

North Island Rhododendron Society



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

Vol.20 No.5

January 2006

Contributors: Mary Palmer Rose-Marie Silkens

Publisher: Noni Godfrey

2005/2006 Executive:

President

Paul Wurz 287-4301

Vice-President

Harry Wright.... 338-8345

Secretary

Diana Scott..... 338-0208

Treasurer

Don Law 339-2735

Ways & Means

Dave Godfrey... 335-0717

Library

Noni Godfrey ... 335-0717

Social

Evelyn Wright.. 339-7493

Bernice Morrison 339-0932

Membership

Dave Crucq 339-7845

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:

3 January 2006

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Don and Dorothy Law 671 Crestview Drive, Comox, beginning at 7:30 p.m.

10 January 2006 — Regular Monthly Meeting

Guest Speaker: Becci Russell from Stone Tree Nursery

Topic: Winter Colour From the Garden

The dream began in 1995 when Keith & Becci Russell transformed an acre of lawn into a botanical wonderment. This Comox Valley jewel is a gathering of choice plant varieties beautifully woven together, showcasing a stunning and colourful garden. Having designed and built their gardens themselves, the process has been a labour of love and it shows. The seasoned gardens now take on a life of their own, providing a sanctuary for an array of flora and fauna. Enthusiasts will find plants growing from Acer palmatum cultivars to Zenobia pulverulenta with countless varieties in between. Here one will experience neatly clipped box hedges, terraced rock walls lining a natural stream, formal & informal ponds, pergolas, and exquisitely pruned trees & shrubs. It has been their intention to grow and display all the marvelous new plant material now available to gardeners. This helps them choose and promote varieties most suited to the gardens of the Comox Valley. The gardens are separate from the nursery area and are open for strolling April thru October 10am-4pm, with an entry fee.

One of the big surprises for the Russell's has been the variety of visitor's. "The Valley has definitely become a destination, & meeting people from all over has been exciting and rewarding", says Keith. They have kept their Nursery small to maintain quality and service. This allows Keith & Becci to get to know their customers needs and offer expert advice. In the Nursery one will find choice selections of trees, shrubs, conifers & perennials. Stroll through the quaint Garden Shop full of garden pots, concrete accents, and hand carved granite pieces from Japan. An added highlight is their extensive variety of Bonsai and supplies. With 20 years of experience Keith will help anyone who is interested in this fascinating hobby, get started. Consultations and classes in Bonsai or pruning are also offered. The Nursery is open Mar-Oct. Wed. thru Sun. from 10am-5pm Nov.-Dec. Sat.-Sun 10am-5pm.



STONE TREE NURSERY

2271 Lake Trail Road
Courtenay B.C. V9N 9C3
Ph/Fax: 338-9785



MEMBER NOTES: (by Dave Godfrey)

“Wasn’t that a party?” Twenty-eight members attended our annual Christmas party on Tuesday, December 13th, and enjoyed an evening of fun, food and friendship.



Social directors Evelyn Wright and Bernice Morrison kept the evening entertaining with a sock race game, a “flower name unscramble” game and the traditional carol sing-along. Brian Staton was kind enough (and talented enough) to provide accompaniment on the piano for the carollers. For many, this made following the lyrics on the pages somewhat easier.

The Rhodo Raffle for “Silver Skies” was won by Diana Scott (again!) and Noni Godfrey won the second place prize of a “holly sleigh” donated by Chris Aldred. Gwen Wright was the lucky winner of the rhodo door prize and “Miss Piggy”. Gwen promised to have her prominently displayed all year in her garden. For those who attended Harry & Gwen’s Christmas “Open Garden”, perhaps you might have spotted the famous “Pristine Porcine.”

Following the gift exchange, a wonderful assortment of hors d’oeuvres and desserts rounded out the evening. Another successful party enjoyed by all who attended.



Although many Chapters and organizations collect for the food banks in their communities during the month of December, we have decided to break with tradition. Our Executive has decided to assist those in need after the holiday season when support is still needed and often forgotten. We are asking our members and guests attending the January meeting to please bring a non-perishable food item for the food bank collection at the door.



CHRISTMAS CAROL SING ALONG

EVELYN LEADS AND BRIAN PLAYS

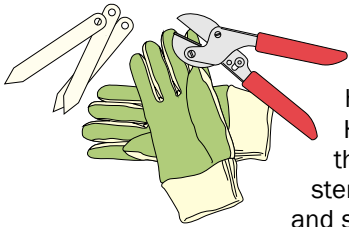


GWEN WINS “MISS PIGGY”

THE SOCK RACE IS ON

GARDEN HINTS

Garden hints from *Fine Gardening #103*, with additions by Mary Palmer



Do you grow giant Alliums? I never know just what to do with the dried stalks with huge seeds heads on them. Here is a good idea: Spray them with bright colours, slip stems over thin bamboo stakes, and stick them into the ground near hostas or ferns for the rest of the summer.

If you plant a few garlic cloves in the flower beds, you will have flower heads which twist into sinuous, remarkable shapes. That reminds me that I have an allium of unknown origin, called "Egyptian Onion", by some and "Crow Garlic" in an English Wildflower book. It took all summer to grow long stalks with ends pointed like Witch's hats. These finally opened out to small mauve flowers which soon turned into clumps of baby "garlic's". Watch for some on the \$1.00 table.

If you have a messy, open compost pile like mine, throw a few annual flower seeds around, in May or June, and you will soon have a bright mass of colour. Near the bottom of the pile, plant a few zucchini or pumpkin seeds in early July to get a good crop. Water them if you can spare it.

One reader of *Fine Gardening* looks for discarded bird cages at garage sales, and places them over plants which are usually eaten by deer. That reminds me of an article which recommended that we garden entirely with plants the deer never eat. Unfortunately this person hasn't realized yet that deer will eat, or at least taste anything and everything they can reach, sooner or later. In my garden, the deer never touched the hostas – until September of this year, when they cleaned them up.

HONEY FUNGUS

A recent issue of *Amateur Gardening* gives a look at this nasty plant disease. It unfortunately spreads from dead plants to live ones. It is also known as bootlace fungus or armillaria root rot. It has spread around the world, and one colony in North America is thought to be the largest single living organism on earth.

In autumn, the toadstools appear around dead and dying plants. Apart from the yellow toadstools, a dark gum exudes from the bark near the base of the tree, and black, bootlace-like strands occur on the roots. The only real cure is to dig out and dispose of the infected plant, with as much of the root system as possible.

HAPPY NEW YEAR

FLOWERS FOR JANUARY



Every year is different in this area – will we have snow? Or rain? Or fog? Will it last a week – a month – or not at all? After the snowdrops, which often start to bloom at Christmas, I enjoy spending time looking for the first crocuses and eranthus to open out, soon followed by Cyclamen coum. This all happens, of course, if there is little or no snow. Meantime the Hamamelis, Daphne odora and D. mezereum are blooming, whether or not the weather is unsuitable.

This year, we are having a few days of snow after a week of fog, this all in November. People say November is usually our wettest month – but not this year! So – what comes next? I refuse to guess. Meantime, there are flowers on one of the Daphne mezereum plants! It just goes to show.



BOOK REVIEW

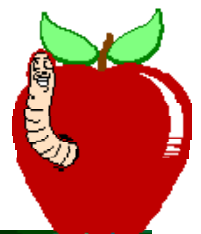
(by Mary Palmer)

Container Gardening,
written by Paul Williams,
Pub. (US) DK Publishing
Inc., 2004.

What a wonderful book to have for browsing on a cold winter day! The photos alone will inspire you to try all kinds of plant combinations for your flower pots, large and small, for the garden, the patio or a bright room indoors.

Mr. Williams shows examples of many kinds of containers – clay, wood, stone, metal and synthetic plastics, and how to put the right plants in the right place. The text tells about the plants he used, how to arrange them in an artistic manner, and the reasons for various shaped pots. Colour is important – white flowers, green and white leaves, in a stark black pot. Short plants in dumpy pots, and ideas I had never thought of, for instance variegated Aegopodium (known locally as roundly hated Bishop's Weed) can look quite handsome in a pot that it cannot escape from. Why not try arranging Rex Begonias with bright coloured Coleus to match. By the way, Coleus is now named Solenostemon, a much more difficult name to remember and spell, I think! Take some cuttings of the Begonias to grow on for next year. Carex flagellifera 'Coca Cola' hanging gracefully around a tall pot with some Crocosmia in the centre. Making an Ivy "Tree" – I must try that one! I felt inspired to go right out in the snow and work on some of these ideas.

The last part of the book tells how to care for these beauties – feeding, watering, pruning, repotting, pests and diseases, and a plant directory which describes each plant he used, including climatic zones. We might not be able to use all the plants recommended, but there are others, hardy in our climate, which can look just as spectacular. I found a copy of the book in the Campbell River Library.



SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

(by Rose-Marie Silkens)



There seems to be endless debate over the appropriateness of using botanical names for our plants. The issue has always seemed what my youthful friends would call a 'no-brainer' – use the right name and everyone is clear what you're talking about. Common names are so inaccurate and used so inaccurately, that the consequences of relying on them can be quite frustrating, and even amusing.

For example, 'Baby's Breath' and 'Rose of Sharon' are applied to so many different plants that I hear of another one at least every growing season. I've learned to ask for clarification when a customer at my garden centre asks for geraniums. One woman stared at me as if I were a complete idiot when I responded to her query by showing off my array of excellent cranesbills. Many years ago, when my father was establishing his garden here in Sayward, a friend offered him starts of 'Rose of Sharon.' He was thrilled, expecting little plants of *Hibiscus syriacus*, though her claim that the flowers were yellow puzzled him considerably. When said friend arrived with *Hypericum calycinum*, and insisted on helping him plant it, he was most effusive on the subject of the English language for quite some time. (*H. calycinum* is also known as St. John's wort, but so are several other hypericums that are far less invasive.)

My dad consistently used botanical names, so I grew up with them and never had a chance to find them difficult. He pronounced them somewhat differently, but then, in later years I learned that Dutch-accented Latin is close to Medieval Latin, though I'm not sure how anyone would really know that. In any case, when I was a child I thought people who talked about their lovely sweet peas were remarkably fond of the vegetable, as I knew the flowers only as *Lathyrus odoratus*. Actually, Dutch common names often stump me too. They appear in a pretty desk calendar I receive from a cousin every year, and my Dutch/English dictionary isn't especially helpful with horticultural terms.

If we're not worried about identity, there is of course a lot of charm in common names. I certainly wouldn't want the language to be without names like 'love in a mist,' 'heart's ease,' or 'love lies bleeding.' And of course the human brain is perfectly capable of dealing with both.

What my brain sometimes has trouble with is accepting the need for changing botanical names. I'm sure the scientific reasons are excellent and sound – new information, new research, discovering new relationships or fine-tuning old ones. But '*Dicentra spectabilis*' (bleeding heart) was such a nice name, and now the plant is '*Lamprocapnos spectabilis*.'

Other fairly recent name changes members might like to know about: *Cornus stolonifera* (our native red osier dogwood) is now *Cornus sericea subspecies sericea*, the same as what was once called *Cornus alba*. That one is not surprising. Neither is the change from *Viburnum triloba* to

Viburnum opulus var. americanum. However, these changes in the names of common garden plants will take a little time to assimilate: *Aster novae-angliae* is now *Symphotrichum novae-angliae*. *Coleus parviflorus* is *Solenostemon rotundifolius*, *Sedum spectabile* is *Hylotelephium spectabile*, and *Verbena hybrida* has become *Glandularia x hybrida*.

A quick note for the turning of the year. If you still need a calendar for 2006, there is a lovely one put out by the Native Plant Society of BC, with truly excellent photographs. You can see it online at the society's website, www.npsbc.ca. An order form is available there.

SPECIES STUDY DAYS 2006

The SSD will be held again in 2006 for the 5th consecutive year at the Rhododendron Species and Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington on Saturdays.

February 25th March 25th April 29th May 13th

The programme is personally directed by Steve Hootman, Co Director at the garden and plant explorer, extraordinaire. The format will follow that of previous years but will introduce new material for the benefit of past participants. No prior knowledge of the subject is necessary as the course begins with the fundamentals and progresses in detail at each session.

The sessions begin promptly at 10:00 a.m. and end at approximately 4:00 p.m. The mornings are generally spent reviewing various topics of general botanical interest relative to the study of rhododendron species, followed by keying of plant material currently in bloom in the garden at that time. A short break is taken for lunch between 12:00-12:30 and the afternoon spent touring the RSBG garden and identifying and discussing the wonderful collection of rare and exotic plants.

The course fee is \$35.00 for each session (x 4) and the entire proceeds are used to provide a stipend for instruction and a donation to the garden. A nominal sum of \$5.00 is charged for lunch for those wishing to participate. In past years, participants from Vancouver Island have traveled to the mainland on Friday prior to the session and stayed with a host overnight, returning Saturday evening. In previous years we have found that it is desirable to cross the border before 7:00 a.m. on the route to Federal Way in order to avoid a delay at the border and the early a.m. Seattle traffic. This has permitted a leisurely drive to Federal Way with arrival about 9:15 and time for breakfast at the location of choice but for most of us at the Country Buffet. Arrangements for car pooling will be made.

The facilities at the RSBG are limited and a maximum of 28-30 people can be accommodated.

In order to avoid disappointment, please confirm your interest and forward payment to the undersigned:

Mike Bale
33623 Wildwood Drive
Abbotsford BC V2S 1S2
Phone: (604) 853-8839
email: lu_zhu@telus.net



RHODODENDRONS ON A WESTERN SHARE

For several years I have been copying parts of an article that Leslie Drew (Cowichan Rhodo Society) wrote, and which was published in the RHS journal *Rhododendrons* 1991 with Camellias and Magnolias. The following is the final part of that article, which is of greater interest to us every year.



"With an average temperature of 6.4C (43.5F), Ken Gibson is able to grow most *Maddenii* outdoors all year.

For other growers, however, the light summer rains are worrying. 'As our human population increases, we will have more water restrictions in summer', a correspondent writes from Seattle, where the average July rainfall is less than 2.5 cm (1"). 'I think that we in

the Pacific Northwest should give more attention to drought-resistant plants'. His words have a bearing on what Dr. Hermann Vaartnau has learned in growing big-leaf species in his sheltered Oak Bay garden - that they reach flowering age and fare just as well as in every other favourable climate, given enough light and plenty of water in the summer months. This possibility of a water shortage in the future.. is one of the major concerns today.

In each microclimate, growers have had the time and experience to assess and compare many species and hybrids for their hardiness and their worthiness as garden plants. Dr. Bob Rhodes and David Dougan have each grown rhodos in several south-coast locations. Rhodes, now on Gabriola Island, has observed colour differences in hybrids grown here and in England, which he can only attribute to different soils. Dougan, whose latest garden is situated high on the Malahat, north of Victoria, delights in meeting challenges of new microclimates while studying the behaviour of his plants. His eclectic tastes encompass species and hybrids. 'If it's a good garden plant, it's a good garden plant.'

Hybridizers, meanwhile, have contributed to the goal of achieving a good range of well adapted plants. A selection of the best BC hybrids includes several from Jack Lofthouse, such as 'Butter Brickle', 'Canadian Beauty', and 'Cherry Float'; Albert de Mezey's 'Mary's Favorite' and 'Peggy Abkhazi'; Rhodes' 'Bob's Blue' and 'Haida Gold', the late Dr. Stuart Holland's 'Transit Gold'; and earlier Greig hybrids bearing their Royston cognomen.

Some hybridizers believe that more of the unusual species should be used now that they are available, as Milton Wildfong is doing. Opinions differ on current trends in the Pacific Northwest where, in the Puget Sound area alone, ninety people are engaged in hybridizing, some making as many as 100 crosses a year. Some BC growers contend that too many new hybrids are being rushed onto the market and, furthermore, that too many of insufficient distinction are being registered. Even in a consumer society, they say, the table can be laid with too lavish a feast.

Two research developments in the Vancouver area, one institutional and the other commercial, are being watched with interest. At the University of B.C., the David C. Lam Asian

Garden gives every promise of becoming a rhodo species garden of world class. The site, a 16-ha (40 acre) old-growth Douglas Fir forest on a south-west slope, is proving excellent. The collection has been building up since the early 1950s, first with a thousand plants donated by the Greigs, and then expanded in the 1960s when the university co-operated with the new Rhodo Species Foundation in the US as the principal propagator of its plant material from major gardens in the British Isles and other prime sources. Seven hectares (17 acres) are planted, not all with rhodos. Now, with a \$1 million gift from David Lam, once a Lieutenant-Governor of B.C., the species garden will have a new building and landscaping of a further 2-2.5ha (5-6 acres).

The other development is very much in the realm of private enterprise - tissue culture propagation by Les Clay Jr. Since financing experimental work in the US, the Clay nursery has swung its production almost entirely from cuttings to tissue culture in ten years. While conceding that the method still has to be validated for certain species and hybrids, Clay believes that in this decade a whole new range of plants will be brought into mass production. Already his nursery is one of the largest overseas exporters on the West Coast, air freighting half a million plants annually, mostly to the UK, France and Italy.

British Columbians have received two Gold Medals from the ARS. One was awarded to Evelyn Weesjes, who was chief propagator at UBC during its joint program with the Rhodo Species Foundation, and who with her husband Nick, has recently developed a woodland garden (Towner Crest) of species and hybrids without equal here among private gardens. The other Gold Medal was awarded jointly to the Greigs, whose rhodos are

everywhere. When he dedicated the Greig Garden Stanley Park, Keeper at Great Park, England's efforts to garden trusts plantings can on site or



at Vancouver's John Bond, Windsor spoke of current establish so that old be preserved relocated. The Greig rhodos were a case in point. Mary Greig was then in her nineties; her historic garden lives on across the Strait of Georgia. While mass transplantings have been done in the past, at heavy cost to either the mover or the plants, most owners of old and venerable rhodos agree that the time has come for heritage trusts."

Note by MP: Over 15 years have passed since this article was written, and as you can see, much has changed in the Rhodo world. Many trips to China and other countries in the Far East have been made by Rhodo enthusiasts, many photos and seeds have been brought back, and many "new" plants are appearing in our nurseries. The climate appears to be becoming warmer and our summers even drier than before.

More ARS Gold Medals have been awarded to B.C. residents -to Alleyne Cook in 1999, Clive Justice in 2000, and to the Weesjes again in 2000. Many more new hybrids are on the market, and many more species rhodos are being discovered.

HAMAMELIS



One of our favorite winter flowers! In the December 2002 newsletter I wrote about a method for taking cuttings in spring, that I found in the January 1999 "The Garden" (journal of the RHS). Here is a copy of these instructions, worthwhile for we have all noticed how the price of these plants keeps going up!

"Rooting and over wintering the cuttings requires diligence and patience. Select young, soft shoots in early summer, collecting them in the evening or early morning. Make cuttings 3" long, severing them just below a node. Remove the lowest leaf and dip the base in rooting hormone.

Have pots ready with 2" potting compost containing slow release fertilizer, in the bottom. Fill the pots with compost consisting of equal parts coir or coarse peat and perlite. Using a dibber, inset the cuttings, 5-10 in a 6" pot. Lightly spray with fungicide, and place pots in a mist propagator, closed propagating case, or seal in an opaque plastic bag with moist sand in the bottom. Bottom heat of 18-22C (65-72F) should be provided.

High humidity is needed and in the right conditions the cuttings should be fully rooted within 8 weeks. Wean them off gradually, and over winter in a cool but frost-free greenhouse. If growth is rapid, pot up the same year, otherwise wait until the following spring."

Fine Gardening magazine #89 gives the following information: There are 100 cultivars of Hamamelis, native to Asia and Eastern North America. Bloom time is fall (H. virginiana) to late winter. Flower colours include various shades of red, yellow and orangey-brown. They are hardy in zones 5-8, and need well-drained loamy acidic soil with a non-compacting mulch.

They are happy in full sun to partial shade, and may object to stress from drought (though these past 4 years of severe summer drought conditions didn't bother mine). They can grow to 15 ft. high and wide. If you have to prune, do it just after flowering. Some varieties have a strong perfume - hybrids Arnold Promise, Pallida and species mollis have the best scents.

These plants have always been expensive, because they are almost all grafted. It is said they are almost impossible to root from cuttings - hence the instructions above which are certainly worth trying.



GARDENING REMINDERS FOR JANUARY

Did you sprinkle dolomite lime around your rhodos last winter? If not, do so this time of year. Sprinkle a couple of tablespoonfuls on top of the snow, around each large plant. Do not fertilize at the same time - wait a few weeks - then give them their first feed of 6-8-6 plus trace elements during February, unless there is heavy rain.

RECIPE REQUESTS:

As requested at the Annual Christmas Party, a delicious flan made and brought by Chris Aldred.

CRANBERRY AND BLUE CHEESE FLAN

Crust..

1cup flour
2/3 C ground walnuts
1 Tbsp sugar.
¼ tsp salt
½ tsp dry mustard
¼ tsp cayenne pepper
3 ozs cold unsalted butter
1 to 2 Tbsp milk

-mix all dry ingredients until mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs, add milk and mix until dough comes together. Press mixture into 9 inch flan dish . Prick base with a fork, FREEZE for 30 mins, then BAKE at 375 ° F for 15 to 20 minutes until just golden.

Filling..

2 Tbsp olive oil
1 large onion, finely diced
1 C cranberries (fresh or frozen)
1 Tbsp sugar (optional)
1 1/3 C chopped walnuts
2 tsp fresh thyme, minced
2 eggs
1 C whipping cream
2 to 3 ozs blue cheese, crumbled



-Heat oil in heavy pan, add onion, sprinkle with salt and sauté 10 minutes or so, until caramelized, stir frequently. Add cranberries and sugar, cook until cranberries pop, stir in walnuts and thyme, set aside.

-Combine eggs and cream, whisking until smooth. Spoon the filling mixture into baked shell, crumble the blue cheese over the top, then pour the egg mix over all. BAKE at 350° F for about 20 minutes until just set and golden.

Note: I noticed that when the shell was baked, cracks did appear in it, so I brushed a little milk over the cracks, and popped it back in the oven for 5 minutes, as I didn't want to risk the filling leaking through the base. It worked well! Enjoy!

