

North Island Rhododendron Society



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

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Newsletter

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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:

7 February 2006 - Executive Meeting

The executive meeting will be held at the home of Dave and Marlene Crucq, 2301 Seabank Road, beginning at 7:30 p.m.

14 February 2006 — Regular Monthly Meeting



Guest Speaker: Paul Wurz
Topic: The Lofthouse Rhodos



MEMBER NOTES: (by Dave Godfrey)

Thanks for your support! Most members attending our regular meeting on Tuesday, January 10th, generously donated to the Comox Valley Food Bank. Several boxes of donated items were delivered to the food bank as a New Year's gesture.



The CV food bank was very grateful for the many items donated by NIRS members in January



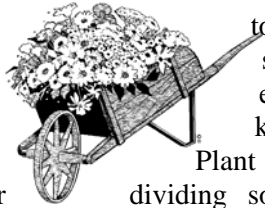
Twenty-seven members and two guests (Mary Carter and Linda Gooding) enjoyed the presentation of "Winter Colour in the Garden" presented by Becci Russell of Stone Tree Nursery. Becci outlined the development of her gardens noting that plants of varied colours bring different senses of experience throughout the year. Following her slide presentation, Becci answered many garden related questions, rounding out a very informative presentation and evening.

Congratulations to Tiffany Wyles door prize winner of the rhodo "Haida Gold" donated by Harry Wright, and to Betty Percy winner of the raffle "Southern Skies", a Lofthouse rhodo. Don't forget, next month's speaker will be NIRS President Paul Wurz giving a presentation on the Lofthouse rhododendrons.

NIRS PLANT SALE COMING SOON:

The poet Shelley once said it best: "When winter comes, can spring be far behind?" So far this winter, we've had some balmy spring-like weather, even to the point that some plants are starting to show signs of life again. Spring is not that far off, and neither is our Plant Sale.

As gardeners begin spring and would ask that NIRS members the May 7th annual are splitting or dividing some plants, or can pot up a few seedlings for donation to the NIRS revenue table at the sale, they would go a long way to the success of our largest fund-raising event of the year.



This year, our own NIRS table will be the only one selling companion plants, with most other vendors concentrating on Rhododendrons and other specialty plants. Monies realized from the sales at our own table bring the club a 100% return, and helps offset the costs of hosting the sale. Your support and consideration will be very much appreciated.

Dave Godfrey, Sale Coordinator

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

(by Rose-Marie Silkens)

January thoughts from Sayward for February newsletter



Concerns over invasive plants that threaten natural ecosystems continue to grow. Besides the dreaded Scotch broom, other introduced plants are becoming increasingly visible hazards throughout the province. Ivy and the giant Asian knotweed, in fact two introduced polygonum species, are in the running for second place. An excellent reference on this subject is the website maintained by The Invasive Plant Council of BC. This group is made up of government, professional and other interested organizations and individuals. At www.invasiveplantcouncilbc.ca, you can check on the lists of harmful plants, where they are most problematical, and what individuals can do to reduce the hazards.

At this time of year gardeners can lift their heads up from the dirt long enough to reflect on past and future, and of course weather is usually at the top of that list. The coastal climate is purported to be getting drier, but here in Sayward there is certainly no sign of that. Annual rainfall has been basically average for as long as I have kept track, though the months it falls in vary considerably. A dry November was odd, but not unheard of. Certainly the spring and summer here were wet, and winter has so far been extraordinarily so. I have had puddles of ground

water lingering in areas that haven't been that way since the 1980's. However, it's still not wet enough to make me do housework instead of fiddling about with plants and pots.

Every spring when frost turns early rhodo flowers to brown mush, I make scornful remarks about global warming. But in truth, the last decade has seen a perceptible warming trend even in my small patch of the globe. Not that a decade is more than a blip in the scheme of things, but nonetheless there is a consistency in the change that has got my attention.



Specifically, the winter-blooming perennials have begun so much earlier than they used to. It has been my custom, on removing the Christmas greenery from the house, to scour the garden for replacement material to fill vases. Formerly that would have been *Skimmia japonica*, *Jasminum nudiflorum*,

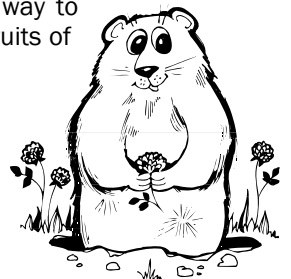
Viburnum x bodnantense and *Sarcococca humilis*, to be followed much later in January by hellebores, pulmonaria and snowdrops. For the last few years, those herbaceous plants have been in bloom or at least in bud by the end of the Christmas season. This



year, *Pulmonaria rubra* 'Redstart' has been fully open since January 4. When I first started growing it here 25 years ago, I boasted that it was always in bloom by Valentine's Day. Every hellebore in my garden is either in bloom or has very fat buds: *H. orientalis* and its hybrids and seedlings, *H. cyclophyllus*, *H. argutifolius*, *H. foetidus*, *H. odoratus*. The only exception is the hybrid *H. x sternii*, which is only marginally hardy here, but its buds are swelling and I have covered it with evergreen boughs for fear of losing that remarkable bloom. And the Christmas rose, my venerable *H. niger* specimens, are long finished: they began in mid November (when it wasn't particularly mild) and were done long before Epiphany. From the beginning of the thirty-five year span that those plants have been in my garden, that is a full month earlier.

Which reminds me to add that when I say "the end of the Christmas season," I mean Epiphany, January 6. Few seem to be aware of epiphany anymore, even though the jangled versions of "The Twelve Days of Christmas" blare from audio systems throughout November. Apart from its profound significance in western culture, epiphany is also the day I observe another age-old tradition, that of wassailing my fruit trees. A walk through the orchard on a grey January afternoon, tipping from a glass of something by each tree, is a particularly pleasant and positive way to end one season and anticipate the fruits of another.

This letter from Sayward has perhaps been less positive than I would like. I do want to end with a wish to fellow members for a healthful and peaceful new year, and the most splendid gardening year ever.





GARDEN HINTS



Garden hints from *Fine Gardening*, with additions by Mary Palmer

On reading through the past few issues of *Fine Gardening*, I came across some interesting and useful gardening hints.

You can wrap foam pipe insulation around metal parts of the wheelbarrow that touch the ground; then it won't scratch cement work or hurt a plant. Little "hens & chicks" are handy for marking the spot where bulbs were planted. They multiply quickly so you can always dig some to share with friends or take to a plant sale.

Plants with white or pale mauve flowers, or silvery foliage, look wonderful just before nightfall, especially if your garden is highlighted with candles or electric lights. Use your imagination - stiff vellum paper makes shades for tall candles to outline a path. Hang glass jars containing candles from arbors or tree branches. Large globes from light fixtures, propped on rocks, give a soft glow. Plants that glow in the semi-dark include white lilies, chives, Japanese anemones, and flowering tobacco. I have noticed that at dusk, even with no extra lighting, mauve rhodos in the woods and garden seem to glow.

There are some new weeders on the market. The fulcrum weeder pries out deep-rooted pests like dandelions. The long thin pointed "fid" does the same job. There are crack weeders that make clearing the sidewalk easy. And if you can prevent weeds from germinating, then you don't need fancy weeders. Corn gluten, a natural product, suppresses germination 80% and second and third applications in the next 60 days will produce nearly complete suppression. Corn gluten is what's left of corn after sugars and starches have been extracted to make corn syrup and cornstarch. Spreading the gluten on the beds inhibits the formation of root hairs. The seedling is unable to absorb water, so it dies.

Compost is also an efficient weed suppresser. Seeds need light to germinate so if they are covered with compost, they have little chance. As the compost breaks down, it must be replaced with more, meantime it is easy to pull the odd new sprout out as you check your flower beds. Do you have a luggage carrier not in use? It makes a handy wheeled conveyance for carrying bags of mulch or fertilizer around, with a bungee cord to hold the bags in place. Some dogs love to dig, and if you bury scraps of hardware cloth around your rhodo stems, they will soon lose interest in digging up the plants.

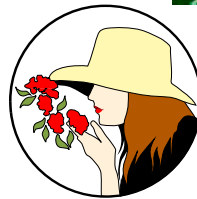


THE WEATHER

This is always a fascinating subject, and as usual, we have had unusual weather this winter - not, however, the kind

that has devastated other parts of the country. After a quick cold snap earlier in the month, we are back to a "regular" December, with fog, sun, heavy rain, more sunshine. Reading a recent copy of *Amateur Gardening*, I was reminded of all the beautiful botanical gardens, complete with huge greenhouses, which can be visited in England in the dreary winter months.

We don't have anything like that here, but we are fortunate to have Art Knapp's beautiful heated greenhouses in Courtenay to walk around in (and hopefully buy a plant) when the weather is dark and wet outside. You can find every kind of flowering houseplant, as well as ferns and other greenery, in those buildings. Just remember to protect them on the way home from wind, rain and change of temperature. Many need increased humidity in the home, as well as light, warmth, no drafts and no sun. Many plants, including orchids and begonias, appreciate sitting in a saucer with a large saucer under it, kept full of water. The larger saucer can have a layer of gravel on which the plant can sit, as long as the pot is on the gravel, not in the water.



WINTER FRAGRANCE



Here are some shrubs that give off the most wonderful scents in winter. One of the best is *Sarcococca confusa*. One day I was walking around a small park in Falmouth, Cornwall. This was in January and there was a little snow on the ground. I was suddenly stopped in my tracks by a strong perfume, and noticed a small green bush with tiny white stamen-like flowers on it. Could it be? Yes, that's where the perfume came from. I wasted no time when I got home, finding one of these, and now have a large bush near the front door, covered at present (end December) with flowers as well as red and black berries. This is a very hardy shrub and it will grow well in a large container.

Lonicera fragrantissima, "Winter Honeysuckle", is more of a scrambler than a climber, has small white flowers in profusion all winter. *Jasminum nudiflorum*, a yellow-flowered jasmine has a subtle scent. *Clematis armandii* is a true climber with a gorgeous scent. It prefers a sheltered south-facing wall or fence.

There are several *DAPHNES* that bloom during the winter months. *D. mezereum* has flowers from January. Look for *D. bholua* with intense perfume, *D. b. 'Jacqueline Postill'* is a slow-growing cultivar, again with very fragrant flowers. *D. odora* needs a protected corner and is happy in summer with almost no water. *D. laureola*, with green flowers in Feb. is "wild" all over Vancouver Island. I often have *D. mezereum* seedlings around the garden, and try to dig them up before they get too tall, for they have carrot-like tap roots. In fact all daphnes dislike being moved.

Chimonanthus praecox, "Wintersweet", has perfume-packed flowers. They can grow to 8 ft. but I found a cute

dwarf with coloured leaves in spring and fall as well as dainty flowers. Hamamelis of course - another article lists many of these. As I write this, at the end of December, H. mollis, 'Jelena' and 'Pallida' are all in bloom, and will remain so for a month or two, regardless of what the weatherman throws at us during January and February.

SILVER PLANTS TO BRIGHTEN THE GARDEN

Silver plants grow coverings of silky down or bloomy wax to survive, even thrive, in drought, extreme heat, searing wind, even salt spray, and some look beautiful even in winter, though I have noticed they do not appreciate our wet wet winters. Be sure they have excellent drainage.

There are several plants commonly called "Dusty Miller", so be sure to read the labels. Some are annuals, some perennials. Centaurea cineraria 'Colchester White' is an outstanding one of these. It is wise to pull off a few stems in August and pot them up; overwinter them in a frost-free place, "just in case".



Have you tried Brunnera macrophylla 'Jack Frost'? What a beauty. Mine is on the edge of the pool, where it gets full sun until late afternoon. Its leaves are small in spring when the dainty blue forget-me-not flowers bloom, then they expand to quite large silver heart shaped leaves with green veins which last until late fall. The slugs and deer ignore them.

"Powis Castle" Artemesia looks lovely for months, but dislikes the rain. It needs to be cut back in late winter. Pulmonaria "Excalibur" is an almost completely silver lungwort that really lights up a shady spot. "White Nancy" deadnettle, Lamium maculatum, makes a dainty edging to a bed. It needs to be cut back in midsummer, to grow on again, and I have found it prefers to be in shade here.

I love grasses, and a favorite is "Blue Oat Grass", Helictotrichon sempervirens, which looks lovely year-round. You do not cut this one to the ground in late winter, just pull the dead foliage out, and cut off the beige flower stems. Divide and replant every few years. I did not do this; that is probably why I lost mine after 5 years. I'll try again.



February 2 GROUND HOG DAY



VIBURNUMS

A recent copy of Amateur Gardening has an interesting article about viburnums that bloom during the winter months. The only item omitted is the fact that (in my experience anyway) the deer will eat the leaves off all the evergreen varieties, but don't seem to bother the deciduous ones.

Viburnum farreri flowers all winter, reaching 10 ft. in height, has massed clusters of pink buds and white waxy perfumed blooms. V. grandiflorum grows to 6 ft., and has similar flowers in Feb. and March. V. bodnantense "Dawn" is a cross between these two, and has lovely pink buds and flowers from October to April. Selections include 'Charles Lamont' and 'Deben'.

V. tinus has been cultivated in Britain since the 16th century and is as popular as ever with people and deer. Mine has grown to 10-12 ft. so is safe now from the deer except when it tries to add new branches from the bottom. Sometimes a fall of our heavy wet snow breaks branches loaded with leaves and flowers, but the plant always recovers. Look for cultivars 'Eve Price' and 'Gwenllian'.

If you prefer viburnums with berries, it is best to have a male and a female plant. Look for V. betulifolium, an upright deciduous shrub, burdened in fall with copious clusters of currant-like fruits. V. opulus, known in England as the guelder rose, has flat heads of hydrangea-like flowers, fabulous autumn colour, and clusters of edible bright red fruits. Look for 'compactum' or 'xanthocarpum' or 'Fructo-Luteo' with yellow berries. C. prunifolium also has edible berries that change colour from rose-pink to black.

If you want a compact evergreen plant, try V. davidii, with its beautiful metallic blue fruits. Remember to get male and female plants, and you may have to protect them from the deer. V. cassinoides, considered one of North America's finest, has bronze young foliage, fabulous red colour in autumn, June flowers and berries changing from green to red to metallic blue to black.

Viburnums grow in most soils, but prefer deep rich soil in sun or part shade. Shelter winter-flowering species from north winds and early morning sun on the flowers. These plants can be grown from seed or semi-ripe cuttings. Aphids are the worst pest - spray with soft soap in spring.

ROSE HIPS

One item that brightens the garden and wild areas in winter is rose hips. I know there are many reasons for Rhodoholics to not grow roses, but there are always exceptions. *Rosa rugosa* and other species roses that have sharp spines on stems are not very palatable to deer. Also, they are not as susceptible to black spot and other diseases; they are very hardy, and those hips just glow on a winter's day. To digress - a few days ago I partook in the annual Christmas Bird Count, and part of the area we walked over was the "pub to pub" walk near the UBC Farm at Oyster River. A beautiful walk at any time of year, but on a wet day in December the masses of wild rose hips along the paths stood out like little lanterns.



So here is a list of roses that have outstanding hips, from a recent article in *Amateur Gardening* magazine.

The plants should all be easy to find in your local nursery, or the Old Rose Nursery on Hornby Is.

Rosa rugosa hips are the best for making rose hip syrup, as well as being huge and brilliantly coloured. 'Alba' and 'Rubra' and 'Fru Dagmar Hastrup' all bear a bountiful supply of rich red fruits. *Rosa acidularis*, a vigorous shrub that will make a dense thicket, with glossy red pear-shaped fruits. *R. eglanteria* (sweet briar), with its apple-scented foliage and stems perfumes my garden year-round.

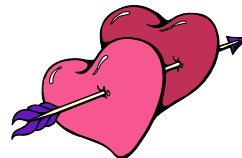
If you have an old shed or dead tree that needs covering, try *R. filipes* 'Kiftsgate', a rampant rambler with vicious thorns and flamboyant fruitiness. *R. soulieana*, with soft grey-green fluffy foliage, white flowers and trusses of orange-red oval hips. *R. 'Francis E Lester'* reaches 13 ft., with apple blossom flowers and pale orange-red hips which last well into winter. *R. moyesii* 'Geranium' with brilliant red single flowers and huge, waxy flask-shaped hips. *Rosa glauca* has grey-plum tints to leaves and stems, flushed with ruby and orange autumn colour, fine red fruit (which in my garden was quickly eaten by travelling robins in October). And by the way, though this plant does not have vicious spines, the deer never touch it. (Never?, well, so far never).



If you want something weird and wonderful, try *R. roxburghii*, which grows to 13 ft., with flaky, grey-tinted bark, 3 inch apple-blossom pink flowers that change into large, spiky, orange-yellow fruit with dense spines. A similar plant is *R. villosa*. *R. 'Fritz Nobis'* has pink, clove scented flowers and lovely orange hips. A sprawling shrub is *R. farreri* 'Persetosa', with fine, fern-like foliage and masses of coral hips. *R. davidii* is an arching,

upright plant with clusters of pale pink flowers and dark red bristly hips.

For the finest display of hips, don't deadhead these roses. Prune in late winter or early spring by removing some of the oldest branches just above the ground. A severe frost may shatter the hips, but then watch for seedlings. I have often taken little *R. glauca* plants to plant sales.



UNUSUAL ANNUALS

If you enjoy starting something new from seed, here are some unusual and easy to grow annuals to try. "Flower of an Hour", *Hibiscus trionum*, has masses of cream and purple flowers; each lasts only one day, but the plant blooms profusely all season. "South African Foxglove", *Cerototheca triloba*, is easy to start indoors, is drought tolerant and deer resistant. The flowers look like foxgloves, in shades of white and pink with violet stripes. This is a tall plant which looks well planted between shrubs.

"Honeywort", *Cerinthe major* 'Purpurascens' has become a favorite in this area, with its unusual blue-green leaves and deep purple flowers. I noticed large plants in a Campbell River garden with seedlings all around. The garden owner was constantly offering seedlings to friends.

An unusual flowering tobacco, *Nicotiana langsdorffii*, has small, strikingly green flowers in abundance on quite tall plants. "Clary Sage", *Salvia viridis*, is a drought tolerant self-sower. It has insignificant flowers with large bracts in shades of pink, purple and white, with deep purple veins.

In a suitable site, a large clump of these will self-sow every year. They also make an excellent fresh or dried cut flower. All of these can be started in the house, six weeks before the last frost, or planted outside once the weather is warm and stable.



HAMAMELIS

Amateur Gardening magazine lists some varieties that I have not heard of previously. Watch for them in our nurseries.

Hamamelis mollis (the Chinese form) has the strongest scent, and new cultivars 'Coombe Wood', which flowers in December, and 'Brevipetala' which has dense clusters of yellow flowers with dark red centres also have strong perfume. 'Wisley Supreme' has a broader habit, paler flowers, and blooms earlier than others. Depending on the weather there is a great variation in blooming times. My H. mollis usually blooms weeks later than 'Jelena' and 'Pallida'. H. japonica, the Japanese form, has smaller flowers, with twisted petals, and a sweet subtle scent.

H.x intermedia has the best features of both species, with large leaves, rich autumn colours, yellow, orange or dark red flowers with crimped, twisted petals. 'Pallida' is sulphur-yellow, with broad petals and a sweet, subtle fragrance. 'Arnold Promise', bright and clear, 'Barnstedt Gold' and 'Advent Yellow', bloom just before Christmas. 'Jelena', flaming orange with red autumn leaves, 'Orange Peel', deep orange flowers, upright habit, is good for smaller gardens, 'Orange Beauty', orange-yellow, 'Aphrodite', huge burnt orange blossoms and fragrance, and 'Diane' is the best deep red.

H. virginiana has been used for medicinal purposes for hundreds of years. It has pale yellow flowers and leaves in autumn. H. vernalis, another American beauty, flowers in late winter or early spring, is upright to 6 ft., has masses of small, sweetly fragrant pale orange or copper blooms. Her petals open widely on warm winter days, and close tightly in cold weather. The leaves turn purple in late summer and change to bright yellow in autumn. 'Sandra' has small honey-coloured flowers, and plum-purple young leaves, whereas 'Purple Seedling' has small purple flowers and brilliant autumn colour like the best acers.

Chris Lane says "if you want a plant in a small garden, you can cut back to previous season's wood to 2 buds annually in late winter. Unless there is only a little growth, there is normally a cluster of flowers at the base of the new wood, and growth buds are above these". He has a 14-year-old bush that is only 5 ft. high and wide.

This sounds rather severe - I have tried to keep mine a bit smaller by trimming off new long shoots in spring before the leaves open. The plants are still rather enormous, spreading as wide as they are high (10-15 ft).

You can propagate hamamelis from seed - harvest fruits in late summer or early autumn, sow immediately in the cold frame; they take up to 18 months to germinate. When seedlings show, pot them up and leave them in a cold but frost-free greenhouse for a year; they take about 6 years to reach flowering size.

Do not plant hamamelis in a garden already infected with honey fungus, and if coral spot fungus is seen, cut back to healthy wood.



RECIPE REQUESTS:

BARBEQUED SPARERIBS

4 Lbs spare ribs
2 Tbsp butter or margarine
1/2 C finely chopped onions
1 C water
1 C ketchup
2 Tbsp vinegar
2 Tbsp lemon juice
2 Tbsp worcester sauce
2 Tbsp brown sugar
1 tsp dry mustard
1 tsp salt
1/4 tsp pepper



Cut spare ribs into serving size pieces. Brown slowly in two 10" skillet. Put in baking pan. Pour fat from skillet, melt butter in skillet, add onion & cook until brown. Add next 9 ingredients, simmer 20 mins. Set over for moderate, 350 F. Pour sauce over ribs. Bake, covered for 1 1/2 hours. Makes 4-6 servings.

CHICKEN LASAGNA

3 cups sliced Fresh Mushrooms
2 cups chopped Onion
2 pkgs. Knorr's Hollandaise Sauce (prepared according to directions) yield 3 cups
1 lb. Pkg. Lasagna Noodles, cooked
2 lbs. Chicken or Turkey Breast, cooked and thinly sliced
Salt and Pepper to taste
2 only 12 oz. cans Asparagus Tips (Do not use fresh or frozen)
1 tsp. Dried Basil
1 Tsp. Dried Oregano
3 cups Mozzarella Cheese, shredded
1 cup grated Parmesan Cheese



Saute mushrooms and onions until soft. Using a 9" x 13" pan/dish, spread a small amount of Hollandaise on the bottom and place a layer of noodles on top, then cover with half of the chicken and sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Top with half of the mushroom and onion mixture, then half of the remaining Hollandaise and sprinkle with half of the basil and oregano. Top this with half of the mozzarella and parmesan cheeses. Place all of the asparagus tips neatly in a layer over cheese. Repeat the layers, ending with the cheeses. Cook uncovered in a 350 degree oven for 35 minutes or until hot and bubbly. Let stand for 10 minutes before cutting. Serve with salad with a tart dressing to offset the richness. Serves 8 to 10 people.

Changes:

- 2 cups thin white sauce or Cream of Mushroom or Chicken Soup, diluted.
- steamed broccoli in bite-sized pieces to replace asparagus
- chicken breasts - sliced thin, sautéed or steamed.