

# North Island Rhododendron Society



# PO Box 3183, Courtenay, BC, Canada V9N 5N4

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Contributors: Mary Palmer Rose-Marie Silkens

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## 2005/2006 Executive:

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### Vice-President

Harry Wright.... 338-8345

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### Membership

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### Rhodo Garden

Harry Wright.... 338-8345

### Historian

Lois Clyde..... 337-5754

### Sunshine Lady

Gwen Wright.... 338-8345

### Revenue Table

Gloria Guyader. 338-5267

### Publicity

Evelyn Wright.. 339-7493

### Newsletter

Noni Godfrey ... 335-0717

The club meets the second Tuesday of the month, except July and August, at the United Church on Comox Avenue, Comox 7:30 p.m.

## COMING EVENTS:

### 1 November

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Gwen and Harry Wright...Everyone knows where 'Haida Gold Gardens' are...

### 8 November — Regular Monthly Meeting

**Guest Speaker:** Glen Jamieson, from the MARS Club in Qualicum Beach.  
**Topic:**

Glen traveled to Yunnan, China with Steve Hootman and several other avid Rhododendron 'Plant Hunters', this past May. He has kindly agreed to do a slide show and presentation of his adventures for our club. Part one of the presentation was well attended in October (see member notes for information). Part two, concentrating on the Salween River area, is continued at our regular meeting on November 8.



## MEMBER NOTES: (by Dave Godfrey)

Over 35 members and guests attended the regular meeting on Tuesday, October 11<sup>th</sup> to enjoy guest speaker Glen Jamieson's colourful presentation on "Chinese Gardens".

Glen is a Research Scientist with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada, and a member of the MARS chapter in Qualicum Beach. In May 2005, under the guidance of Steve Hootman of the Species Foundation, Glen traveled with a group of plant enthusiasts to the Hengduan Mountains and the Salween River area of Yunnan, China.



Glen explained the many differences found in both the plants and cultures of China. His many colourful slides provided an entertaining evening for those in attendance. Part 2 of Glen's adventures will be featured at the November 8<sup>th</sup> meeting.

Glen provides information on Yunnan, China

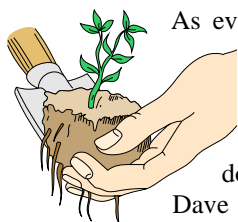
## MEETINGS:

As part of the educational portion of the October 11<sup>th</sup> meeting, NIRS member Brian Staton explained how to winterize fuchsias. For 10 years now, Brian and Barb Staton have been propagating fuchsias by removing them from their pots, trimming the plants of any new growth and burying the whole plants and trimmings in a “ditch” at a frost free depth.

These plants are then removed in the spring with both the original plant and the trimmed branches producing new growth. The plants are repotted and placed in a greenhouse where they continue to thrive. This method has produced a 95% success rate for the Statons. President Paul Wurz also gave a talk on propagation of rhododendrons. He covered several important areas of propagation, such as; the size of cuttings, the types of rooting hormones, the planting mediums and the temperatures and conditions above and below ground, to name a few. Not as easy as it looks, me thinks. Perhaps one would be well advised to take a few cuttings to Arnie in Cumberland; that \$1.65 per successful cutting is looking pretty darned good at this point.

Congratulations go out to Diana Scott, winner of the raffle prize of “Fancy Yak”; and to Mrs. Kaefer (Glenn’s mom) winner of the rhododendron “May Day” donated by Harry Wright.

## PLANT SALE AND GARDEN TOURS



As event coordinator for the 2006 plant sale on May 1<sup>st</sup>, Ways & Means director Dave Godfrey asks all members to consider potting up any companion plants for donation to the NIRS table. Also,

Dave is asking members to consider joining an “organization team” for the annual garden tours. Both these events are the major income earners for our club and require a lot of volunteer support from the members.

## SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

(by Rose-Marie Silkens)



When I have talked about *Arbutus unedo* in the past, I have always told people that its pretty fruit is inedible. Well, apparently I have been entirely mistaken. Recently I was looking up apple recipes in Jane Grigson’s *Fruit Book* when the heading ‘Arbutus’ caught my eye. To my surprise, there are two pages packed with interesting historical, culinary, geographical and scholarly information on the fruit of *A. unedo*, the Strawberry Tree. Apparently tinned arbutus fruit is exported by China (“a pretty, if not a remarkable item for taste”), and in warmer climates

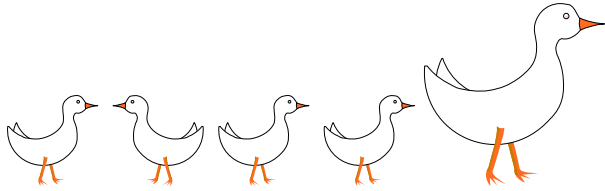
where the fruit can ripen well, it actually becomes quite juicy and makes a good jelly. For example, in northern Italy the fruit is ripe enough to be pleasant by mid-November. She does point out a possible reason for the specific name *unedo*, however. Meaning it is eaten only once, as in a single harvest, she suggests that perhaps eating it too early would mean one would never wish to try it again.

One of my eccentricities is a fondness for observing traditions, particularly those very old ones concerning gardening or farming. Planting trees at Michaelmas, the 29<sup>th</sup> of September, is one of those venerable—and sensible—customs. I was a few days late this year, but made a point of planting three of my new treasures during the appropriately wet weather we had at the beginning of October. Completely new to me is a Rock Elm, *Ulmus thomasi*. My brother grew this one from suckers given him by friends on Quadra Island, and I have added it to the ever-expanding archipelago that began as my tree island.

Rock elm, also known as cork elm, hickory elm, or cork-barked elm, is native to eastern North America, though in Canada its range is restricted to the extreme south of Quebec and Ontario. It grows on both dry, gravelly sites and moist, fertile ones, but prefers limestone ridges. In the wild it occurs with other deciduous trees or in pure stands, and makes a long trunk before branching into the crown. The bark is deeply furrowed, even on my young specimen. Rock elm has been prized for lumber, so not many naturally-occurring trees are left. My brother warns me that it is inclined to sucker freely, so some vigilance will be required on the gardener’s part, but I am looking forward to becoming much better acquainted with *Ulmus thomasi*.

Of the many native trees and shrubs I enjoy cultivating, the one making the biggest impact this October is the showy California or beaked filbert, *Corylus cornuta*. This very large shrub, represented by three specimens scattered about the place, colours dramatically in October. It is native to the west coast, but on Vancouver Island occurs naturally only in the very south. Its range does include an area on the northern mainland coast around Hazelton, where its nuts were an important food source for native people. These nuts are smaller than those of European *Cornus avellana*, but reputed to be equally edible. My shrubs have never produced nuts (in 37 years), and I wonder if the very early appearance of the female flowers means they are killed by frost. However, the plants produce for me in a different way. The beehive stands near two of them, and on a sunny winter afternoon, the honeybees find vital nourishment in the abundant, pollen-laden catkins

**Dues are Due!**



### FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN:

Membership renewals are now due!!!!

All individual memberships, (which can include husband and wives) are \$35.00 Canadian.

All Associate memberships are \$10.00 Canadian.

All cheques should be made out to N.I.R.S. and either brought to the next meeting or mailed to Dave Crucq at:

N.I.R.S.  
c/o Dave Crucq  
2301 Seabank Rd.  
Courtenay, B.C.  
V9J 1Y2

### IN MEMORY OF JIM CAVERS

Jim was President of our club from January 1989 to December 1990, when he and Joan decided to move from our club to MARS. I remember a members' garden tour around the Ships Point area, when members visited Cavers' garden - a mass of beautiful rhodos, rows of seedlings and cuttings under lights in the basement, and Joan's colorful chrysanthemums in the garden. Jim and Joan were obviously keen gardeners.

I will quote from the article he wrote for our newsletter in December 1990. Nothing has changed in the interim.

"For the last two years I have been fortunate to be in office when the North Island Chapter has been involved in a number of significant events. These include our becoming a registered society under the Society Act, the very successful BBQ as part of the ARS Conference in Victoria...

However, none of these events would have been possible or successful if it were not for the dedication of the executive I worked with and the co-operation of the membership at large. Only through their efforts could we have succeeded. It seems to me that in order to be a viable club it is necessary to have all members assume some interest not only in rhodos but also in the running of the club. I would urge all members to get the most out of the organization in the way of knowledge, friendship, and enjoyment by putting something into it.

To my executive, I want you to know how much I appreciated your support and to all those volunteers my heart-felt thanks...."

Jim never suffered fools gladly, and could be quite acerbic, if he felt someone was not "holding up his end", but this article shows he really did appreciate members' efforts. He will be missed.

### GARDEN HINTS

The Times-Colonist had an article about Sedum x Autumn Joy in the 6 Oct. 05 issue,, which reminded me -



Have you noticed the huge, beautiful Sedums of this type this fall? I think our dry summers must suit them very well, especially when the dry sunny weather lasts through Sept. And these plants are so easy to grow. You will notice new growth starting at ground level when you cut the plant back in winter.

Fine Gardening had an interesting tip (too late for this year I know), an easy way to reproduce more of your favorite variety from stem cuttings. Take about six stems when the plant is starting to bloom, cut them close to the ground. Cut off the flower head and all the leaves, and bundle the stems, hang them upside down in a cool, dry place.

In 6-10 weeks you will see tiny plantlets appearing in the leaf nodes. When these are 1/2" long, cut the stems so each piece contains a plantlet. Pot them in sterilized soil so each plantlet touches the soil, and place under lights for a few months. By spring these plants will be ready for a place in the garden.

### MOSSY POTS

Here is a recipe for covering your hypertufa or other pots with moss. Mix an 8 oz. lump of clay in 3 cups of water (pour into an old blender if you have one). Add 1 cup undiluted fish fertilizer and 1 cup fresh moss, mix thoroughly, and spread on pots to give a mossy surface.

You can also use yogurt or powdered milk mixed with water for this purpose. Keep the pots in a damp shady spot for a few months, and the moss will gradually appear.

### LOROPETALUM CHINENSE

Have you tried one of these dainty shrubs, related to Hamamelis (Witch Hazel) but not quite as hardy. I had a green- and a purple-leaved plant but they were not happy in my Z7 garden., in fact after the green one died, I gave the other away to a warmer garden.

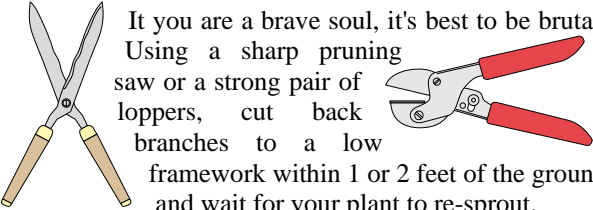
However, according to Helen Chesnut in the Oct 6 Times Colonist, they do very well in Victoria. Fringe Flower is the common name, as the flowers look fringe-like, bright pink on the purple-leaved form (named Razzleberri) and white on the green ones.

Ms. Chesnut keeps hers in a pot, which can be moved around when it is in bloom. I might try again, and move the pot into a warm corner when the temperature drops below -5C.

## A REMINDER ABOUT PRUNING RHODOS

Amateur Gardening May 2005 had a brief reminder for rhodo gardeners.

"As rhodos and camellias generally need minimal pruning, gardeners are often under the impression that they shouldn't be pruned at all. But sometimes, they need a drastic rejuvenation, either because they are getting old and leggy or they've simply outgrown their space. And hard pruning works surprisingly well on most varieties, except tree forms of rhodos such as *R. arboreum* and *R. falconeri*. The key is patience - you may need to wait a couple of seasons before your plants recover enough to be covered in a profusion of blooms again.

 It you are a brave soul, it's best to be brutal. Using a sharp pruning saw or a strong pair of loppers, cut back branches to a low framework within 1 or 2 feet of the ground and wait for your plant to re-sprout.

If you don't feel this is an option because your plant is a key feature and you can't bear to wait for it to grow back, then do the job more gradually. Thin out 1/3 of the shoots each season, over a period of 3 years.

The best time to prune is in spring, just after the plant has finished flowering. As pruning removes much of the plant's food reserves, give it a balanced feed such as blood or fish and bone meal. This will help build the plant back up."

Note from MP: I have noticed some rhodos, after some hard pruning, immediately start new shoots at ground level. With them, I believe, severe pruning will result in a new bushy plant in a few years. Others, often with one stem (tree-like), will not regenerate from the bottom. Cutting down the leader simply means they grow another leader. These I presume must have some arboretum blood in them.

## SLUGS

I promise this is the last slug report for this year. I started on June 18 to pick up every large black or brown slug found on our property, count them, and drop them into pots of salt water. I picked up 481 in June, 688 in July, 642 in August, and 133 in September. I stopped bothering with them on September 7<sup>th</sup>. I had several 100+ slug days; the biggest day was just after the welcome 25 mm rain we had on August 16<sup>th</sup>.

However, I am sorry to say I never found one of these slugs near my Hostas; I think the tiny grey slugs are the worst Hosta eaters, and though I put oyster and egg shells around every plant several times during the summer, these plants were badly eaten. After a dry September, "giant slugs" (the deer) tore many hosta

leaves off and devoured them. Now, they have all turned yellow and are ready for winter.

I read in the Times-Colonist that coffee grounds seem to discourage the slugs, so next year, instead of mixing these with compost around the rhodos, I will try using them for slug bait. Life goes on!

## HELLEBORES

Here are some myths and facts about these plants, from Steve Wysall, writing in the Vancouver Sun.

Myth: Hellebores must be planted in shade or part shade.

Fact: Most are sun-loving plants; Corsicans must be in full sun, but others are happy anywhere, even in full shade.

Myth: Hellebores are fickle and difficult to grow.

Fact: The Christmas Rose, *H. niger*, can be temperamental and difficult to establish, all others are easy as long as they have well-drained soil, enriched with organic material.

Myth: Hellebores cannot be moved or divided.

Fact: Clumps can be moved at any time, given their large root ball is dug with lots of soil attached. They can be divided, but may take a year off flowering.

Myth: The Christmas Rose doesn't flower at Christmas

Fact: Most varieties of *H. niger* don't flower at Christmas, but *H. niger* 'Praecox' can flower as early as October.

Myth: Hellebores thrive in any soil.

Fact: They survive in poor soil, but flourish in soil that has large amounts of organic matter. Compost or well-rotted manure is much appreciated. Fresh horse manure in fall will be washed in by winter rains.

Myth: Hellebores are over-priced.

Fact: Seeds take 9 months to germinate, and plants flower after 3-4 years of care. \$15 - \$25 is then a reasonable price.



Varieties of *H. orientalis* (now called *H. x hybridus*), are the most popular. Varieties with yellow, deep red and dark purple flowers are snapped up the moment they are

seen. Double-flowered hybrids are also much sought after.

It is recommended that the old leaves be cut off the plants before the flowers open, especially if they look black or tattered. They appreciate a side-dressing of lime once or twice a year, especially *H. niger*.

Note by Mary Palmer: I moved my *H. niger*s close to the wall of the house, where a bit of lime is regularly washed out of the foundation, and they seem much happier there. But all the rest live down in the woods, where the soil is acidic, and they get a little winter sun but none in summer. I almost never cut any leaves off the plants, because they almost never look tattered. Also, I never have any luck germinating seeds, but the plants are always surrounded by dozens of seedlings. I pot them up for plant sales, and now have a great array of flower colours, from white and green through pinks to purples. Very satisfactory plants, these!

### A FEW GARDENING NOTES

There are many handsome *Brugmansias* around the area, and everyone asks whether or not they will survive the winter here. I was told to cut mine back to a foot and leave it in a cold greenhouse for the winter. WRONG. I lost it.

Better advice is to partly cut it back, and keep it in a room where the temperature doesn't go below about 50F (10C). This is not possible for most of us in this area.

The best advice is to take cuttings. Amateur Gardening, in April, said "A *brugmansia* is an easy plant to propagate. Break off as many non-flowering pieces as you like and every piece will grow. The only trick is to use branching pieces if possible, because they will flower earlier than straight ones. All the flowers come from joints between the branches, so once they've branched, they'll flower.

It doesn't matter what size your cutting is, just pop it into a pot with some multi-purpose compost. Alternatively place it in a jug of water for up to a week, watch the roots appear, and then pot it up.

When potting on, put some fertilizer in the bottom of the container - pelleted chicken manure or bone meal. Once it's strongly into growth, make sure it has plenty of water. In a container it will need watering twice a day in hot weather; in the ground once a day will be sufficient".

Note from Mary: Sorry I didn't get this in earlier - it may be too late this season to get material for cuttings.

**Deadline for December  
Newsletter is Nov 22**

### CYCLAMEN HEDERIFOLIUM (formerly known as neapolitanum)

The cyclamen I have were obtained from an old garden in Victoria some years ago. The house had been demolished and garden plants were dug up and removed by various people. (That is where I also dug up the *Hellebores*).

I put the tubers in the woods and for several years they bloomed heavily. Several winters the deer ate all their leaves. I have read they dislike having their leaves covered by large leaves such as *Acer macrophyllum*. This is very true. I dug up all the tubers I could find and moved them to rhodo beds where they do much better. There are quantities of seedlings which can be carefully pricked apart and replanted.

The flower colours range from white to various pinks, and the plants bloom anywhere from August 15 to the end of October, often depending on the first fall rains. They are tolerant of our dry summers, and I have seen happy masses of them under fir or cedar trees, and in gravel. They dislike fertilizer. A little leaf-mold or other humus sifted around the plants in summer before blooms open, is much more to their liking.

They are very hardy and will withstand any weather in this area. The tubers become huge in time. The leaves open out at the same time or after the flowers, and persist until spring. They make a lovely ground-cover for about 9 months of the year, then die completely away when the flowers open out.

### C. COUM

This little cutie blooms in January-February. The leaves are round instead of ivy-shaped, and can be plain green or variegated. The flowers are smaller than *C. hederifolium*, and can be white to pink to a brilliant cherry-red. The plants are happy in sun or shade and the leaves are in sight from fall to spring.

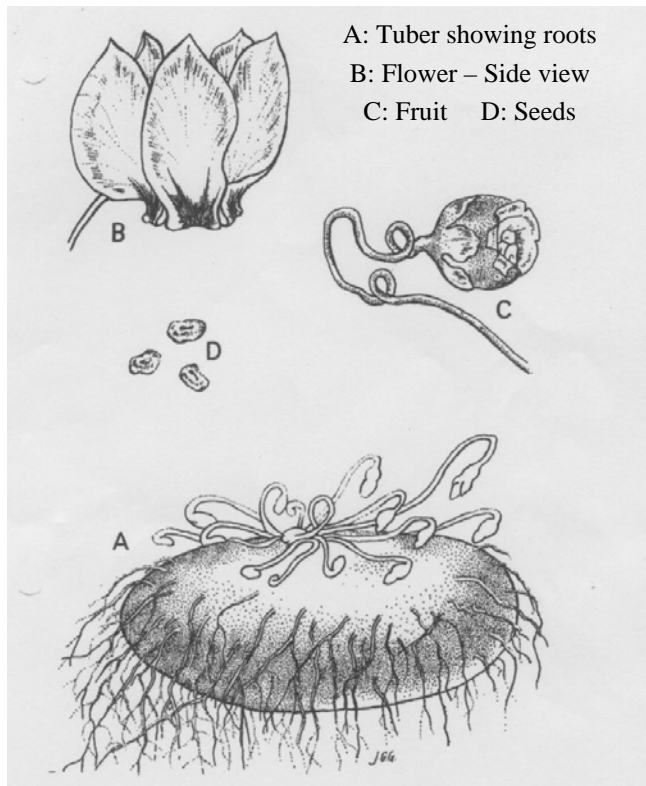


Cyclamen in full bloom at the old Greig Gardens in Royston. *Acer griseum* in the background.

There are other cyclamens - I had a *C. repandum* once, but it disappeared. They are difficult to start from dried tubers from the nursery. *C. persicum*, of course, is the large-flowered houseplant which needs much different care.

Picture from Christopher Grey-Wilson's Book "The Genus Cyclamen"

Publisher: Christopher Helm & Timber Press 1988



**Cyclamen hederifolium**

### TREES WITH BEAUTIFUL BARK

I admit to 'going on and on' with advice about growing plants with colour for your garden in winter, and I feel strongly that beautiful bark is a terrific bonus for the garden.

First you should go, notebook in hand, to visit gardens or parks in winter of course, to look at bark. You will be astounded at the varied colours and textures. Many of these characteristics don't show up when plants are young, hence the advice to look at established trees before you go to a nursery.

*Parrotia persica* has brilliantly coloured leaves in fall, but the stems are outstanding too - the colour of old, wellworn iron you used to find in railway stations. The stems have the same cold, heavy feel that iron does. Hence the common name Persian Ironwood.

Many of the birches have glowing white bark; the best example, *Betula jacquemontii*, dazzles in the winter sun.

Shrubby dogwoods often have red or yellow stems in winter. Cut them back hard every other spring to encourage more flamboyant whippy stems.

*Corylus avellana* 'Contorta' (Harry Lauder's Walking Stick) has very black stems later in life, but in early years needs to be pruned carefully to leave a framework of corkscrew limbs. The prunings are wonderful for flower arranging.

One of the best of flaking barks is *Acer griseum*, an outstanding tree for a small garden. Brilliant autumn leaves are a bonus. The deep mahogany bark peels into flakes of orange parchment.

*Prunus serrula* also has shining mahogany bark which is enhanced by gentle loving polishing by your hands every time you pass by. Site both these last-mentioned trees where the flaking bark can be silhouetted against the sun.

Finally Eucalypti - all have wonderful barks of varying colours. Some of these are not hardy in our area, but in a protected corner they will be safe until we have a very severe winter. I had a *E. darlympleyana* which grew to 35 feet in 8 years from seed. It flowered for two years, but its protected corner was far too close to the house foundations and the tree had to go. *E. pauciflora niphophila* and *E. gunii* are also hardier than most.

Information from Amateur Gardening Nov. 1994

### RECIPE REQUESTS: (Diana Scott's-yummy)

#### APPLE PEANUT FUDGE BARS

- 1 (6-ounce) package semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 1 (14-ounce) can EAGLE BRAND® Sweetened Condensed Milk (NOT evaporated milk)
- 3/4 cup butter or margarine, softened
- 1/3 cup peanut butter
- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup quick cooking oats
- 1/2 cup chopped peanuts
- 2 tart medium apples, pared, cored and finely chopped (about 2 cups)

#### Instructions

Preheat oven to 350° (325° for glass dish). In heavy saucepan, over low heat, melt chips with EAGLE BRAND. In large mixer bowl, beat butter, peanut butter and sugar until smooth; stir in flour, oats and nuts until crumbly.

Reserve 1 cup oat mixture, press remainder onto bottom of greased 13x9-inch baking pan. Top with apples; pour chocolate mixture evenly over apples. Crumble remaining oat mixture over top.

Bake 35 to 40 minutes or until golden. Cool. Chill thoroughly. Cut into 24 bars. Refrigerate covered.