

North Island Rhododendron Society



PO Box 3183 Courtenay BC Canada V9N 5N4 Vol.19 No.10 June 2005

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Articles not credited are by the editor.

7 June

Executive meeting at the home of **Don Law**, 671 Crestview Dr., Comox.

18 June

ANNUAL BBQ at the home of **Bernice Morrison**, 951 Aspen Rd., Comox. Where is Aspen Road? Just follow these instructions exactly and you will be there in no time. From Comox Ave: North on Anderton to Idiens Way on your left. Idiens Way, left onto Aspen, to the second-last house, the only one with a chain-link fence, # 951. From Ryan Road: South on Anderton, past Longlands Golf Course, right on Idiens Way, left onto Aspen. It is even easier for Campbell River members: Highway to Kitty Coleman Rd., onto Anderton, straight south until you hit Idiens Way.

10 May

The Annual General Meeting was held at the home of **Pauline and Dick Bonney**. The evening was cool, but it didn't rain! The large number of members present enjoyed the evening touring the large garden and discussing rhodos and many other plants growing there.

Elections were held, and **Diana Scott** was returned as Secretary, and **Dave Crucq** as Membership

Chairman. Both of these people have done an outstanding job for the past two years, and members were happy to have them continue. No one stepped forward to be Program Chairman, a disappointment, but **Harry and Paul** will continue to do the job. Suggestions for speakers are always welcome. Many of our members know or are themselves "experts" in the horticulture field, not necessarily rhodos, and suggested names of local "experts" are always welcome.

Presentation of a ROCK was made to Mary, who has been Editor of the Newsletter for the past 15 years. Yes, a ROCK. A large grey rock for the garden, suitably inscribed, and very much appreciated, as was the hot coffee and cakes provided. An interesting evening.

MEMBER NOTES

Members attending the BBQ, as usual, are reminded to bring cutlery, plates & mugs, food (potluck), and chairs. Bring wine if you wish. The garden will be open from 4:00 p.m., and if members wish, they can leave home in time to tour Harry Wright's garden earlier in the afternoon.

Members enjoy touring gardens, so if you would like to open your garden one day or evening during

the summer, just leave your address with Paul or Harry so they can make an announcement during the

potluck meal.

Please add Streamside Gardens to the list of nurseries who give our members a discount on presentation of the membership card.

We were sorry to hear of the death of **Jack Lofthouse** in his 90th year. Jack spent many years hybridizing the most beautiful rhodos you can imagine, and Paul has some examples in his garden.

All members who attended the conference in Victoria last month enjoyed the displays and learned from the lectures. Judy Walker gave an outstanding talk on the history of rhodos on Vancouver Island. There will be a more complete report in the Sept. newsletter.

RHODO OF THE YEAR 2008

Of all the rhodos recommended, the following were selected as being THE BEST;

Elepidote (no hairs) Marie Starks
Lepidote (hairs or indumentum)
Vibrant Violet
Deciduous Azalea Yukon Gold
Evergreen Azalea Girard's
Fuchsia

Are you interested in doing some hybridizing? Excellent examples of the results of this activity at the beautiful new "Courtenay" hybrids that Harry Wright has produced. Yes, this is a long-term activity, but

well worth it. Speak to **Harry** to arrange a discussion one Saturday in late May or early June.

Early June is also the time to visit Rhododendron Lake. Anyone interested in going up there this year? Speak to **Harry**. Don't try to go on your own - the logging road one must travel on is often in TERRIBLE condition. 4-wheel drive is a must.

What do you think are the best rhodos for our area? Some of the old hybrids like Cunningham's White and Rosamunde are very reliable bloomers and perform year after year with no complaints as to lack of water or too much sun. Mine must be 20 years old and make the backbone of the garden. But how about the newer plants, produced by hybridizers since 1950? Do you have any? How are they doing? After last year's severe drought, some plants are looking sick, and after the sudden cold snap this year after a mild winter, some lost their flowers. Take a look around the garden as you deadhead and admire the new leaves, and make notes for the Sept. meeting. A list of the most reliable in each area would be useful information for newcomers, and for consideration when buying plants.

SUMMER WORK IN THE RHODO GARDEN

No more fertilizer after the end of June. Finish deadheading everything you can reach. Spray plants that are affected by root weevils. Note the weevils only bother certain rhodos, and never touch the rest. I had a badly affected R. Scarlet Wonder one year, that I dug up, put in a large pot, and doused it with various weevil killers, once a month. I tried everything suggested to me, including brand names, and mixtures such as Lysol + soap. Next spring the plant had new unbitten leaves and has looked healthy ever since. I have read that cuttings of

deciduous azaleas should be taken as soon as the stems harden off a little - late May or early June. Cuttings of many other shrubs, including rhodos, can be taken after 15 July, depending on the weather. A good rain or watering a day or two before, is necessary.

Rhodos need water during the summer, in order to initiate flower buds for the next year, and that is where our climate often lets us down. Having said that, I am amazed at the huge numbers of trusses on most plants this year. Perhaps that rain in August saved their lives, after many months of drought.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Dr. Mike Bale, writing in "The Yak", (newsletter of one of the Fraser Valley Rhodo societies), March 1998, discussed buying too many rhodos, and joining too many organizations. He belongs to 11 professional organizations with annual dues ranging from \$130 to \$2000. I will quote "As a result of reviewing these expenses, I have become much more appreciative of the value one derives in membership in the American Rhodo Society. The extremely modest fee provides involvement with a very successful national organization with strong international attachments, and also includes receipt of an extremely high quality quarterly magazine which is full of authoritative and useful information. In addition, membership provides the opportunity to attend monthly meetings at the local chapter and to meet and listen to experienced and knowledgeable individuals and to benefit from their wisdom."

Words of wisdom indeed! With the cost of everything always going up, and the Canadian dollar yo going up and down, in my opinion, we should consider raising our extremely modest membership fee. The amount we pay has to be subsidized by the club to meet the cost in US

dollars, and there are still other expenses to be covered - rent, honorariums for speakers, cost of newsletters, etc. Let's have a discussion on this at the Sept. meeting.

REPORT ON THE PLANT SALE AND TRUSS SHOW May 8, by **Dave Godfrey**.

"Here is the information on our NIRS Plant Sale and Truss Show held on Sunday May 8 at the First Nations Hall on Dyke Rd. Not counting the 6 members that were selling their plants, there were 23 volunteer members who helped make the sale another huge success. This major fundraiser for the year will net the club close to \$800, thanks to all those who helped to organize and run the sale.

As for the free raffle draw, 161 tickets were deposited and the winner, drawn by Pres. **Paul Wurz**, was **Sue Taylor** of Merville. The truss show drew a lot of interest and attention, but only 28 ballots were cast for the 'People's Choice Award'. Of these, 4 favoured "Lem's Storm Cloud", while "Bambino", "Point Defiance", and "Elsie Watson" each had 3 ballots cast.

Special thanks go to **Dave Crucq**, **Diana Scott**, and **Don Law** for their expertise and advice to ensure the success of the sale. Don is to be particularly commended for all the extra time spent sorting all the sales amounts and calculating our earnings. I look forward to working with all our members again next year in anticipation of even greater success".

Dave Godfrey, Event Co-ordinator.

DAPHNE

An article in Horticulture magazine, April 2001, reminded me about Daphne, usually a lovely, highly perfumed plant, but ... I lost a D. retusa after a "bad" winter when stems were split by snow, then attacked by coral spot fungus. I have not been able to find a

replacement. *D. tangutica* is a larger sister, but sprawley. However, it has the same lovely purple buds and white flowers, as well as perfume.

D. odora is one that dies of "root rot" in some parts of the country. Sharp drainage seems to be the answer. Many have been planted under roof overhangs. My plant gets no water in summer, and very little in winter. They are sprawley plants also, but have a wonderful perfume. *D. cneorum*, a low sprawler with bright pink blooms, is expensive and often not long-lived in this area.

There are many other varieties that are seldom on offer, or not quite hardy enough for us. Exceptions are *D. mezereum*, a deciduous variety which seeds itself all over my garden, and *D. laureola*, an evergreen almost weed which is scattered all over forested areas of Vancouver Island. Both of these are very hardy and bloom in winter; tiny pink, purple or white perfumed flowers on *mezereum* and green ones on *laureola*.

Another article in the same magazine described PHORMIUM, New Zealand Flax. These large and often spectacular plants, with leaves like giant swords, often brilliantly coloured, are not really hardy in this area, but are very suitable as summer pot plants. In the past the plant supplied a fibre called New Zealand Flax or Hemp. An old leaf torn into strips makes a remarkably strong material for tying plants to stakes. There are many new varieties on the market now. Look for "Rainbow Surprise", brilliant yellow/orange. Cut down on watering and put the plant, pot and all, in a frost-free place for the winter.

TALKING OF OLD RHODOS

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Dr. Mike Trembath of the South Fraser chapter of ARS, has written an interesting article on "The Old

and Not Necessarily Ugly" rhodos. She comments "old" seems to vary with the chronological age of the writer so the period was set at pre-1940. "Oldies but Goodies" that should be reliable plants for the budding rhodophile.

"When I think `white rhodo' I think of Helene Schiffner - awarded an FCC from the RHS in 1893 - and still unbeatable. A moderate-growing plant with nice dark foliage whose bud scales are so dark red as to look almost black, and whose flowers are pure white in a nice neat truss. She is still readily available and well worth growing. Of much the same vintage (exhibited prior to 1886) is *Chionoides*. This too is widely available. It is also a moderate grower, late May, early June bloomer, foliage rather coarse and rugose - blooms smallish and rounded - florets white with a slight yellow centre - and goodness knows it is hardy.

Who can forget *Sappho* - also pre 1887 - a very striking plant with its round, white truss and strong purple blotch. If you grow her, you have to learn to live with her untidy habit, or spend a lifetime of frustration trying to make her grow into a semblance of an independent plant. I once did see her looking like a normal shrub, but she stood parched, starving and alone in the middle of a lawn.

Ed Trayling grew a plant called *Queen o' the May* with much the same colour scheme tho' a more upright truss and the blotch a bit subdued. An elegant plant, but Ed's parent plant died and no one seems to have been able to propagate it.

If you want to hide a neighbour's garbage dump or some such, how about *Mrs. A.T. de la Mare* - a very big growing lady with impeccable foliage and a big white truss with green markings, and fragrance. What more could you ask? Well, it would be nice if the flowers didn't get rust spots even in the dew, let

alone rain - and she is BIG. While we are on size, nothing can beat *Beauty of Littleworth* - gorgeous dark foliage, huge Loderi-type trss of pure white set off by purple throat speckles. I suppose it is really a big garden plant but I wouldn't want to be without it - blooms in April.

Then there is *White Pearl* (also called *Halopeanum*) - 1896 - another big growing plant with a tall truss of almost translucent appearance - a couple of red whiskers in the throat. It has very dark foliage, completely characteristic of only itself, but I'm at a loss to describe its unique quality".

Ed. Note: I'd like to add a couple of plants to this list - *Diane Titcomb*, with huge pink buds and a pale pink-white flower with pink markings. *Anna Rose Whitney*, another plant with huge pink buds and bright pink trusses. Both of these plants are monsters in my garden, and though *Anna Rose* was planted in a sunny spot with nothing overhanging her, she has become very sprawley and has had to be pruned severely. This has not stopped her blooming profusely however.

For those interested in giant rhodos, there are red ones too. Another article will list some of these.

THREE RECIPES - ONE FOR YOU, TWO FOR PLANTS.

Here is a tasty Poppy Seed Cake, courtesy Lynn Wurz.

1/4 cup poppy seeds
1/4 cup milk
1 Lemon Supreme cake mix
1-3 oz/ pkg. Instant Lemon Pudding
4 eggs
1/2 cup salad oil
1 cup warm water

Mix 1 tbsp. each of cocoa, cinnamon and sugar together. Have on hand 3 tbsp. lemon juice and 6 tbsp. white sugar, mixed together.

Soak the poppy seeds in milk overnight. Next morning, mix together the cake mix, pudding mix, eggs, salad oil and water, add the poppy seed mixture.

Grease and flour a bundt pan. Pour in part of the cake mixture, sprinkle with cocoa mixture, repeat several times until both mixtures are used up.

Bake at 350F for 1 hour. This depends on your oven of course. Turn the cake out of the pan, and while still warm, drizzle the lemon juice mixture over it. The makes a LARGE bundt cake, absolutely delicious.

COMPLETE ORGANIC FERTILIZER

This was copied from a Territorial Seed catalogue several years ago. All quantities are by volume, for easy scooping and measuring.

4 parts fishmeal or seedmeal
1 part dolomite lime
1 part rock phosphate or 1/2 part bonemeal
1/2 part kelpmeal

Canola seed meal can be purchased in many retail garden centres. It is high in nitrogen, has a moderate amount of phosphorus and is weak in potassium. Buy finely-ground agricultural or dolomite lime. Do NOT use quick lime or slaked lime in the garden. Bonemeal and rock phosphate are effective phosphate fertilizers; bonemeal is faster-acting and much more expensive. Kelpmeal adds potassium and all necessary trace elements.

Organic fertilizer is a slow-release material. There is much less tendency to burn plants or over-fertilizing with it. One application at planting time is usually sufficient. To use it in a cost-effective manner, avoid broadcasting it. Place it around the plants or seedlings, but not close enough to touch delicate stems, as it

can heat and decompose more rapidly once it has been wetted. It would be wise to mix it with some soil, then place the mixture around (or under, when transplanting) a plant.

ROOTING CUTTINGS OF REX BEGONIAS

This method, offered by **Joan**

Berkenstock, gave me two beautiful plants of a "sea shell" begonia. I have had no luck with other methods.

Cut off a healthy leaf with about 2" of stem attached, and place it in a glass or plastic jar of damp perlite. I used glass pint jars. Push the stem down into the perlite, cover with a plastic bag, and place in a propagator or on a warm window-sill. Don't let the leaf touch the plastic - trim off part of it if necessary. It may need a bit more water in a month or so. Peek under the leaf after a few weeks, and when a new little leaf is seen, cut off part of the old leaf. When new leaves are about 1" in size, carefully lift the new plant out and place it in a pot of sterilized potting soil. It will rapidly grow into a lovely little plant. I used 4 begonia leaves and got two plants. The operation took about 2 months.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

This has been such a banner year for spring bloom on trees and shrubs, particularly the rhodos. Even though the weather turned so wet and dark again in May, the wealth of bloom has been breathtaking. My hawthorns have never been so colourful, and even the smallest laburnum is a mass of bright yellow.

The NIRS Truss Show and Sale on May 8 was a treat, giving me a chance to catch up with club members. Driving to and from Comox for evening meetings just doesn't work well for me, and when I read about the meetings afterwards, I am sorry to have missed them. So, a bit late, here is my update on rhodo hybrids that have performed well in this area.

Yaku Sunrise, Yaku Incense, White Gold and Mrs. Furnivall continue to be at the top of my Sayward list. Now that I have had them for a few years, I have to add Janet Blair, Hachmann's Marlis, Trudy Webster, Goldflimmer, Wigeon (one of the Cox hybrids named after game birds), Silver Skies, and Vibrant Violet, both from Frank Fujioka. A disappointment is Capistrano, a new-ish yellow whose flowers can't begin to compete with Hotei or Nancy Evans.

As I have room, I grow a lot of deciduous azaleas. A fairly recent addition to my collection is a hybrid called Moonlight. It is a lovely soft, clear yellow, sulphur yellow as Gertrude Jekyll would say, with none of the gold tones common in its cousins. I purchased mine from Jensen's in Comox, but have never seen it for sale since. I regularly nag Paul to propagate it, hoping it will become more common on the north Island.

Last month a friend, **Michelle Morton**, who lives in Black Creek, gave me a plant of Omphalodes cappadocia "Starry Eyes". This lovely groundcover has bright blue spring flowers, a bit like forget-me-nots, that are edged in white. It prefers partial shade in moist, fertile soil. I have placed it where it has room to form a good-sized mat. David Tarrant often recommends omphalodes, and he did so again when he spoke to the horticultural society in April. Yes, I did drive down to hear him, car-pooling with Sayward garden club members.

The **Sayward Garden Tour** is scheduled for Saturday, July 23. Ed. Note: I have gone on this tour several times, and have written enthusiastically about the lovely gardens and friendly garden owners in that area. These people are avid gardeners and grow beautiful roses, rhodos, annuals and perennials of all kinds, imaginative water gardens

- mark your calendars, get a car-pool together and go. It is a lovely drive and well worth the time.

Back to Rose-Marie's discussion. A recent Native Plant Society newsletter included an article on the roof design for the new expansion to the Vancouver Convention Centre. This building will have a six-acre green roof that will mimic typical coastal grassland. Native plants have been selected that tolerate the drought and exposed conditions of the site.

Sayward is home to the beautiful estuary of the Salmon River. Rich in plant and bird life, the estuary is a delightful place for a stroll or a paddle. On summer evenings in the 1960's, when I was home from school, my father and I used to row through its dozens of channels. Now the site is under the aegis of the Nature Trust of B.C.

At present the chocolate lilies (*Fritillaria lanceolata*) are blooming there, and the shooting star (*Dodecatheon pulchellum*) is beginning - there is a huge sweep of it that turns several acres a glowing pink. Last year purple martins were sighted in the estuary, so this spring my brother has put up nest boxes for them on the pilings left from old booming activities.

A favorite task that my garden centre business requires of me is to assemble hanging baskets and container plantings for customers. I enjoy doing all of these, regardless of whether or not plants or colours would be my own choice. However, I do have my biases to be sure, and one is a preference for calm colour schemes. Most customers ask for containers to contain the full colour spectrum, to be as bright as possible - the "riot of colour" seed catalogs like to describe. (I have never understood how a riot could be construed as a positive metaphor). A recent order, though, was for baskets destined for

a sheltered site in partial shade, and I was to "do whatever you like". I spent a gleeful couple of hours assembling yellow begonias and the delightful blue *Streptocarpella* in wicker baskets. I think I'll do a few of these for myself now.

MEMBER NOTES

Two subjects I never seem to get enough of are **SLUGS and WEATHER.**

First, the slugs. I have not seen many giant black ones yet this spring - too cold in the mornings I suppose - but there are lots of little grey ones around, judging by the holes in several hostas. I am going to try a new product on the market - SLUGGO, supposedly harmless to animals and birds, but keep it away from children and ponds. It has ferric sulphate in it.

Now the weather. I am sure everyone considers the past few months to be unusual, and you are right. I know the Oyster River area weather is not the same as Campbell River or Courtenay, being in the middle of the highway between them.

My weather record might not be the same as yours.

January average 1981 to 2000- 230 mm. This year 170 mm.
Feb. av. 195 This yr. 64
March av. 151 " " 213
April av. 95 " " 223
May " 72 " " 157 to May 22. Yes, we seem to be in a different set of climatic figures this year.. The last time we had a large amount of rain in May was 1984, with 141 mm for the month. I wonder what will be next? Meantime, all trees and shrubs are outdoing themselves in producing leaves and flowers.

COMPANION PLANTS FOR RHODOS

If you are itching to buy something new to keep the rhodos company, consider some of the following, usually very hardy here, and often producing flowers or colourful

leaves at a different time of the year.

First, perhaps, are deciduous azaleas, which of course are really rhodos themselves. In addition to the brilliant spring flowers, these plants have leaves that are equally brilliant in the fall. They can take more direct sun than the large-leaved evergreen rhodos.

Kalmia latifolia blooms in June, after many rhodo flowers are finished. For a great display, visit Harry Wright's garden in June. *Pieris japonica* is a plant with hanging bunches of white, pink or red flowers, and new leaves (cut the seedpods off, please) that can be any bright colour from yellow to red. These are hardy here - the cold snap we had this spring that ruined some rhodo flower buds didn't bother the pieris at all. Have you thought of varieties of *Vaccinium* in the garden? They belong to the same family as rhodos and many have the advantage of delicious edible berries as well as bright red new leaves and fantastic fall colour.

I don't have much luck with *Hydrangea macrophylla* (*Hortensia*), probably because our soil is sandy and free-draining and water is precious. However, I have no problem growing *H. quercifolia*, a plant I got as a small cutting from **Linda Easton**. This shrub is huge now, with large flower trusses and leaves that turn the most beautiful shades of red and purple in fall. A great background plant.

If you need a large shrub, consider the *Hamamelis*. Depending on variety, you can have flowers from October to March, bright yellow, bronze or red, and a bonus of bright yellow or bronze leaf colour in fall.

Enkianthus campanulatus is another easy-to-grow rhodo relative. Dainty bell flowers, scarlet fall colour, what else do you need?

There are many more attractive shrubs to look for in nurseries or

beg cuttings for in friends' gardens.

WHAT ABOUT THE INDUMENTUM?

Kelly Dodson wrote a useful article in the Rhodo Species Foundation Newsletter, January 1994, that reminded me it is time to discuss indumentum again. Flowers are for a few weeks, indumentum lasts forever.

" There are many rhodos of refinement whose complexity of form, texture, bark and especially indumentum extends their allure beyond the obvious floral appeal.

Indumentum is a covering of hairs generally found on the underside of certain rhodo leaves. When appearing on the upper surface of leaves, these hairs are called "tomentum" and are more striking in the new growth. Ed. Note: in the past ten years this term seems to have been discontinued.

Very likely, the function of indumentum is to maintain the moisture content of the air adjacent to the leaf surface and stabilize transpiration rates. There also may be some deterrent factor involved with certain chewing and sucking insects, although watching various caterpillars eagerly devouring indumented new shoots like so much asparagus, I wonder if this is more wishful speculation than reality.

H.H. Davidian recognized 18 distinct hair types and 10 forms of these types in "The Rhododendron Species, Vol II".. This subject is complicated because these hairs exhibit considerable variation within specific types and frequently integrate into other types of hairs.

Blooms are simply a bonus on those species cloaked with indumentum.

A personal favorite is **R. elegantulum** whose narrow leaves sport a vibrant reddish-brown indumentum. Another stellar species is **R. pachysanthum**, whose smallish leaves show a nice orange-brown indumentum.

R. bureavii is the consummate foliage plant. A low-growing shrub, its somewhat broadly rounded leaves have a softly inviting appearance backed by a superb rusty brown indumentum.

R. sherriffii is a small-boned aristocrat with all parts in perfect scale and taste. Its delicate twigs and leaves, contrasted with a chocolate indumentum and simple cherry-red flowers, are the embodiment of the phrase "you can never be too rich or too thin".

A few more of the many indumented species to seek out include **R. rex** ssp. **fictolacteam**, **R. fulvum**, **R. tsariense**, **R. arboreum** ssp. **cinnamomeum** and **R. campanulatum** in its various forms.

When choosing your next rhodo for the garden, look beyond the flowers, turn over a leaf, and consider indumentum."

Ed. Note: I have abbreviated the article to some extent. I was surprised that **R. yakushianum** was not mentioned, not only because the various forms have many varied colours of flowers, but each has a different indumentum colour from ivory through tan, cinnamon to brown. And how about **R. strigillosum**? Have you seen the new growth - all green and red and grey, with new white hairs and stems with red bristles? This show is more spectacular than the brilliant red flowers.

All the above are species rhodos, but many hybrids of these plants carry the indumentum in their genes. Look for indumentum when you buy a rhodo, and get far more than one season's pleasure from the plant.

This all reminds me that the new leaves on some of these plants, such as Sir Charles Lemon and various Yaks, are quite delicate at first, often covered top and bottom with grey hairs on the top surface, and indumentum that darkens with age.

If a sudden shaft of hot spring sun hits these leaves, they sustain nasty burn spots. If possible, I try to whip out a piece of old glass curtain to protect the plant for a few hours in the afternoons. This becomes quite difficult when hot sun is combined with a stiff west wind.

That is why last year's leaves on my Sir Charles look terrible. This year - well, maybe the leaves will have toughened up by the time the rain and clouds disappear.

THANKS

Many thanks to all the people who have helped with the newsletter over many years, particularly **Jane Drown, Bernie Guyader, Harry Wright, Pauline and Dick Bonney, and Ray Palmer**. Harry, Bernie and **Rose-Marie Silkins** have provided articles regularly, and many other members have offered advice or help over the years. It was all much appreciated. Now the plan is for **Noni Godfrey** to arrange and edit the newsletter, and I, along with **Rose-Marie**, will provide articles on various garden subjects, including rhodos, of course.