



The RHODOTELLER

#

COMING EVENTS:

7 November 2006 – Executive Meeting

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Dave & Marlene Crucq, 2301 Seabank Road, Courtenay, beginning at 7:30 p.m.

14 November 2006 — Regular Monthly Meeting

Guest Speaker: Ron Knight

Topic: Pruning

Ron Knight is a retired biology teacher and school administrator. He is a confirmed rhodoholic, past-president of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society and currently the Alternate-Director for the ARS's BC District 1. Ron is a busy guest speaker at garden clubs on the Sunshine Coast and at rhododendron clubs on Vancouver Island and in Greater Vancouver. He writes a monthly column entitled, "Back to Basics" for the Vancouver Rhododendron Society's online magazine "The Indumentum". (WWW.rhodo.citymax.Com)

At November's meeting, Ron will be presenting "Pruning with Confidence". Using colour slides, he will describe the huge difference that pruning can make to the health and attractiveness of plants and will suggest 7 goals that gardeners should keep in mind before wielding their loppers. Then, Ron will use tools and plant material to illustrate general principles and techniques that will allow anyone to prune ornamental trees and shrubs with confidence.

PRESIDENT'S VIEW. (by Harry Wright)

Still waiting for more moisture, but why worry about something you can't do any thing about. At least we can enjoy the fall colours as long as the wind doesn't get too strong.

Cuttings are all in the propagating tank and looking good, but it's still a little early to tell what they think of their new home for the next 4 to 5 months.

Most of the fall clean up is complete, but Gwen and I don't get too carried away with clean up! We like to leave plants with seed heads for the birds; they always seem to enjoy easy pickings.

If any of our members are not saving ARS Journals after reading would you mind bringing them to the meeting for me and I will see that they are recycled. I have saved mine since 1980, so if anyone needs to do research in any back articles our NIRS library has an index to cover that time period.



North Island Rhododendron Society

2005/2006 Executive:

President

Harry Wright 338-8345

Vice-President

Dave Crucq 339-7845

Secretary

Diana Scott 338-0208

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..... Nonigod@shaw.ca

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Evelyn Wright .. 339-7493

Bernice Morrison 339-0932

Revenue Table Committee:

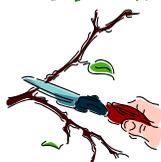
Joan Walsh 335-1349

Tiffany Wyles... 336-8188

Historian:

Lois Clyde 337-5754

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

PRESIDENT'S TIPS FOR NOVEMBER:**Why Prune**

Undoubtedly there are numerous gardeners who shudder at the thought of inflicting so much as a small cut on any unsuspecting plant. Look at the forest around us on Vancouver Island and the vast fields of untouched trees living quite happily in their un-pruned state! Not so you say! Look a little closer and one will see the constant 'natural' pruning process of 'Mother Nature' in action. Wind, weather and wild animals are forever reshaping and resizing our forest trees and plants in an effort to maintain a healthy population of all species.

Cultivated plants, on the other hand are pruned, by our hand, for several reasons.

- To keep a plant healthy (prune to let in light and air, remove dead and dying branches, crossing limbs etc.)
- To keep a plant from growing too large (pruning roots as well as branches may be called for to keep a plant in size!)
- To make a plant more beautiful (prune to topiary, hedges, espaliers, or bonsai)
- To improve the quality or quantity of flowers, leaves or fruits (help to coax the best from a plant by pruning stems, shoots, leaf buds or flower buds)



My vast experience has shown that pruning will not harm a plant but will actually help it in all the areas indicated above. Pruning is the topic for the next meeting so come prepared with questions. Also why not bring something for the revenue table.

See you there. Harry

ARS WESTERN REGIONAL FALL CONFERENCE

(by Brian Staton)

The ARS Western Regional Fall Conference, hosted by Fraser South Rhodo Society, was held on September 22-24, 2006, at the Harrison Hot Springs resort on a beautiful sunny weekend. Over 240 Rhododendron enthusiasts attended the three day event, starting with a wine and Cheese reception and a welcome lecture from Steve Hootman, co-director of the Rhododendron Species Foundation.

The next two days consisted of morning lecture series and afternoons of Spirit Tours. Two provocative lectures that were very enlightening were the "In Search of the Arctic Rhododendrons" by Dalen Bayes, who informed us that there are three very hardy Rhodos that live in the minus 60 degree Canadian North, and "Too many Rhodos? Alpine Plants for the Rhododendron Garden" by David Sellers whose power point presentation was very informative on how to build a rock garden.

The Saturday conference banquet featured an excellent buffet and culminated in a very entertaining and humorous keynote address by Des Kennedy entitled "Passion Encounters in the Garden". A very well stocked plant sale took place next door to the conference that included rhododendrons, bonsai and flower arranging demonstrations, plus a large selection of matted Rhododendron photographs for silent auction. The final lecture was a very entertaining and provocative slide lecture by Steve Hootman, entitled "Frolicking Among the Species: Aristocrats and Tramps"

The eight delegates from our club thoroughly enjoyed themselves and returned with newly bought plants and inspiring knowledge to appreciate the fascinating species "Rhododendrons".



Steve Hootman's presentation: "Frolicking Among the Species: Aristocrats and Tramps"



Our own Paul Wurz "Frolicking Among the Species"-and friends! (photos by Brian Staton)

MEMBER NOTES: (by Dave Godfrey)

The format for our meeting on October 10th was changed to accommodate guest speaker Les Clay's travel plans. In order for Les to catch a late ferry home, he was allowed to give his presentation on Propagation prior to the business portion of the meeting.

Les explained to the 30 members and guests in attendance that there were several methods of propagating new rhododendrons. Layering is one method found in the wild, and used in the very early days by plant growers.

Today however, there are several other methods available, including seed planting, grafting, plant cuttings and tissue culture. Grafting and cutting propagation are the two most common methods, with tissue culture (micro-propagation) being the most expensive and therefore not practical for most growers. Les gave a slide presentation of equipment and methods of tissue culture from his previous endeavours in the business.



Les gave an explanation and demonstration of how to properly graft cuttings to an inexpensive root stock, also how to prepare and plant rhododendron cuttings. Both of these methods are obtainable by most members. Information regarding these methods is available in several books or brochures in our NIRS library.

At the conclusion of Les' presentation, the draws were made for the raffle and door prizes. Dorothy Law was the raffle winner of "Courtenay King", while Betty Clough took home the rhodo "Helen Dear" which was kindly donated by Les and Bev Clay.

The door prize of "Fastuosum Flore Pleno" was also won by Dorothy Law; however, three other lucky winners received secondary prizes of plantings and seedlings donated again by Les Clay from his presentation.



Les Clay being very hands on with his instructions on propagating and grafting

**NEW RETAIL DISCOUNTS**

As members are renewing their 2007 memberships, Ways & Means Director Dave Godfrey reminds members that several businesses in the area offer discounts to those members showing their membership cards at the time of purchase (some restriction may apply.)

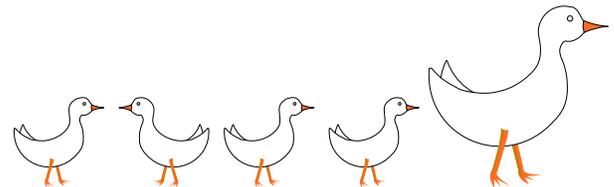
Although Buckerfield's and Courtenay Nursery have recently gone out of business, two new garden centers have been added to the list. Shar-Kare on Puntledge Rd in Courtenay and Mt. Arrowsmith Nursery in Qualicum are both offering discounts to NIRS members.

SAVE

In addition, "Serendipity in the Garden" in Campbell River and "Comox Valley Ornamental Concrete" on Knight Road in Comox are both offering 10% discounts on any concrete garden ornaments.

Comox Valley Ornamental Concrete has over 200 different lawn and garden statuarys and stepping stones to choose from at very reasonable prices. Their winter hours vary, so it is best to phone ahead.

Call Doug at 890-0667 (store) or 250-338-3944 (cell).

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN:

Membership renewals are required by the November 14th meeting to ensure this year's membership with ARS and to receive your copy of the ARS Journal!

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

All Associate memberships are \$10.00 Canadian.

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

N.I.R.S.
Attn: Brian Staton
P.O. Box 3183
Courtenay, B.C.
V9N 5N4

**HELLEBORES**

This is the time of year we start to look for flowers on our *H. niger*, followed after Christmas by all the vari-coloured *H. orientalis* or *H. hybridus*. Thompson & Morgan has bought Elizabeth Strangman's Hellebore collection, and is now producing the fantastic "Washfield Doubles". You can buy 10 seeds for about £5 (around \$7.50 here, if you can find any) and the picture shows an amazing variety of colours.



GARDEN CHATTER, NATTER AND NOTES

(by Mary Palmer)

You can shred leaves in the fall by dumping them into a large plastic tub, and use the string trimmer to break them up. Dump them into a circle of fence wires and within a year they will have turned into lovely leaf mold to use for compost around the rhodos. I have found they are often well rotted by March, after the fall rains have helped to break them down.

Do you grow giant Alliums? I never know just what to do with the dried stalks with huge seed heads on them. Here is a good idea: Spray them with bright colours, slip the 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 garlucs".

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 that deer never eat. Unfortunately this person hasn't yet realized that deer will eat, or taste, anything and everything they can reach, sooner or later. In my garden, the deer never touched the hostas - until last year, when they cleaned them up.

Several people have told me this fall, that deer have eaten their tomatoes for the first time. That is, they took each fruit off the bushes, tasted it, dropped it to the ground, and on to the next. Two people had deer go right inside their greenhouses. (Remember to close the door after this!)

PLANTS IN POTS FOR THE WINTER



Those of you who do not need to be concerned with deer in the garden, can plant winter-blooming pansies in the pots that contained summer annuals. The rest of us must make do with brightly-coloured ivies, evergreen trees and bushes, and heathers and grasses that the deer don't bother. These can be very attractive all winter, even when they are covered with frost or snow. Now is the time to look in the nurseries, where there is a good supply of these plants. Some are variegated, some change colour in winter - heathers that turn bright red or yellow, junipers that go from green to purple - who needs flowers when there are so many other brightly coloured plants.



BOOK REVIEW

(by Mary Palmer)

Gardening with Foliage Plants,
Leaf, Bark and Berry
by Ethne Clarke, photos by Clive Nichols
Abbeville Press, 1996, 1997



This is a wonderful book to peruse in autumn, when many of the brightly coloured tree leaves are attracting our attention, and in winter, when we make note of interesting bark and berries on our walks through gardens and parks.

"There is more to any plant than just its flowers despite their tendency to steal the limelight in nursery catalogues and in the minds of many gardeners. Coloured stems, beautiful bark, striking leaf shapes, and vibrant foliage are just some of the characteristics that continue to adorn a garden before and after its flowering season. Here, Ethne Clarke's fresh ideas and Clive Nichol's stunning, specially commissioned photographs combine to produce an innovative book that will be an inspiration to all gardeners." That says it all.

This book encourages individuals to look beyond the transient flowering potential of plants and to experiment with leaf shape, plant form, and shades of green.

There are outstanding photos of trees and shrubs in garden settings, and individual leaves and bark, as well as sketches and paintings of plants and gardens. Grasses, berries, gardens in containers, a variety of inspirational ideas that could keep a person happy until spring comes again.

The plant directory lists plants according to colour - green, grey-green, blue-green, yellow, orange, red, purple, autumn colours, bark, stem, berry - and suggestions as to where to site particular plants. I borrowed the book from the Campbell River Library, and wish I could keep it all winter. Ask for the book at your library, or buy it - it's worth it!



SOMETHING NEW



After reading an article in Gardens West about making a styrofoam box into an imitation hypertufa container, I grabbed a can of grey paint and a pail of sand and got to work. 3 coats of each, on each side, and the box really looks like hypertufa, and weighs almost nothing. Of course, by the time I filled it with soil, heather, ivy, a fern and a grass, I needed help to move it to a permanent position. Now I wonder if winter weather will remove the sand. I'll let you know in the spring. If you try it, don't forget to cut some holes in the bottom of the box, and lay rocks or other drainage material over them. Use a mixture of soil, coarse sand and/or perlite - amounts vary depending on the kind of plants you wish to put in the box.



SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD

(by Rose-Marie Silkens)

As the fine fall weather allows me the punctual tidying of perennial beds without rushing, I've been able to ponder the various successes (and failures) of the year, as well as considering which new plants have earned permanent status.



This was the first year I grew *Lysimachia atropurpurea* 'Beaujolaais.' A moisture-loving relation of the gooseneck flower, *Lysimachia clethroides*, this upright perennial has narrow, variegated leaves with burgundy flower spikes that fairly glow from lighter-red centers. Perhaps because of the dry summer, the plants have as yet shown no inclination to run like *L. clethroides* does, but then, they have been in place for only a few months.

Brunnera macrophylla 'Jack Frost' has been all the rage for a number of years now. I thought it must be too good to be true when I first heard about it, as newly-introduced plants are often disappointing. 'Hadspen Cream' reverted to all-green after only one season here. So I didn't plant 'Jack Frost' until two years ago when Steve Whysall wrote about how impressive it was after two years in his garden. I certainly find more and more locations for this low clump of silver-green foliage, and while it shines most brightly in shade, it still did nicely in a spot that became sunny because of an accident to overhead branches.

Humbled by my delay in planting 'Jack Frost,' this year I tried two other variegated brunneras. 'Looking Glass' is very similar, but even more silvery, very striking. 'Dawson's White' is stunning, with rich cream variegation much wider than 'Hadspen Cream.' If either one turns out to be half as reliable as 'Jack Frost,' they'll be keepers.

The perennial lavateras, most notably 'Barnsley,' have been immensely popular for some time. When I first purchased 'Barnsley' about 15 years ago, from the Knechtels on the lower mainland, I was warned that it can revert to clear pink (from red-centred pale pink). This did in fact happen with my 'Barnsley,' but I still quite like it. Subsequently I have added the all-pink 'Bredon Spring' to the group. The original 'Barnsley' colouring is very pretty, especially when the plant is grown as a large (huge) specimen, but here in Sayward the climate keeps the clumps smaller and more suited to the company of other perennials in a large herbaceous border. In that setting, I actually prefer the more intense clear pink.



I'm partial to mallow flowers generally, and especially like one that performs as a biennial for me, *Malva sylvestris*. I originally grew the veined, grape-popsicle-purple 'Brave Heart' from Thompson and Morgan seed, and now have its offspring popping up around the place. Some plants are very good at selecting spots that are better choices than mine, and this plant is one of them. Perhaps it just looks good almost anywhere. The colour is handsome regardless, but it is particularly pleasing with chartreuse, and I love combining it with the annual *Nicotiana langsdorffii* (which unfortunately does not self-seed for me). The credit for that combination goes to Rosemary Verey, who of course originated Lavatera 'Barnsley' at her Barnsley House gardens in England.

Knautia macedonica, a scabious relative sometimes called Red Scabious, is another self-seeding plant in

my garden. I first planted seeds sent to me from Holland about 20 years ago, and now these tall (at least 3 feet) perennials appear at will throughout the place. They do need weeding out, but I keep lots too. Their basal rosettes don't take much room, and their superstructures are slender and unobtrusive, not jostling their neighbours for growing room. Mine appear in many shades of pink through deep red, and the long flower stems make them useful cut flowers (though they don't last long). A new dwarf cultivar, 'Mars Midget,' was introduced this year. Its flowers are dark red, but so far I don't really care for the growth habit. The meadow-flower quality of the original has far more natural grace.



I was disappointed in the spring to realize I had lost every plant of *Scabiosa columbaria* 'Butterfly Blue,' the dwarf, everblooming Scabious that was arranged along the front of a big perennial border. They were about five years old. I have never had any of the *Scabiosa caucasica* selections last much longer, but 'Butterfly Blue' (and its cousin, 'Pink Mist') have been touted as 'Top Ten Perennials' for some time. There are some other dwarf cultivars on the market now, and perhaps one of those will prove more durable.



PRUNING SHRUBS



This advice does not necessarily refer to rhododendrons, but most of us have other shrubs in the garden, and often wonder how and when to prune them.

Shrubs that flower on new shoots produced the same year benefit from pruning in spring or they can become weak and flower poorly. Pruning encourages new shoots - the shrub may flower later in the season, but the blooms will be better.

Some shrubs such as Buddleia, Caryopteris, deciduous Ceanothus, and herbs such as rue, sage and artemesia, should be cut back to a basic framework in order to have a shapely bush when it grows again. Cut back up to 2/3 of the growth, cutting to a pair of buds. If wind damage in winter is a common occurrence, cut back 1/3 in early autumn. Finish the job in late winter or early spring. This certainly applies to leggy rose bushes.

Allow a year or two's growth on newly planted bushes - just trim off any weak and straggly stems. Long-established shrubs, on the other hand, sometimes need a severe pruning - take out 1/3 of the oldest stems, down to 6" or ground level.

Some shrubs, such as Fuchsia, Ceratostigma and Perovskia should be cut down to ground level. Timing is important, for sometimes in our area we have warm gardening weather in January, then sharp frost or snow in March which will kill all the new shoots coming up. In this case, cover the plants with horticultural fleece for a week or two, or even wait until late April or early May to do the pruning. Sometimes an apparently-dead shrub or tree will show signs of life as late as July, so don't dig them up too soon.

After pruning, apply a general fertilizer in the surrounding area, and water frequently in dry spells.



Lest We Forget

CONTAINER GARDENING

Here is good advice on this subject, found in the Peace Arch Rhodo Society newsletter of May 1996, written by David J. Williams of Eugene, Ore. We are often tempted by the sight of the varied and attractive plant containers we see around us, and wonder if a favorite little rhodo would be happy in one. Mr. Williams first thought he could plant any and all rhodos in containers, but he learned lessons he has kindly passed on to us.



"The first important fact of life for your container plants is - WATER!" Even in winter there are times that plants in containers need water. In summer, it is mandatory to water daily - sometimes twice a day. The hotter the temperature, the more water the plants need.

"I try to use redwood containers because they are lightweight, water resistant, and reasonably attractive. As the plant grows, I usually change containers to a larger size". Because of the cost of these containers, after use they are washed and stored for future use.

He has used most of the available commercial soil mixtures - the most important factor is good drainage. Be sure drainage holes are large - cover with nylon screening to keep out slugs, then with rocks or broken pots to prevent the holes being clogged with soil. Add sand or perlite to the mix if you think it is a bit heavy.

Set the containers on strips of wood to keep the base from being constantly wet. Also, even a cedar deck will rot if it has wet pots on it continuously.

Set the plant into the container of soil, keeping the soil surface about 2" below the top so that water will stay inside. "And remember to water liberally. I don't worry about leaching out the useful minerals, I do worry about hydration. More of my plants have died of thirst than have ever suffered chlorosis".

Fertilizer - a good rhodo fertilizer with added trace elements, 4 times a year, on a schedule based on season and weather rather than the calendar.

What kind of success has he had? "Well, I'll tell you, sometimes it's the pits! But I've a few plants in containers that I'm willing to discuss. A cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libano*) in the same container for 18 years, a *R. yakushimanum* for 25 years, and a *R. Impi* in the same 18" container for 15 years.

So if you have a patio or balcony, try highlighting the area with container-grown rhodos. You can choose from a variety of colour, leaf sizes, fall foliage, or whatever you want. Just be leery of sub-freezing winters. I've no experience with that type of weather so I cannot help you there. But I do know you can have a good time planting a new form in a container, and you will certainly enjoy the bloom within reach of your family and friends".

Ed. Note: Yes, the long (or short) subfreezing winters can be a concern, and my advice would be to listen carefully to weather forecasts after 20 Dec. If a cold front is forecast, immediately put containers into a cold greenhouse, shed, garage, or any other protected place where frost and snow can be kept out. The plants don't need heat. The house is a 'no-no' unless you have a cold crawl-space under it. And don't do as I did - bring them out on a warm day in February, for we are almost sure to get ice and snow in early March.

RECIPE REQUESTS:

GRANDMA JOHNSON'S SCONES

"A basic scone recipe that really does the trick. Tried and tested through 3 generations of kids. Simply the best anywhere!" yield: 12 scones.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup white sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup butter
- 1 egg
- 1 cup raisins, cranberries or other fruit (optional)



DIRECTIONS:

- In a small bowl, blend the sour cream and baking soda, and set aside.
- Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Lightly grease a large baking sheet.
- In a large bowl, mix the flour, sugar, baking powder, cream of tartar, and salt. Cut in the butter. Stir the sour cream mixture and egg into the flour mixture until just moistened. Mix in the raisins.
- Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface, and knead briefly. Roll or pat dough into a 3/4 inch thick round. Cut into 12 wedges, and place them 2 inches apart on the prepared baking sheet.
- Bake 12 to 15 minutes in the preheated oven, until golden brown on the bottom.

GRANDMA'S BERRY MUFFINS

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| 2 1/2 C Flour | 1 C Sugar |
| 2 1/2 tsp Baking Powder | 1/2 tsp salt |

Mix together in large bowl, then add:

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 2 eggs | 1/2 C melted margarine |
| 1 C Sour Milk (add 1 tsp lemon juice to regular milk) | |
- Gently mix then add 2 C any berry (Blueberry, Blackberry or Raspberry etc)

Bake 20 minutes at 400F. Makes 12 regular size muffins. I find that 1 1/2 Cups is more than enough if berries are large!!

NOTE OF INTEREST:

For those who haven't had a chance to read through the latest issue of the ARS Journal (Vol 60 No. 4 Fall 2006) be sure to read the interesting articles by NIRS associate member Bill Dale "Rhododendron Heaven" and member Harry Wright's "Let's Talk About Hybridizing: The Courtenay Five" on pages 238 and 239 respectively.

