

# North Island Rhododendron Society



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

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## 2005/2006 Executive:

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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 May through August) at the United Church on Comox Avenue, Comox 7:30 p.m.

## COMING EVENTS:

### 4 April 2006

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Bernie and Gloria Guyader , 1965 6<sup>th</sup> St East Courtenay, beginning at 7:30 p.m.

### 11 April 2006 — Regular Monthly Meeting

Club Presentation: Knowing Your Rhodos

Presenters: Harry Wright, Paul Wurz and Dave Crucq.



## MEMBER NOTES: (by Dave Godfrey)

Almost a full house was in attendance at the March 14<sup>th</sup> meeting to hear a presentation by our own Judith Walker on the Grieg garden connection. Entitled "Making Connections from a Continent to an Island", Judy outlined the beginnings of the Rhododendron Society, the nobles who went to Asia in search of seeds, and their eventual connection to George Fraser and others on the west coast of North America.

Correspondence and seed exchanges between Gable, Fraser, Magor and others, formed an alliance in the advancement of horticulturalism, particularly with Alpines and Rhododendrons.

As Judy explained, in 1927 Ted and Mary Grieg of Royston were introduced to the Simpsons at Lake Cowichan. After a long and close friendship, the Griegs purchased the stock of the Simpson's 'Maple Bay Alpine Plant Nursery' in December of 1934 and moved it to their property in Royston. Thus began the world famous Royston Nursery.



The many slides and scanned documents in Judy's presentation made for a very informative and entertaining evening. (For additional information regarding the Grieg Connection, see article on page 2.)

During the social following the meeting, the door prize of a *R. pachysanthum* was won by Barb Staton and the plant raffle for the rhododendron "Rim fire" was won by Christine Aldred.

Next month's meeting will feature a panel of local experts discussing foliage, flowers and care of rhododendrons. This forum was well received last spring, as many members were able to find out more about their plants and what treatments they might need.

## PLANT SALE PLANT SALE PLANT SALE

Plans are well underway for the biggest fundraising event of the year. Our plant sale will once again be held at the First Nations Hall on Comox Road with many of the same vendors returning. Members willing and able to help are asked to arrive at the hall between 8:30 and 9 am on Sunday May 7<sup>th</sup> to begin the setup. Doors will be open to the public from 10 am until 2 pm, and a great deal of help is needed to make this year's event a success. Refreshments and lunch is provided to our members through the efforts of our social committee, who will gratefully accept any goodies donated.

In order to stock our NIRS companion plants table, we ask each member to consider a donation of plants and seedlings to help the cause. So in the next few weeks, while starting or splitting your plants, please consider potting up a few for the club.

## GARDEN TOUR 2006

Evelyn Wright has once again lined up a fabulous assortment of gardens to tour this spring. There will be 6 gardens on the Comox Peninsula open for public tour from 10 am until 4 pm on Mother's Day, Sunday, May 14<sup>th</sup>.

As in the past, we will require two members to sit at the gates of the gardens to control admission. Sitting times will be from 10am until 1 pm, and from 1 pm until 4 pm. A list of garden locations and sign up board will be available at the April general meeting.



ARS Journal...Vol. 45 Number 1 (Winter 1991)

## Mary Greig

(by Alleyne Cook, North Vancouver, BC)

With the death of Mary Greig on June 19, 1990, at the age of 93, an era of North American rhododendron history came to an end. The important early figures would probably include, among others, such well known personalities as Barto, Gable, Del and Ray James and Nearing. Mary Greig's contribution to the culture of rhododendrons on this continent was as great as any.

Back in 1955 I sat on a frame in John Henry's nursery while he estimated the number of plants that were grown everywhere in America in 1946, when the ARS came into existence. The Royston Nursery share was nearly 10%. Its output was actually very modest, but in the mid 40's, to most gardeners, the rhododendron was an unknown plant whose incredible beauty was yet to be realized.

That rhododendron species became synonymous with Ted and Mary Greig was a fluke. To start their Royston Nursery in 1936, the Greigs first purchased the Alpine Nursery of Buchanan Simpsons at Cowichan Lake. Alpines interested them, rhododendrons didn't and only George Buchanan Simpson's insistence "that they'll grow on you" made them include the rhododendrons. Ted always preferred alpines and wild flowers; it was Mary who became North America's leading rhododendron expert.

Today, with a multitude of publications available, it is hard to realize the tremendous importance of *The Species of Rhododendron* edited by J.B. Stevenson. It was the very

first handbook and contained technical information of all known species. In time it was to prove inadequate, but from 1930 it enabled the genus to advance in an orderly manner. It is not known when Mary received her copy, probably about the time they were refused admittance to the English Rhododendron Society because they were "commercial." It was this book which let her sort out which of her seedlings were probably hybrids. Remember, it was at this time growers of species seed were considering all seedlings true to the packet label. Mary constantly changed and updated that species book as information was published.

The Royston Nursery catalogue, published for the last time in 1954, remains the only commonsense one ever published in North America. She followed the series as found in *The Species of Rhododendron*. It was obvious to Mary that plants of the same series should be grouped together to give customers a greater understanding of the genus.

In our house, she was always known as Mrs. No-Nonsense Greig. Once when the entire family was departing after a happy weekend she said, "I'm glad you came, I enjoyed you being here, I'm pleased you are all leaving."

Because of her friendship (by correspondence) with Jim Russell, manager of the Sunningdale Nurseries in England, rare and unusual species not listed in any catalogue were added to her orders. Between 1950 and 1954, the writer of this article was responsible for preparing and shipping all the Royston orders. In later years, Sunningdale labels bearing his printing still hung from many Royston plants. It took years, but in time, these choice species found their way to collectors' gardens.

The climax of all Mary's efforts was being asked to judge the first early show staged by the Seattle Species Group. She was confronted by trusses, most of which came from plants she had sold. No one questioned her when in her emphatic manner she rejected an obvious hybrid, nor when she gave multiple 1<sup>st</sup> prizes to trusses in the same class which she considered to have equal merit.

The logical outcome of this furthering of species interest and knowledge, was the creation of the Species Foundation, a group which by the distribution of superior true species, continued Mary's work.

In 1966, the ARS jointly awarded Ted and Mary Greig, a gold medal.

The entire nursery was sold in 1966 to the city of Vancouver and was planted mainly in Stanley Park and Queen Elizabeth Arboretum. (Unfortunately Ted passed away later that same year)

During the winters of 1981-2 and 1982-3, 3,000 species were moved from Stanley Park to the protection of the VanDusen Botanical Gardens where they form the core of the Sino-Himalayan section.

In 1989 the gardens in Stanley Park were dedicated as "The Ted and Mary Greig Rhododendron Garden," with the bronze plaque being unveiled in her presence by John Bond of Windsor Great Park. Mr. Bond is probably the world's leading plantsman. It was a very special occasion for a very, very special plantswoman and was attended by members of the Vancouver Parks Board, friends of the ARS and all her family.



## SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

(by Rose-Marie Silkens)



The subject of invasive plants, especially introduced aliens, is broached with increasing frequency in horticultural publications and workshops. As I harangue the NIRS membership on this subject quite frequently, I thought that this month I would present some interesting alternatives to invasive plants that are commonly used.

We will soon be thinking about potting up hanging baskets and containers for spring and summer display. Many people like to include non-flowering trailers, which are of course very attractive in baskets and pots. The most common plants to fill this job are *Lamium galeobdolon* (dead nettle) and various selections of English ivy, *Hedera helix*. Both plants are notoriously invasive in both the garden and the wild if they are allowed to escape, so I have enjoyed coming up with alternatives for both my own use and the baskets I prepare for customers.

Last year I started *Dichondra micrantha* from seed. This pretty tender perennial (Zone 10) has small kidney-shaped leaves and a generous trailing habit. The flowers are inconsequential. This is so attractive that I plan to use much more this year. I saved a few plants to overwinter in the house, and they have done reasonably well.

*Dichondra* seed is available as 'Silver Falls,' a silver-leaved form, and 'Emerald Falls.' It bulks up quite quickly, so seed started by mid-April should be ready for containers by mid June.

Because *dichondra* cannot take frost, it isn't a candidate for a career as an invasive alien. The gardener can tip the plants into the compost at the end of the growing season with a carefree heart.

There are too many pretty groundcovers that become hooligans very quickly, so I am always looking for evergreen carpeters to use instead. *Gaultheria procumbens* (wintergreen) and *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* (kinnikinnick) are favourites, but they lack variegation. So last year I eagerly tried the variegated *Euonymus fortunei* 'Wolong Ghost.'

I confess to a lifelong blind spot to *euonymus*. While I have a few obligatory burning bushes (*E. alatus*) dotted about the place, apart from that brief flash of fall colour, I've never found a plant in that genus to attract my attention. The variegated forms of *E. fortunei* are certainly preferable as groundcovers to some of the invasives we have all planted in foolish youth, but some, like the pretty but ubiquitous



'Silver Queen,' get a little too tall for groundcover duty. 'Kewensis' forms a pretty carpet but the veining is not very noticeable. When I gave mine more sun to encourage variegation, it was winter burned very badly during our typical March blasts. 'Wolong Ghost' has, so far, been brighter in its sheltered spot. The leaves are a rich green and the veining is a bright white. This is only its first winter here, and it's a long, cool one, so I'm hoping this little Australian cultivar will come through well.



### ARS Western Regional Fall Conference

Invitations have been extended for all ARS members and guests to attend the Western Region Fall Conference being hosted by the Fraser South Rhododendron Society at the Harrison Hot Springs Resort and Spa on September 22 - 24<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

Keynote speakers for this year's conference are Steve Hootman, co-director of the Species Foundation, and Des Kennedy with his humorous talk entitled "*Passionate Encounters in the Garden.*"

Guest lecturers for the conference include Dalen & Lori Bayes with their talk "*In Search of Arctic Rhododendrons*"; Colleen Forster on companion plants entitled "*Romancing the Rhodo - Perfect Partners for All Seasons*"; Glen Jamieson on "*Vireyas - The Natural Progression of a Rhodoholic*"; Charlie Sale's presents "*What Can Be Learned from the Gardens of New Zealand and Tasmania*"; David Sellars will focus on "*Valley Gardens and the UK Rhododendron Species Collection*"; Norma Senn's talk is entitled "*Coast Gardens of the Pacific Northwest, walking in the Sasquatch Footsteps*"; and Don Martyn will chair the "*Hybridizer's Round Table*" on Sunday morning.

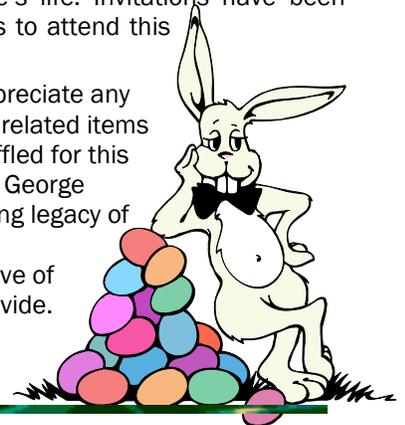
In addition to the panels and lectures, there are several garden tours being organized. For more information, members can go to: [www.arsfallconference2006.com](http://www.arsfallconference2006.com)



### Annual George Fraser Day Coming...

On Saturday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, Ucluelet will be celebrating the sixth annual "George Fraser Day and Heritage Fair." This year the local committee is honouring Bill Dale for all his tireless efforts in researching George's life. Invitations have been extended to all ARS members to attend this event.

The committee would also appreciate any donations of plants or garden related items which may be auctioned or raffled for this annual fundraising event. The George Fraser Project provides a lasting legacy of this pioneer of rhododendron hybridization and is appreciative of any support members can provide.





## GARDEN HINTS

I reported some months ago, about vinegar-based weed killers. Here is further information on this subject. Ordinary kitchen vinegar (5%) is not strong enough for the job. There is a product on the market which I tried, but it did not completely kill small broom plants that I tried it on. The leaves died but later, the plants recovered. 20% acetic acid is necessary but I haven't located any yet.

According to Fine Gardening #91, spraying acetic acid onto the plants strips off the waxy protective coating on the leaves, making the plants vulnerable to desiccation. Plants will dry out all the way to the root in hot weather. For soft stemmed weeds, even vinegar might work, with a little detergent or Safer's Soap added. After all, I was trying to kill BROOM!

These products work best on warm dry days, temperature over 65°F. Citrus oils, alone or combined with vinegar, are also very effective. Use for spot-killing, wear eye-protections and gloves, and don't expose skin to the spray. Look for named products containing eugenol (clove and cinnamon oil compound), acetic acid and citric acid on the labels.

## DROUGHT DAMAGE

There continue to be articles on this subject, for each year seems to be drier than the last. We have had many dry summers on the Pacific Coast, so it is interesting to read about problems in other parts of the continent. In the March 2000 issue of Horticulture magazine, Joe Boggs, a horticulture agent for Ohio State University, says "although some trees reacted immediately to 1999's drought, other damage won't be visible until March 2000. Trees were really stressed this past summer, especially those in poor sites.

According to the Kentucky Arborists Association Dave Leonard, 1988's drought caused massive decline in Kentucky, and 1999 was worse than 1988."

Just one season of drought damages a tree, however, many US regions, such as New England, have suffered multi-season and multi-year droughts. Joe Boggs says "This isn't on the level of the 1930s, but our area is sliding toward extended periods of growing-season droughts". Because it robs trees of water and nutrients, drought increases a tree's vulnerability to disease. Watch out for Maple verticillium wilt, blight on 2-3 needle pines, a higher incidence of two-spotted spider mites, etc. Try to give your trees water in the summer as well as a good feeding program, in order to give them a fighting chance.



## TOO MUCH MULCH

*More from Horticulture, March 2000*

A layer of bark mulch or other organic matter will control weeds, help retain moisture, moderate soil temperatures, but used to excess it hinders drainage and soil aeration, creates anaerobic conditions, and slow nitrification. Mulched bark stays wet, making the trunk prone to insect and rodent attacks. So make sure organic mulch is not

more than 2-3" deep and keep the ground around tree trunks and shrub stems clear of mulch. If you use landscape fabric, make sure it is a porous one.

However, I would like to add to this. Some years ago, I laid landscape fabric on a (cleaned) bed, cut holes for rhodos, put mulch on top - it looked so clean and neat for a few years. Then I noticed grass and dandelions poking up - and found they were almost impossible to remove. The dandelions had come from roots left in the soil, and the grass sprouted in the bark mulch. I finally pulled the whole area apart, and managed, with great effort, to dislodge the bark and the weeds from the landscape fabric, which was finally burned.

In a year such as the past one, with 6 weeks or more of warm wet weather in "winter", weeds just kept on growing, and landscape fabric is not a good choice. Maybe it can be covered with 4" of gravel instead of bark, but it will not be permanent - weeds will sprout in the gravel and their roots will go through the fabric.



## BOOK REVIEW

*(by Mary Palmer)*



Garden Plants of China.  
by Peter Valder,  
pub. Timber Press 1999

*(from the North Island Rhodo Club library)*

What a wonderful book! Outstanding photographs by the author, and text which covers the history of gardens and gardening in China from several centuries BC to the present.

Inside cover notes include "It is hard now, to imagine gardens, at least in the temperate regions, without the peonies, flowering peaches, camellias, azaleas.... and a host of other favorites which have come from this source. The material in this book is based on the author's own extensive horticultural and botanical experience, observations made during frequent trips to China, and his survey of hundreds of earlier publications... Thus the book is an essential reference for everyone who grows or is given pleasure by the garden plants of China..."



# Happy Easter

## HERBS IN POTS

Many herbs do well in pots, and it is so convenient to have your favorite cooking herbs near the kitchen. Others, like lavender, smell lovely when brushed against, so near a front entrance is a good home for them.

In the article "Herb Garden Essentials" in Amateur Gardening, there are many useful hints. "By growing herbs in containers you can choose the soil and position to suit the plant. Containers of culinary herbs by the back door or on a window sill are easy to access and are an effective way of growing herbs if space is limited.

Most herbs adapt well to growing in containers. Tender herbs like lemon grass or invasive ones like mint are best grown in containers. Tender herbs in pots can be sunk into the flower bed for the growing season and then lifted in winter for protection against frost, without damaging their roots."

Choose a quality growing medium so the plant will thrive in its restricted environment. A loam mix is best. Make your own by mixing 7 parts loam, 3 parts fine bark and 2 parts coarse sand. Use seaweed or comfrey liquid for fertilizer. Or - you can make your own fertilizer mix - 4 oz. bonemeal, 3 oz. hoof & horn, 2 oz. ground limestone. Do not let the plants dry out in hot summer weather.

### Containers can be:

Terracotta (if re-using a pot, be sure to scrub it out first), glazed pots (might crack in freezing weather), plastic (put extra extra stones in the bottom for weight). Plastic will become brittle and crack after a few years in the sun. Metal containers can become overheated in sun. Better to put the plant in a plastic pot then pop it into a metal container.

### Some recommended herbs:

Coriander: annual, easy to start from seed, and harvest your own seeds in summer.

Dill: another easy annual which can seed itself around the garden if given a chance.

Lavender: start from seed or cuttings or buy a plant to get a favorite colour.

Lemon Balm: hardy herbaceous perennial, also seeds itself around.

Mint: if not in a pot, will spread all over. Easy to start from cuttings.

Hardy Oregano: another hardy herbaceous perennial.

Parsley: not easy to start from seed, best to buy a plant.

Thyme: there are so many kinds of Thyme, variety 'vulgaris' is the best for a cooking herb as it grows to 12". Most are aromatic ground-covers.

All of these herbs (there are many others) are well-loved by bees. Try not to disturb them when picking flowers or leaves.

With our gradually changing climate, you may have a spot for a Bay (Laurus nobilis), whose leaves are so useful for cooking meat. It needs a cozy corner, facing west, and protection from rain and snow in winter. I have seen a huge shrub at Oyster River, which needs to be cut down often,

but I lost a small plant in a pot by not putting it in a frost-free room for the winter.

Basil is another lovely herb - every variety tastes and smells wonderful. However, they are far from hardy in our climate, and the safest way to have them on hand is to buy a plant or two every year. Seeds can be started in a propagator, temperature at about 68°F. Do not plant outside until all danger of frost is past.

French tarragon is another iffy one. It only flowers in a warm climate, and though a perennial, it is better to take a few cuttings in summer, "just in case". Russian tarragon has larger leaves and a slightly bitter flavour.



## Name The Newsletter Contest



Glacier Press



Rhodo Court

Courtenay Jester

Rhodo Reader

Rhodophyllum



Rhodo Record



Printophyllum

Rhodomentaries

The Rhodoteller

The Rhodofiles

North Island Rhodo Files



What's Up



Chapter Chatter

The North Islander

North Island Rhodo Society News and Views

Listed above are the entrants for the "Name The Newsletter" contest received to date. The final selection will be made at the NIRS Annual General Meeting on May 9<sup>th</sup> at Dick and Pauline Bonneys.



### NIRS Rhododendron of the Year Selections:

Elepidote: 'Fantastica'

Lepidote: *R. augustinii* ssp. *Augustinii*

Evergreen Azalea: 'Rosebud'

Deciduous Azalea: *R. occidentale*



## CATALOGUES:

We are having some of our regular "wild and woolly" March weather lately, so what to do? Sit with a cup of coffee and peruse several catalogues stuffed full of fascinating plants and garden supplies, of course. Here are items that attracted me:

**Botanus:** a B.C. company (Langley) that turns out two colourful catalogues of mainly bulbs for summer gardens and fall-planted bulbs for spring blooms. Do you want a dahlia that looks like the white top-knot on a cute little alpaca? Tsuki Yori is in the Botanus catalogue, also *Amaryllis belladonna*, a beautiful fall-blooming flower which will have to live in a pot and be brought in for the winter, here. I saw masses of them in a garden in Wales and have coveted them ever since. Service from this company is outstanding, and because they are a short distance away, parcels arrive promptly.

**Breck's:** an old Canadian company that sells the latest in bulbs, direct from Holland. They sell "new and amazing" items such as daffodils and tulips that have been chilled, then sprouted, so you can have flowers in late spring. There are also summer-blooming daffodils listed. There are unusual new varieties of perennial plants, but what really took my eye were Asiatic lilies, bright colours with black centres, and a beautiful pink double lily. The catalogue even has a \$35 discount coupon (if you buy a certain amount). This catalogue comes from Ontario and I worry about the amount of time the parcel may stay in the mail system, but - what the heck! I've got to have one of those lilies.

**Lee Valley Tools:** This catalogue is stuffed full of every kind of garden tool you can think of. I was overjoyed to find they still have ratchet pruners that I need for my less-than-strong hands, very reasonably priced. And, talking of landscape fabric, they have a new bio-degradable weed barrier that slowly breaks down in the soil, discouraging weed seedlings while shrubs and perennials get established in the garden. How about compostable bags to put veggie scraps in before they go on the compost pile? These bags look like green plastic but are made of vegetable oil and cornstarch.

As you well know, my unfavorite garden subject is slugs (and snails). Did you notice there were hundreds more snails around last fall than usual? Anyway, here is woven copper wire mesh, 5" wide and 100' long, to wrap around the hosta bed to keep these creatures out. Of course, if the devils laid eggs in there last summer - I will still sprinkle egg shells and ground oyster shells around I think. This is another company that delivers promptly and has a store in Vancouver too.

*Extra Note by MP: That reminds me that we are always asking for contributions to the newsletter. The number of gardening magazines is proliferating regularly, so if you buy one and see an interesting or useful article, how about loaning the magazine so we can borrow ideas and make up an article for our newsletter? I usually read several English magazines per month, as well as Gardens West and Gardenwise. Fine Gardening and Horticulture are*



borrowed from the library. But there are dozens more magazines and members must be reading them. So remember to give me material for the newsletter when you have finished with them. Thanks.



## SOME NEW "FAVORITE" SHRUBS

Gossler Farms Nursery in Springfield, Ore., recommends some new varieties of old favorites. They might be hard to find in our area, as yet, but it is worth trying, in a nursery such as Island Specialty Nursery in Chemainus, if not locally.

- *Aralia elata* 'Aureovariegata', with golden margins, compound 3 ft. leaves, grows eventually to 15 ft.
- *Cornus controversa* 'Variegata', light green foliage with a creamy edge, branches grow in horizontal layers.
- *Disanthus cercidifolius*, stunning purple-red fall colour, small hamamelis-like red flowers in fall.
- *Fothergilla gardenii* 'Jane Platt', 18-24" in 15 years, brilliant fall colours in orange, red and yellow.
- *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Sunburst', the brightest of yellow flowers in heavy clusters.
- *Helleboris x hybridus* - look for the "new" rich colours.
- *Magnolia* 'Marjory Gossler', a hybrid between *M. denudata* and *M. sargentiana* 'Robusta Blood Moon' gives 12" white flowers.
- *Phormium* 'Flamingo' Variegated soft pink-purple foliage, small and narrow.
- *Viburnum x bodnantense* 'Charles Lamont', because of size and quantity of pink flowers in spring.
- *Vitis vinifera* 'Purpurea', dark purple-green leaves all summer, changing to red-purple in fall, grows to 10 ft.

All of these should be perfectly hardy here, except maybe for the *Phormium*, which can be in a pot and protected in winter.

## LOCAL NURSERIES



Keep in mind that we have club members with nurseries, and it is always worth a trip in spring to see their beautiful gardens in bloom. As well they have interesting and unusual rhodos, other shrubs and trees.

**Harry Wright** "Haida Gold Garden"

**Linda Easton** "Oyster Bay Plant Works"

**Paul Wurz** "Hidden Acres Rhodos"

Of special interest at Harry's garden are his interesting hyper-tufa pots and their contents. Linda has a good supply of beautiful little maple trees as well as other shrubs. Paul not only has quantities of John Lofthouse's rhodos in bloom, but can boast huge footprints of "his" elks in the rhodo beds. Just check and visit when a quantity of rhodos are in bloom, making it easier to purchase just the right one. And if you travel a few miles further north from Campbell River, be sure to check out Rose Marie Silkens' lovely garden and nursery at Sayward.

**North Island Rhododendron Society**



# **Rhododendron SALE AND SHOW**

**SUNDAY – 7<sup>th</sup> May 2006**

**10 a.m. until 2 p.m.**

First Nations' Hall  
3320 Comox Road (Dyke Road)

**Rare varieties of Rhododendrons  
direct from our growers.**

**Other companion plants also for sale!**

**View our Rhodo Truss Show**

Free Admission - Free Raffle Draw - Free Parking

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Print copies of this poster, Cut along dotted line and distribute in key locations....thank you!