring. Renew labels or cut back wandering stems of clematis and roses.

More hints from FINE GARDENING magazine;

In dry summer weather, when rinsing veggies, keep the water and scraps in a pail to dump onto the compost pile.

Use athletic or adhesive tape to prolong the life of glove fingers. Use pieces of coloured yarn, tied around plant branches, to help remember the flower colour, and when collecting seeds, note the flower colour as well as plant name on the envelopes.

When collecting branchlets and weeds in the wheelbarrow, have several plastic bags hanging on the handles, for collecting items you don't want in the compost, like rocks, diseased rose leaves or pernicious weeds. And, by the way, the most useful hint I picked up this year is to have a couple of bungee cords ready, when collecting downed branches in the wheelbarrow. You can load the barrow much higher than usual, then snap the cords across the pile. This works like a charm!