

North Island Rhododendron Society

PO Box 3183 Courtenay BC Canada V9N 5N4 Vol.19 No.9 May 2005



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Articles not credited are by the editor.

3 May

Executive meeting will be held at the home of **Paul Wurz**, 4367 Gordon Rd., Campbell River. Drive north past the pulp mill, turn onto Duncan Bay Rd., then to Gordon Rd. Paul's home and nursery is just past the Mystic Woods Nursery. Watch for signs.

10 May

Annual Meeting will be held at the home of **Pauline and Dick Bonney**, 2393 Seabank Rd., Courtenay. Kitty Coleman Rd. to Wavecrest, left on Wavecrest to Seabank, a short distance left again. Watch for a high metal gate (to keep the deer out). Bring lawn chairs, and remember to consider ahead of time - is it my turn to help the club continue in an efficient manner? We need a Membership person and someone to help organize Programs.

12 April

We had a very stimulating evening, with many members taking active part. **Harry Wright** brought slides of some very beautiful rhodos, **Paul** brought plants in bloom, and many others offered trusses and leaves of various rhodos as well as telling us how well these plants do in their gardens. Many members felt it was one of the most successful evenings we have had. Thanks to everybody!

MEMBER NOTES

New book catalogues are on hand,

from Firefly and Whitecap Books, and a book order will be going out in a few weeks. A 20-book order means discounts of 40-50%.

Remember to stop by our Rhodo garden, and lend a hand on work party days, or just drop by, admire the flowers, and do a bit of deadheading or pull a few weeds (mainly maple seedlings).

Our best wishes for speedy recovery go out to **Bill Dale** in a Victoria hospital, and **Bonnie Steele**, due for a stint in a Vancouver hospital.

Here is a recipe from **Harry Wright** that should be used often.

RECIPE FOR A HOME

To 1/2 cup of Friendship add 1 cup of Thoughtfulness. Cream together with a pinch of powdered Tenderness, and beat lightly.. Add to a bowl of Loyalty, with a cup each of Faith, Hope and Charity. Be sure to add a spoonful each of Gaiety that sings and the Ability to Laugh at little things. Moisten with a sudden tear of Heartfelt Sympathy. Bake in a goodnatured pan and serve repeatedly.

Susan Ramsey, writing in the Colonist April 23, wrote a useful article on rhodos. She included a photo of **Norm Todd** with a yellow jacket and mauve *R. augustinii*. Very artistic!
Norm passed on his recipe for

healthy rhodos. Basic requirements are **WASH** -

W for water. Rhodos need 1" (25mm) per week during our dry summers. Ed. Note: Need, yes.

Get - well, we do the best we can when our rhodos live in water-short regions.

A for acid. A pH of 5.5 is ideal. We have that.

S for shade. "Many rhodos require full sun but the average hybrid with leaves 6" long needs 6 hours of good light at mid-summer in order to set flower buds".

H for humus. Dig 50% bark mulch into the surrounding soil, to ensure acidic soil and good drainage.

Norm gave some other important reminders. Consider the leaves - rhodos have beautiful leaves all year-round, but flowers do not last. Of course you can have one plant or another in bloom from January to August if you choose carefully. Size of plant at 5-10 years can be important, especially if you have a small garden. Some rhodos work hard to become 20 ft. trees, and cutting them back does not discourage them. If you have a small city lot, choose the rhodos with tiny leaves and a mature height of 18".

"DoDon't set your heart on a plant you have seen in a magazine. It might not be available here, it may not be appropriate for your conditions. It may have been

featured because it is a rare prima-donna" Ed. Note: This is so true. I would be ashamed to admit the number of rhodos that I have lost for these and other reasons. Read the labels - if the plant is hardy to -5F, no worry in our climate. If to +5F, don't plant it where the northeast wind might catch it once every 5-10 years. +10F means don't take a chance.

Another point Norm made, which we often forget; plan to have your rhodos (and your garden in general) in bloom when you are home to enjoy them. If you plan to be away in the January to March period, don't bother with early blooming rhodos.

DATES TO REMEMBER

May 8 Mothers' Day - our plant sale and Rhodo Show at the First Nations Hall on the scenic road between Field's Sawmill and Comox.

May 15 Tours of gardens in the Miracle Beach area. Tickets at various nurseries in the area.

May 28 George Fraser Day at Ucluelet. The rhodo garden at Stubb's Island will be open the same weekend, so plan to attend both events if possible. (Don't forget **Ken Gibson's** garden in Tofino also). Altogether, an exciting weekend!

Black Creek Farm & Feed has a supply of good rhodo fertilizer on hand. Present your card for a discount.

ANOTHER RECIPE, this time for making a mossy surface for clay or cement pots. Mix an 8 oz. lump of clay with 3 cups water, add 1 cup undeluted fish fertilizer and 1 cup of fresh moss. Mix thoroughly, and use to spread on pots for a nice mossy surface. Keep them in a shady spot until the moss is well established.

Talking of moss reminds me of ferns.

FERNS IN THE RHODO GARDEN, an article by **Diane Thompson** in the Nov. 1997 Seattle

Rhododendronland News. Ferns make a lovely textural addition to the rhodo bed. There are fluffy ferns, bold ferns, shiny ferns and lacy ones.

When choosing ferns, remember some are evergreen and some deciduous, some hardy and some not. Rabbit's Foot ferns are house ferns. Ferns don't have "flowers", so choose the ones with beautiful fronds. Our native Sword ferns look lovely with large rhodos and Vine Maples at the edge of a woodland garden, and Deer ferns combine well with smaller rhodos.

Smaller ferns like the Hard Shield, Soft Shield and Crested types work well in front of and between rhodos. Try the Japanese Painted Fern with a lavender or purple rhodo. The Autumn Fern has lovely rust coloured new fronds, to complement yellow and orange rhodos. Maidenhair ferns look well with all rhodos, just remember they need shade.

After a few years, you will find little 'fernlets' at the base of some ferns. Some ferns have these, or baby ferns along the veins. These can be propagated by laying them on the ground, kept damp. Later you can cut the babies out and plant them in little pots of soil and peat moss.

Then thinking about something new for your garden, remember "eye enjoyment" and texture, and try some ferns. They will be one of the nicest additions to your rhodo collection.

Ed. Note: article condensed and revised slightly.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

April has begun with wet, windy weather, and it surprises me how cheerfully the primulas are blooming in spite of that. I have always had a preference in a general way for single flowers; so often old

favorites lost much of their charm when they were selected or hybridized to be double. Yet the English primroses are as charming as a primrose can be, and their colours have the delicacy and subtlety I associate with the primula genus. My favorite one is invariably the one I'm looking at, though I do lean towards the pastels, such as '**Paragon**', '**Marie Crouse**', and '**Quaker's Bonnet**'. Their colours are lovely when grouped together. I have just discovered the frilly green '**Francesca**', from the Surrey garden of Francesca Darts, and have planted it among a cluster of old single white-flowered plants, near a dark green Irish Yew.

Across a stretch of lawn from that group, a well-established planting of **Primula veris** is beginning to bloom. It is a larger plant in all respects than **P. vulgaris**, and the flowers appear on fairly long stems. A few selections with colour variations are available, but I continue to prefer this lovely plant in its original soft yellow. The deliciously-scented flowers proclaim spring in spite of pelting rain and a gusty wind that hurtles the juncos and hummingbirds between feeders.

Another tough primula is the **Siberian P. cortusoides**. It came to me as a gift some years ago, and has spread into a substantial clump near the edge of a mixed shrub border. It won't bloom there until the end of April, when its abundant mauve-pink flowers dance on longish stems. And yes, these flowers are single.

Forming canopies above the early-spring flowers, my growing collection of magnolias are in various stages of their springtime performance. After each windstorm I anxiously check them all. The earliest bloomer, *Magnolia stellata*, is in a sheltered spot, but nonetheless the four big windstorms that have hit us since it was fully in

bloom have battered the display. After each wind there are more white petals strewn across the surrounding beds. I can live with that, as long as the tree itself isn't damaged.

Magnolias are notoriously susceptible to wind damage, but that usually happens in the fall, when they still have their leaves to give the wind a better grip. A large *M.x soulangeana* near my front door has been torn repeatedly by November gales; its odd shape is a testament to many sessions of therapeutic pruning. It is now far too large to move, but I have never wanted to do that anyway. Its large leaves hide the pruned branches, and in spring the breathtaking flower display is all one can notice. (It is a very dark purple selection, darker than 'Rustica Rubra'). It continues to offer a few blooms all summer, and then pops out another fairly big display in September. My theory is that this magnolia is living up to being given pride of place. Visitors are invariably smitten by it, I admire it daily, and it responds by acting like a diva. I suppose its diet might be a factor. It is underplanted with early spring bulbs and hostas. The bulb bloom is over, and the foliage tatty, before the hostas are up, so I cover the whole thing with a layer of tidy black fish compost.

BOOK REVIEW

GRASS SCAPES, Gardening with Ornamental Grasses, by Martin Quinn & Catherine Macleod. Whitecap Books 2003

This is a lovely book, with excellent photos of individual grasses and grasses in the landscape; paintings also of individual grasses; notes on root systems, grass forms, cultivation, examples of colour in the garden in winter, spring, summer and fall, and a large selection of grass descriptions, including zone numbers, which are very important to me. I lost several grasses in the Feb. frost this winter. Clumpers and Spreaders is another

concern - what purpose do you have for the grass and where to place it in the garden. This book will give you much detail. There is a good selection of *Carex* (sedge), many of which are happy in dry gardens.

Because we often get grasses, sedges and rushes mixed up, I will quote a bit from the book. "The term 'ornamental grass' is used very loosely. 'True' grasses are members of the Poaceae family, which includes woody-stemmed bamboos. The other grass-like families are sedges (Cyperaceae), rushes (Juncaceae, restios (Restionaceae), and cattails (Typhaceae). Often sedges, rushes, restios and cattails are lumped in with true grasses when discussing ornamental grasses". I borrowed this book from the Campbell River library.

Another book with extensive descriptions and pictures of grasses, "A Place in the Rain, Designing the West Coast Garden", Ed. Michael K. Lascelle, Pub. Whitecap, was reviewed in Gardenwise magazine, Summer 2004. I have not seen the book yet, but this excerpt suggests there must be a great deal of useful advice for any West Coast gardener in it. "Enthusiastic homeowners often rush into landscaping their yard without considering all the options. The various chapters contained in this book will help you to see your garden from every possible angle. The essence of the advice is: read the landscape... before you plant... This compilation work showcases some of B.C.'s best and brightest landscape designers, professional gardeners and landscape architects".

WHERE DO RHODOS LIVE IN THEIR NATURAL HOMES?

I have been re-reading "Sikkim-Himalayan Rhododendrons". Pradhan & Lachungpa, Primulaceae Books 1990, and as usual ask myself "How can these plants adapt themselves to

gardens on Vancouver Island where the climate is so different?" These abbreviated quotes might give us a few clues, but I can only think that miracles abound in the plant world.

Eight species of Sikkim Rhodos are found growing either epiphytically (grow on moss, tree branches, but derive no nourishment from them), or lithophytically (grow on stony surfaces). Some, *R. leptocarpum*, *R. camelliiflorum*, *R. lindleyi*, may be either epiphytes or lithophytes, but *R. maddenii* is usually lithophytic and grows among sedges and rocky scrub on steep slopes. *R. vaccinooides* grows in moss covered trees and rocks in deep shade. *R. dalhousiae* and *R. lindleyi* inhabit trees such as Oak and Magnolia but can also be found growing on large boulders in association with ferns and Orchids. *R. pendulum* is found on *Abies* and on huge rocks facing northeast. *R. edgeworthii* prefers to hang down from near the tops of *Abies* and *Tsuga* trees and from rocky ledges. *R. camelliiflorum* is nearly always epiphytic on *Tsuga* and Oaks, together with Orchids like *Coelogyne* and *Pleone*.

Other rhodo species invariably grow on sandy loam covered with humus and often in impregnable thickets, such as the *R. hodgsonii* forest in north Sikkim.

R. anthopogon and *R. lepidotum* grow in the alpine region in sandy gravelly soil, often forming large populations, along banks of rivers in NE Sikkim, and *R. nivale* and *R. pumilum* inhabit alpine screes.

Summers are wet owing to the monsoon rains, winters are cold and dry and snowfall above 2500 metres is a regular winter occurrence.

In contrast, summers on Vancouver Island are hot and dry, and winters are usually comparatively warm and wet. As the saying goes, "How do

they do it?"

R. WILLIAMSIANUM

What do you think of the Williamsianum hybrids? I noticed a few days ago (many rhodos are blooming earlier than usual this hot April weather that followed on the heels of the cold wet weather earlier in the month that Rose-Marie described) that I have 3-4 rhodos blooming at once, all with roundish leaves and similar frilly pink flowers. What are they? All are Williamsian hybrids and some the same cross.

All are very hardy (to -5F) and seem quite happy in my garden with lots of sun and very little water all summer.

J.C. Williams was the hybridizer. He lived in Cornwall 1861 - 1939, and is also famous for his lovely Camellia hybrids.

Bow Bells - 'Corona' x
williamsianum, coppery new leaves
James Barto - williamsianum x
orbiculare (probably)
Mission Bells - williamsianum x
orbiculare
Royal Pink - 'Homer' x
williamsianum
Temple Belle - orbiculare x
williamsianum
Willbrit - williamsianum x
'Britannia'

There are many more, some hybridized by **Dietrich Hobbie** (sure to be super-hardy). **E.H. Wilson** discovered R. williamsianum in 1908. It is native to remote areas of western Sichuan at elevations of 2500 to 7500 ft. It is frequently used in hybridizing for it is an elegant plant with attractive foliage. New foliage ranges from almost orange (Temple Belle) to dark red (Elizabeth Lockhart), giving yet another burst of colour to the plant. Most of these rhodos are quite low, spreading wider than high, but most of the German hybrids develop into fairly tall, broad shrubs. Young plants can be slow to begin flowering, but once they do, what a show! Look for tags showing this cross, and you will

never be disappointed.

VIEW RHODOS IN OTHER GARDENS if you have the opportunity. I stopped in at **Linda Easton's** garden (4077 S. Is. Hwy, Campbell River) the other day, and was amazed at how much some rhodos have grown since they were planted some 10-12 years ago. This is the best way to find out just how big a plant will grow in 10 years. One of the williamsianum hybrids in her garden, 'Linda', a cross with 'Britannia', is positively huge, and loaded with frilly pink flowers. Linda also has several beautiful Camellias, one with 3 different kinds of flowers on it.

If you possibly can, make a trip to gardens like **Linda's**, **Paul Wurz's** (4367 Gordon Rd., Campbell River) or **Harry Wright's** (769 Chaster Rd. Courtenay), where you can see many rhodos in bloom, and very likely be able to buy your favorite. You don't have to travel to Nanaimo, Victoria or Seattle to see wonderful rhodos; our own members have dozens or hundreds of them, and you can feel sure that any that can live happily in our area will survive in your garden too. Every garden also has many perennial plants such as Hostas, and many interesting trees to enhance the area.

Several other members of our club also have plants for sale - **Anne Doolittle** on Quadra Is. and **Rose-Marie Silkens** in Sayward, but it takes a bit more effort to reach their gardens. In both cases it is well worth the trip, however.

TIME FOR MORE RHODO CHORES IN THE GARDEN

It is time to spray for weevils. I understand there are new kinds of nematodes on the market that are not as sensitive to cold weather as previous kinds. Check at your favorite nursery for information on nematodes that can be applied now, and others to be applied in late summer.

During May, deadheading can be a big chore, but the plants will look better and energy will be concentrated on making flower buds for next year instead of producing seeds.