

North Island Rhododendron Society



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

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Sunshine Lady

Gwen Wright ... 338-8345

Revenue Table

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Publicity

Evelyn Wright.. 339-7493

Newsletter

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The club meets at 7:30 p.m.
the second Tuesday of each
month at the United Church
on Comox Avenue, Comox.
(except May through August)

COMING EVENTS:

7 March 2006

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Evelyn and Daryl Wright 1672 Beaufort Ave, Comox, beginning at 7:30 p.m.

14 March 2006 — Regular Monthly Meeting

Guest Speaker: Judith Walker

Topic: "Making Connections: From A Continent to an Island"

On the west coast of North America, and especially in southern BC, Washington and Oregon, we are aware of truly wonderful and delightful specimens of rhododendrons. Even if one weren't an enthusiast for the genera, the plants couldn't help but turn heads. But beautiful as they are, each one has a story, and Judith often wonders where the plants came from and who were their parents. Did the seed travel thousands of miles to a small nursery here? Was that specimen planted so many years ago that no one remembers the story?

Those questions lead her to search out the connections between the plant collectors, the British nurseries, the wealthy members of the Rhododendron Society and to the surprising connections on the west coast of North America. And to the key: The Royston Nursery on Vancouver Island.

Join Judith in "Making Connections" for the fascinating story of friendships and chance encounters, trials and triumphs that have left us a wealth of rhododendrons in our gardens and parks today.

Judith is a registered landscape architect living in the Comox Valley. In 1988 Judith returned to the University of British Columbia to enter the landscape architecture program and continued on to the University of Washington, Seattle, to complete her Masters in Landscape Architecture in 1992. She was one of the founding members of the North Island Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and was given a bursary from the Chapter to continue her studies.

Judith wrote a regular gardening column for the Comox Valley Record and has been a Board Member of the B.C. Society of Landscape Architects and the Comox Valley Land Trust. She actively promotes positive land stewardship through writing articles, presentations to school and community groups and teaching workshops. Judith is currently working for the Regional District of Comox-Strathcona as a land use planner.

She is always quick to point out that she was a passionate gardener, long before she became a landscape architect. It was as a gardener that she became a friend of Mary Greig and later wrote the manuscript "A Garden for Life: Mary Greig and the Royston Rhododendrons". That research piqued her curiosity about all the long forgotten nurseries of Vancouver Island and she determined, that one day, she would tell the stories of those nurseries that shaped the gardens of Vancouver Island and beyond.



MEMBER NOTES: (by Dave Godfrey)

Our regular meeting on February 14th was a very informative and entertaining one. First, Bernie Guyader gave an educational demonstration on "his" way of planting Rhodo seeds. As Bernie explained, there are many ways to accomplish seeding, but he has found his method to be very successful. (See Bernie's article in this newsletter.)



Then, guest speaker for the evening, our President Paul Wurz's gave a presentation on the Lofthouse Rhodos. Paul explained a brief history of how he met Jack Lofthouse in Vancouver. Following Jack's passing in January 2005, Paul inherited about 50 plants from the Lofthouse estate, many in poor condition given Jack's failing health in the later of his 90 years.

Born and raised in Vancouver, Jack Lofthouse began hybridizing rhododendrons in the late 1950's. His first hybrid, 'Pink Petticoats' was a cross between two Dutch hybrids 'Jan Dekins' and 'Brittania', which first bloomed in 1964. In his 40 plus years of hybridizing rhododendrons, Jack hybridized a total of 119 crosses, both registered and unregistered. The complete list of these plants that was given to Paul directly from Jack Lofthouse did not include his two latest registered hybrids, 'Stardancer' and 'Moondancer'.

As Clive Justice once wrote, "Jack possessed a romantic streak in naming his hybrids and an irreverent one in naming others. When using the Wada selection of *R. yakushimanum* as a seed parent with pollen from his own 'Pink Petticoats', he created a hybrid, named it 'Ooh-la-la' and gave it the equally brazen synonym 'Hot Pants'. For another hybrid from the same cross, he turned to ballet for the greatest of the ballet dance steps 'Pirouette'.

With pollen from a 'Dido'X'Crest' unnamed hybrid, he created and registered 'Tofino', and with pollen from 'Pink Petticoats' he came up with 'Viennese Waltz'. In some ways the hybrid he created, named and registered as 'Lofthouse Legacy' begins to reflect the inheritance he has left us. It is a cross between two of his own creations 'Butter Brickle' and 'Viennese Waltz'."

Jack employed modern scientific propagating technology: heat lamps, timed misting and air circulation with his closed case "Lofthouse Propagator." With it he was able to root his cuttings very quickly and force cuttings to bloom equally quickly, in order to produce a bank of pollen for his crosses. Jack gave full detailed plans for building it in Vol. 41 of the ARS journal in 1987.

Paul's presentation provided 61 slides of the many Lofthouse rhodos and gardens. The beauty of these varieties was enjoyed by those in attendance. The small attendance was disappointing given the wealth of information presented.

During the social following the meeting, the door prize of a *R. pachysanthum* was won by Betty Clough. The plant raffle for Lem's 121 (recently renamed 'Garden Cameo') was won by Noni Godfrey.



Southern Skies



Sweet Sue



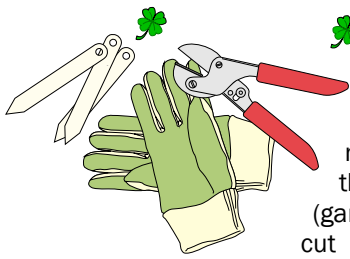
Peach Parasol

**Some of Jack Lofthouse
Rhododendron Hybrids**



JL Peach





GARDEN HINTS

After the storms we've had recently, renewing might be a necessity rather than a fun thing. I read that Helen Dillon (gardens in Ireland) was sorry to cut down a 30 ft. Gleditsia but found the gap allowed more sun into the shrub bed. She had several amusing hints - if you think it is time to plant seeds, sit on the ground - if it feels warm, go ahead and plant. Tie your hands behind your back before going to a garden centre. Photograph the garden regularly - you will be amazed at how it can change over the years.

Here is an idea for a low-maintenance gravel garden, or if you have a small plot of grass you want to get rid of. Dig the area over thoroughly, and be sure to remove all perennial weeds like dandelion roots, and add some compost. Bury landscape cloth under a thick layer of gravel. Move gravel and cut holes in the fabric in which to plant shrubs or grasses.

(Note by MP: I can assure you, if all weeds are not removed, you will have a difficult chore to remove them from the landscape fabric in a few years.)



Gladiolas and Dahlias are back in favour this year. They are so easy to care for, and because the climate seems to be warming up, you do not have to dig and store them for the winter. Just keep them as dry as possible. After writing this, I wonder if this is good advice for our area. If dahlias are planted in a sheltered spot, dry in winter, (like under the eaves) they will be fine - if you can water them in summer. I read also that gladiolas are so inexpensive, that they can brighten up the rhodo beds in summer. Don't bother to dig them up - they will probably survive, and if not, buy some more next year.

If you can find any species gladiolas, they have smaller flowers than the taller varieties, and are really hardy.

Note by MP: Don't believe everything I write, taken from magazines written in New York or California. I am reminded of the beautiful Alstroemerias I planted 25 years ago, rare at that time. Now they pop up all through the Rhodo beds - just try to get rid of them!

I read of a beautiful new Rhodo from Millais Nursery (UK) but maybe someone will import plants. This is R. Crosswater Belle, which has beautiful lily-like white flowers with pink streaks on the outside of the petals. It blooms in mid-spring, grows to 4 ft. in 10 years, and is happy in a pot.



MARCH THINGS TO DO IN THE GARDEN

Helen Chestnut, writing in the *Times Colonist* 2nd Feb. listed gardening "things to do", and as we are always a few weeks behind Victoria, her suggestions will be right on time for us in late February or early March, depending on the weather. It is important to refrain from getting too enthusiastic too early. We can have snow and cold in March.

Nevertheless, we can think about some of these chores and ideas, and be prepared to do them whenever it is safe. For instance, her idea of having some winter heathers in bloom is a good one - if you don't have any, now is a good time to buy one. They laugh off the snow, and make such marvelous companions for rhodos. Pansies and primroses too - but the deer eat them for breakfast in my garden. Maybe you have a more sheltered spot for these. The deer never bother with my hellebores, winter aconites or species crocus. All are in bloom now, and it is always tempting to pick out "just one more" hellebore. A yellow one, or maybe a double.

Check the lawn and rock garden for leaves that didn't get picked up last fall. They can cause dead patches in the lawn, and are death to tiny alpine plants. If you have the strength to do it, fork over the compost pile and add a little alfalfa or canola meal, or seaweed, and cover the pile with plastic to hold in heat and shed rain.

Dig up the fuchsias you buried last fall, set them in a cool bright place, and when green shoots appear, cut them back and repot in new planting mix. Pinch or cut off growing tips to promote branching.



WINTER BLOOMING HEATHERS

The 14 Jan. issue of Amateur Gardening presented a good article on Winter-blooming heathers:

"Flowering from November to March, when there is little eye-catching colour, Erica carnea, Erica x darleyensis and Erica Erigena with honey-scented flowers create a potent mix. Perfect for containers or brightening informal borders alongside other winter-flowering plants, they make excellent ground cover, work well with conifers, and are ideal for stabilizing sandy soils".

Several tried-and-true plants are mentioned - Erica carnea 'Jennifer Anne' pretty pink flowers from November to April. Vigorous 'December Red' mid pink from November to February 'Wintersonne' pink darkening to burgundy with red-brown foliage. 'King George' has rosy-pink flowers on a dark green cushion from December to February, and 'Myretoun Ruby' offers magenta flowers from January to May. 'Springwood Pink' and 'Springwood White' are two more old favorites.

Winter-blooming heathers prefer full sun but will tolerate semi-shade. Buy compact, bushy plants and prepare poor soils by adding well-rotted manure or compost and plant them in mid-autumn or early spring, with stems resting on the soil. Mulch between plants. If Rhodos are in a bed, use the heathers as an edging. After flowering, trim the plants with shears and add a general fertilizer in spring. To propagate, peg down side shoots (they often layer naturally), or take 1 1/2" semi-ripe cuttings, July to September. Strip leaves from the lower part of the stem and insert in a 50/50 mix of compost and sharp sand. Place the pots away from sun and remember to water them in hot late summer weather.

SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

(by Rose-Marie Silkens)



When it comes to basic garden handbooks for the west coast, it's hard to beat the old *Pacific Gardener*. Originally published in Victoria by A.R. Willis in 1964, it has been out of print since the 1970's. A great deal of practical information is packed into that small volume, but it does have only a sketchy mention of organic alternatives. Even before the 1960's, many gardeners espoused organic ideals. Certainly, I grew up with constant admonitions to avoid the hazards of herbicides, pesticides, monoculture, and the other so-called necessities that are a part of contemporary agri-business. My parents believed in cultivating a garden (and raising livestock) along more natural and traditional lines. Nonetheless, the *Pacific Gardener* remained one of my standby references for over 30 years.

However, I have just been given a book that can take over that role, and that also remains true to organic principles in a most practical and helpful way. *A Year on the Garden Path*, by Victoria writer Carolyn Herriot, is a week-by-week guide to organic gardening on the coast. I'm amazed at how much information is contained in this slim volume. The guide to the gardener's year is much more than a list of directions. Each week contains elaborations that go well beyond simple instructions, such as detailed discussions about growing peas and tomatoes. The information is comprehensive enough to inform a beginner, yet provides the accounts of individual experience that interest a lifetime gardener.

I especially like the essays on basic soil science and composting. We all like to have our opinions reinforced, and I am no exception. After reading Carolyn's advice on using manure, I was delighted to have an eccentricity vindicated. I ask Bruce to transport horse manure across the straits from Hardwicke Island even though horse-owners on the Sayward side offer me manure from their animals. The reason: I know what does, and doesn't, go into our horses, and consequently our soil.

Of course, Sayward and Victoria are a world apart climatically, so I expected to find Carolyn's calendar much more optimistic than mine. That isn't the case at all, as her suggestions relate more to the natural rhythms of the changing year than the rigidity of dates.

This is an excellent addition to a gardener's library, and it won't be long before my copy is as tatty-looking as my well-worn *Pacific Gardener*.

At this time of year my small collection of willows brings particular pleasure. I don't have too many willows—yet—but one of my ambitions is to have a great many species scattered about the place. Our native Hooker's willow and Scouler's willow, *Salix hookeriana* and *S.*

scouleriana, thrive alongside a creek, but it is a bit shady there for them to produce many catkins. The showy imports, *S. sakhalinensis* 'Sekka' and *S. gracilistyla melanostachys*, have more exposed locations so in mid-February they are sporting their delightful, large catkins, pewter-grey and black respectively. The bright yellow branches of *S. alba* illuminate the mid-winter gloom. My unnamed cultivar, grown from cuttings taken from a neighbour's plant, is an intense golden yellow. I have grown the curly types, *S. matsudana tortuosa* 'Golden Curls' and 'Scarlet Curls,' but have always been a bit uncomfortable with plants that look as if human tampering has forced them into odd habits. With the mellowing of age I am learning to like those two, but I still draw the line at the grafted pussy willows that are forced into absurdly vertical weeping forms.

BOOK REVIEW (by Mary Palmer)

Variegated Trees & Shrubs:
The Illustrated Encyclopedia
by Ronald Houtman, in association with
the Royal Boskoop Horticultural Society.
Timber Press 2004.



If you like variegated shrubs (Rhodos and others) or trees, you should spend time browsing this book. It is full of descriptions and excellent photographs of hundreds of shrubs and trees that are variegated, either naturally, by soil conditions or viruses, or many other reasons. Most are chimeras, that is, they contain genetically different cell layers.

There is a wealth of information about the shrubs pictured - including zone numbers which are so useful to us. There are articles on using variegated plants in the garden and useful appendices.

Many of us struggle with a favorite plant – Daphne. I have gained a little more information on these plants from this book. *D. burkwoodii*, a hybrid between *D. caucasia* and *D. cneorum*, has several named varieties, with variegated leaves, that are usually hardier than the species. *D. 'Carol Mackie'* for instance, is hardy to Zone 6a, as is *D. 'Briggs Moonlight'*, with its striking yellow leaves with a thin green edge. As many of us know, *D. odora 'Aureomarginata'* is hardy to Z 7, seems to be more winter-hardy than the green-leaved ones, but is difficult anyway. We know it dislikes winter-wet and does well in a dry protected spot in our area. *D. cneorum 'Variegata'* is a lovely little plant, hardier than the species, hardy down to Z 5a. Worth a try if I can ever find one.

I am sure that after reading and making notes from this book you will look more carefully around the nurseries and try one of the lovely plants described. The book can be found in the Courtenay library.



"Have a say in who makes the show!!!"

Come to the NIRS March general meeting and your voice will count.....

We will be picking our candidates for the "Rhododendron of the Year" award from each of the four categories: Elipidote, Lepidote, Deciduous Azalea and Evergreen Azalea.

Make your choice from our chapter's "Proven Performers" list.

A committee of our more knowledgeable members has worked tirelessly on selecting several worthy candidates for your perusal.

So come out and vote for your favorites!

A sneak peak at those in the running:

Elipidote: Hallelujah, Teddy Bear, Fantastica

Lepidote: Biskra, R. augustinii, R. campylogynum

Deciduous Azalea: R. luteum, R. occidentale, Gibraltar

Evergreen Azalea: Girard's Fuchsia, Rosebud, R. kiusianum (Komo Kulshan)



Rhododendron of the Year Candidates for 2009

The following criteria are to be used in making these recommendations:

1. Foliage should have good green color and retain leaves for at least 2 years, (except deciduous azalea).
2. Plant should flower and perform well in your region 4 out of 5 years.
3. Full, compact plant.
4. Must be cold hardy, bud hardy, and heat tolerant in your area.
5. Must be registered with the ARS.
6. Easily propagated.
7. Easily grown in the average garden requiring low maintenance.
8. Resistant to disease.
9. Propagation material must be available for mass production and availability in 2009.
10. 2009 candidates cannot duplicate previous years ROY selections.
11. ROY Candidates should be selected from your Chapter's "Proven Performer" list.



Past selections, with ARS member input, "Rhododendron's Of The Year"

<u>Year</u>	<u>Elipidote</u>	<u>Lepidote</u>	<u>Deciduous Azalea</u>	<u>Evergreen Azalea</u>
2002.....	Ken Janeck.....	Ginny Gee.....	R. schlippenbachii.....	Hino Crimson
2003.....	Taurus.....	PJM.....	Homebush.....	Purple Splendor
2004.....	Percy Wiseman.....	Dora Amateis.....	Arneson's Gem.....	Fascination
2005.....	Horizon Monarch.....	Ramapo.....	Nifty Fifty.....	Hilda Niblett
2006.....	Pt. Defiance.....	Wee Bee.....	Washington Centennial.....	Silver Sword
2007.....	Nancy Evans.....	Blaney's Blue.....	Cecille.....	Mitsuki
2008.....	Marie Starks.....	Vibrant Violet.....	Yukon.....	Girard's Fuchsia

TODD MAJOR'S BASIC SOIL PHILOSOPHY

In the Feb. 2004 issue of Indumentum (Vancouver Rhodo Society), Todd provided the following information:

Healthy soil is a primary requirement of a healthy garden. Important components of a healthy soil are good water and nutrient-holding ability. These qualities are usually provided by the finer textured components, such as clays and partially decomposed organic matter. Good aeration is also essential to the various biological processes necessary for plant growth. Aeration in soil is provided by a variety of particle sizes throughout the profile, including larger materials, such as sands and gravels, and by natural soil aggregates (crumbs), which are made up of both mineral and organic soil constituents.

In general, the deeper the soil, the healthier the plants will be. Microorganisms, including fungi and bacteria, and macroorganisms, such as soil insects and earthworms, all contribute to building healthy, productive soil. Encourage them to live in the soil by maintaining good soil structure and avoiding the use of herbicides, soil sterilants or other chemicals that kill or discourage beneficial organisms. Finally, good drainage is essential in our winter rainy climate.

Examples of Poor Soil

Sand and gravel - do not have the ability to retain water or nutrients.

Clay - has very little air-filled porosity and retains excess moisture.

Hardpan - because water and air will not penetrate it.

Amending and Preparing Soil Before Planting

Break up layers or barriers in the soil that prevent free drainage,

Ensure surface moisture can infiltrate the soil so it does not wash across the garden

Use prepared organic matter to improve the soil - well rotted manure, compost from yard and kitchen waste, peat moss, seaweeds, composted bark mulch, leaf mold.

Fine sand will not improve drainage, but will fill in pore spaces.

Work the soil during dry weather, working soil during rain will damage soil structure.

Do not remove small sticks and rocks - they help build good soil structure.

Do not break up soil crumbs (lumps of soil) fist size or smaller.

Repeated use of a rotor tiller often creates an impervious layer at blade depth. Operate at the lowest speed and gear.

Test the soil before adding lime. Rhodos prefer a pH between 5 and 6.

A little bone meal goes a long way - 1 tablespoonful to the root zone of a 5 ft. tree.

Do not add granular fertilizer to the soil when amending it. The granules begin to release on contact with the soil, and there are no roots there to benefit.

Amend soil to a depth of 12-14 inches (even up to 24) for annuals and perennials. For trees and shrubs, amend 24-36 inches and if you can't go down, then build up above the existing grade.

Do not leave the soil surface bare - always mulch to protect it.



The Member Who Never Came Back



"It amuses me now to think that our organization spends so much time looking for new members — when I was there all the time. Do you remember me?"

"I'm the fellow who came to every meeting, but nobody paid any attention to me. I tried several times to be friendly, but everyone seemed to have his own friends to talk to and sit with. I sat down among some unfamiliar faces several times, but they didn't pay much attention to me."

"I hoped somebody would ask me to join one of the committees or to somehow participate and contribute —but no one did."

"Finally, because of illness, I missed a meeting. The next month no one asked me where I had been. I guess it didn't matter very much whether I was there or not. On the next meeting date I decided to stay home and watch a good television program. When I attended the next meeting no one asked me where I was the month before."

"You might say that I'm a good guy, a good family man and I hold a responsible job and love my community."

"You know who else I am? I'm the member who never came back!"

RHODO NUTRITION "Fatten up your Rhodos"


Ted Van Veen wrote a useful article on fertilizer for rhodos and I will try to pick the most important suggestions from it. "When should I fertilize?" Were we to query 10 different experts, we would have 10 different answers, ranging from "never" to a complicated year-round program.

One authority states "Fatten your rhodos with ample food and they will break into smiles or blooms each season". Another responds: "limit your fertilizer applications to a few hummingbird droppings once a year". In between these two are varied recipes, and who knows which is the best.

There are many variables - soil, light, water quality, age of plants - and don't forget weather. (Note by MP-Earlier I had recommended dolomite lime sometime during the winter - but if you applied it during the extremely wet period we have had this past 6 weeks, it is long gone. The same for advice to fertilize rhodos in Nov. and Feb. Maybe, some years, some place!)

Rhodos can have too much - or too little - nitrogen. If the veins of leaves are green and the rest yellow, the plant may need a little magnesium. Phosphorus may take as long as 6 months to reach the root system, and an application of granular phosphate during the winter will do good. But in general, it is true that rhodos and other ericaceous plants need little fertilizer compared to many other plants.

Note by MP: Perhaps, after this long spell of wet, wet weather this winter, the main ingredient for happy rhodos this spring will be a good layer of bark mulch with some rhodo fertilizer (6-8-6 plus trace elements) mixed in it.

At Oyster River, since 19 December, we have had (up to 28 January) over 28 inches of rain - which is 1/2 a year's supply, according to the 50-year averages. 

TRUSS SHOW AND PLANT SALE:

Our annual Truss Show and Plant Sale will be held on Sunday, May 7th at the First Nations Hall on Comox Road (same location as last year.) A large number of assistance is needed to set up and run the event. In addition to those needed to run the sale, we also require assistance in setting up the Truss Show. Many vendors bring in trusses from their various plants, but are too busy setting up for the sale to help with setting up for the Truss Show. So for those members who may not be able to commit to helping with the sale from 10am to 2 pm, we encourage you to consider helping with the 9 am setup or the Truss Show for an hour.






DROUGHT RESISTANT PLANS AND PLANTS:



It is not too early in the year to consider how to beat the drought we are almost sure to have this coming summer and fall. Those of us on shallow wells must take this advice very seriously - those on water meters perhaps less so, but it would be wise for everyone to look to the future and start cutting back on water use.

An article in Fine Gardening #106 offers some good hints for people living in the Northwest. Overhead sprinkling is the least efficient way to water the garden. Hand-water newly planted material, use soaker hoses or drip irrigation system. Water early or late in the day, or water when it is raining. Water seldom but water those plants deeply.

Look for drought-tolerant plants. Once established, many plants are happy to receive a deep watering once or twice a month in summer. Acanthus mollis, Phormium tenax (not quite hardy here in winter), Physocarpus (our native Ninebark and new varieties with coloured leaves), and Spiraea nipponica 'Snowmound' are good choices. Many plants from the Mediterranean region-plants with fuzzy, silvery or hairy leaves, plants with waxy-coated or succulent leaves, plants with long taproots are all adapted to low moisture.

Buy from local Island growers, who have the same (lack of) water problems as we have. If you have a bed in full sun, fill it with some of these plants. Place the Rhodos where they get some morning sun but less of the hot afternoon sun. Actually, some rhodos will take almost full sun; others need to be moved to a shadier spot.   

RHODO GARDEN EXTENSION:

In this, the 10th anniversary year of the NIRS Rhododendron Garden adjacent to the Courtenay Airpark, plans are underway to expand the gardens. A new area will be established to exclusively include Vancouver Island rhododendron hybrids. Our garden director, Harry Wright, has started the preliminary work and will be seeking assistance throughout the summer months for the establishment of this new addition.  

REVENUE TABLE:

At each regular meeting, we set up a revenue table to help raise funds for our ongoing projects. In the past, members have been very generous in providing plants, cuttings, seeds, and other garden related items to be offered for sale to other members and guests attending the meetings. During the non-growing winter season, several members have also brought other items to sell (homemade preserves, eggs, pots, pails, etc.) and these are most welcomed.

Lately however, our revenue table has been suffering from a lack of donations, and the executive would like to encourage members to be generous when it comes to supporting the revenue table, either as a provider or buyer of items.

For those providing items, please be sure they are marked as to the name of the plant or seeds, and your name for any additional information needed. It is also our wish that, if for any reason, your donated items do not sell you please take them home with you, as we do not have a place to store them.

Growing Rhodos From Seed

(By Bernie Guyader)

There are many ways of growing plants from seeds, but Bernie showed us his way at our February meeting and has kindly offered his notes for printing in the Newsletter.

Step One: Cleanliness is a must, but you can use any container, as long as it's clean and will hold a seed starting medium and moisture. You can use any medium to start seeds; from a seed starting special mixture to moist paper towel. Bernie mixes his own. (See 'recipes' on this page of the newsletter.)

Step two: Do not sow your seeds too thickly. I know we want to plant every seed we have. If you want to sow all your seeds use several containers if necessary. If you have trouble seeing the seeds as you sow them, put a thin layer of light coloured sand on top of the mix then seeds will be visible. I fill a suitable clean container with my seed starting mix. Pack it down, sow the seeds thinly, and then press them firmly into the soil. Set the container in warm water and allow the medium to soak up the water until the surface is moist. Cover the container with glass, plastic or newspaper. Put it in a warm place, (top of fridge) not in direct sunlight and wait...for germination.

Step Three: Requirements for germination: Usually, the only requirements for seeds to germinate are warmth and moisture. If seeds are very old they might need a period of heat and cold to break their dormancy. I have never found rhodo seeds to show this problem. If you provide constant moisture, not soggy, conditions and warmth, (approx. 70-72 degrees F.) the seeds will germinate.

Step Four: Growing on after germination. The seedlings need good light and fluorescent lights are great. A two light fixture with one cool white and one warm white tube will give you a full spectrum. Put your seedlings about three inches below the lights. The centre section of the lights is the brightest area. If using more than one light fixture attach aluminum foil between fixtures to extend the light reflection out. If you are using a window sill, remember to turn the container a quarter turn each day. You must also ensure there is good air circulation. The major cause of plants succumbing to 'damping off' is poor air circulation.

Keep a close eye on the moisture, set the container in warm water, when necessary, to maintain the moisture. You can leave the pricking out as long as you wish. Most publications suggest waiting until the seedling forms its first true leaves before pricking out. This is the reason I put the fertilizer into my mix. The seeds don't need it for germination, but it's there for the seedlings when they start growing roots. You can leave the seedlings in the container until it forms a good root system, but not so



long as to allow the roots to become damaged when they are being pricked out. After potting on, water with a dilute solution (1/4 strength) soluble fertilizer 10-52-10

RECIPE REQUESTS:

BERNIE'S SEED STARTING MIXTURE:

1 pail Peat

1 pail sterilized soil.

1 pail sharp bedding Sand

To this he adds a teaspoon or so super phosphate, frittelated trace elements and lime

(Bernie says to sterilize your own potting soil, place an ice cream bucket full of dirt on high the microwave for 12 minutes...sans the metal handle....and don't mind the smell)

HARRY'S HYPERTUFFA MIXTURE:

1 part peat

1 part cement

1 part perlite

1 part water

1-2 cups frayed nylon rope (cut a nylon cord in 1/2" pieces and it frays itself)

Mix all ingredients but water, until well churned. Add the nylon rope in slowly so it doesn't clump. Finally add the water slowly and mix carefully to consistency of cottage cheese.

CEMENT LOOKING POTS (Gardens West Jan 2002)

1 pail perlite

1 pail sand

1 pail vermiculite

1 pail peat

1 1/4 pail cement

Mix to consistency of cottage cheese; poke holes in bottom for drain, 2" thick for floor & walls.

Chicken wire for strength, cover with plastic, cure 1 week, remove from mould.

FLORIST PRESERVATIVE:

1 T Vinegar

1 Qt Water

1 T Sugar

ROOTING / POTTING UP MIXES

(see Gardens West Nov/Dec 03 article)

ROOTING MIX:

2 parts sand

1 part Peat

1 part Vermiculite

POTTING UP AFTER ROOTING (6 to 8 weeks)

1 part sand

2 parts soil

1 part peat

FERTILIZE 20 - 20 - 20

1 oz liquid to 1 Gallon or

30 gr. powder to 8 L

NAME THE NEWSLETTER CONTEST:

Just a reminder that we have a contest underway to name our newsletter. Members are asked to notify Noni Godfrey of any suggested names ASAP. Those members attending the AGM in May will be asked to vote on all names submitted. The person submitting the winning name will be rewarded with a rhododendron.