



The RHODOTELLER



COMING EVENTS

02 January 2007 – Executive Meeting

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

09 January 2007 — Regular Monthly Meeting

Remember the trip: A digital picture show presentation of our members' trip to Whidbey Island this past April.

RESIDENTS VIEW

(by Harry Wright)

Wow, I have only just become used to writing 2006 and here is 2007 around the corner and gaining speed! Gwen and I both hope that this year brings health and happiness to all.

As far as our gardens go, they've had a tough couple of months with the cold, snow, wind and rain, and again with the cold, snow, wind and rain. An endless barrage of winter storms even before the official first day of winter. Hopefully your pruning tools have been put away for the winter well oiled, cleaned and in good working order as they'll soon be needed to put in some overtime on maintenance and repair work in the early Spring.

Our 'Haida Gold Gardens' rhodos that used to be upright are now much closer to the ground. I also see a few broken limbs from all the snow we've had this past month. Seeing as I don't believe in tying and staking, there will be a lot of chipping going on this spring for fresh mulch. Recycle, that's the way to maintain a happy and healthy garden.

A lot of our border line hardy plants that were budded up so nice with green buds now have brown ones, so they will be coming off early, makes dead-heading simpler this year.

The one bonus this time of year is that the days are finally getting longer; signaling warmer weather shouldn't be too far away.

Try to avoid getting cabin fever these next couple of months of winter while we wait for our gardens to come to life again. Remember to look around at the beauty of winter. The local mountains are glistening with their snow caps once again this winter with another abundance of the fluffy stuff. The gardens may be asleep but various trees and shrubs still provide a frozen winter wonderland in the early mornings and a daytime treat with their majestic and leafless bodies and brightly colored stems and branches. Slow down and enjoy the scenery as you walk thru life.

See you at the meeting.... Harry

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

2006/2007 Executive:

President

Harry Wright 338-8345

Vice-President

Dave Crucq 339-7845

Secretary

Diana Scott 338-0208

Treasurer

Don Law 339-2735

Director: Ways & Means

Dave Godfrey ... 335-0717

Director: Membership

Brian Staton 337-5228

Director: Publicity

Chris Aldred 335-3231

Director: Newsletter/Library

Noni Godfrey ... 335-0717
.....Nonigod@shaw.ca

Social Committee:

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.



MEMBER NOTES

(by Dave Godfrey)



Our annual December Christmas party was a wonderful opportunity to enjoy the company of good friends and great tasting food.

Although a smaller turnout than previous years, those members who did attend enjoyed the many games that Evelyn and Bernice organized, as well as a Christmas Carol sing-along accompanied by pianist Brian Staton.

The traditional gift exchange brought lots of laughter from those seeking a special gift and those trying to avoid a certain one. In the end, Maggie Shaughnessy unwrapped "Miss Piggy" much to the disappointment of Diana Scott, who really wanted her. Maggie finally took pity on Diana's despair and offered her up for safe keeping.

Delightful assortments of dishes were then consumed for dinner, followed by delectable desserts. Our social committee is to be commended for providing an entertaining and fun filled evening enjoyed by all. Kudos to Evelyn and Bernice!



All members who contributed to our Christmas Hamper project are thanked for all the great items donated. In addition to the non-perishable food items donated, there were gifts for all members of the family and the club provided a \$50 gift certificate for the purchase of a turkey and all the fixings.



Special thanks to Christine Aldred for organizing the drive, and for delivering the goods to the Salvation Army depot for delivery to the family.

Members are reminded that at our January 9th meeting we will be collecting non-perishable foods to assist the local food bank in restocking their shelves after the holiday season. We hope that all those members attending the meeting can bring an item or two to share with those less fortunate.

GARDEN CHATTER MATTER AND NOTES

(by Mary Palmer)

All our "wild" Snowberries have white berries, but there are some new ones on the market. I saw one at a nursery with large pink berries. And a new one is Symphoricarpos x doorenbosii 'Kordes', which has deep purple-pink fruit.

Snowberries have many virtues. In a protected spot the berries stay on the bushes for months. Deer never seem to take an interest, but hummingbirds are often seen around the tiny pink flowers. The roots of the plants will slowly spread and new plants will soon pop up to make a solid hedge if you need one - otherwise you have to work to keep them out of the flower beds. Of course the new varieties might not be quite so vigorous.

Here is a recipe for "aging" terracotta or hypertufa pots: a pinch of tomato fertilizer in 2 1/2 cups buttermilk. Add rainwater and chopped up moss if you wish. Leave the pots in a corner protected from rain and wind, and they will rapidly assume a mossy finish.

Hellebores can be divided in spring - old roots are very tough so a handsaw is needed. This is totally different to some other advice, so try it first with a plant that is no too valuable. I have used an axe to chop apart a big old plant, with no problem. I ended up with 3 nice healthy plants.

Look for a new Daphne x burkwoodii 'Briggs Moonlight', hardy Zones 5-9. This plant has really luminous leaves, and tiny highly scented pink flowers. Prune after flowering. This daphne grows slowly to 3 ft.

Here's a new Geranium - 'Midnight Reiter', a semi-dwarf with dark purple leaves. The large flowers are lavender-pink. Cut the plant back after flowering, and you will have a second flush of leaves and flowers in fall.



FINE GARDENING AND AMATEUR GARDENING

Smyrniurn perfoliatum is an amazing plant - a biennial or hopefully a self-seeding annual or perennial. Shining golden bracts in May. You can get seeds from Chiltern Seeds. Mary Palmer has a catalogue which can be borrowed. This plant has green leaves the first year, dies down in summer, then next year the leaves reappear and a stout stem pushes up. Green bracts soon change to brilliant golden yellow. The plant grows to 18-30 inches.

I saw these plants, a brilliant golden mat around a tree, in a garden in Scotland, and ordered seeds. I must have ordered the wrong variety, for my plants were always dark green with flowers resembling those on a carrot, and definitely perennial. They were about 4 ft. in height and handsome, but not what I expected! They disappeared after about 4 years.

There are so many "new" plants on the market. One of the nurseries had some *xChitalpa tashkentensis* trees, but because I couldn't find anything about them, I didn't buy one. Now here is a description of the beautiful flower. This tree is a cross between a *Catalpa* and a *Chilopsis*, is hardy Zones 6-10, and grows to about 20 ft., ideal for a small garden. The flowers are rather like large pink rhodos and bloom in July.

This issue has an interesting article on plant-hunters; how they find and bring back many "new" plants (in seed form). There is also a description of mushroom compost and how it benefits the garden. It can be used as a slow-release fertilizer or as a mulch. NPK ratio is 2-1-1 and pH is 6.8. This pH makes it unsuitable for rhodos, but many other plants can benefit, Farmers rarely use pesticides on mushroom crops, and steam-pasteurizing kills weeds and insect pests.

A recent issue had several interesting gardening advice and tips. If your magnolia had strange lumpy looking fruit on it, this is what to do: soak the fleshy fruits in warm water with a bit of detergent in it, for a couple of days, clean off the fleshy part, and sow the seeds in pots in a seed compost and over winter them in a cold frame or protected corner of the garden. If any have germinated by the following June or July, prick them out into small pots; if not, pop them back for another winter. Or you can save the seeds in the refrigerator in a bag of moist peat. Sow in March with bottom heat and you should see shoots in about 6 weeks.

Talk about longevity! There is a gardener in Dorset who, at age 103, still tends a garden at a nearby pub. He said he has never taken a holiday in his life; he intends to garden until he is too old for it, and when he gets tired, a drop of whiskey puts him right in a 1/2 hour. How about that!

On the same subject, at Kew Gardens' Seed Bank, 40 packets of seeds which were sent from South Africa in 1803 were found and germinated. They now have some unidentified legumes, a protea and an acacia (another legume) growing vigorously. Amazing, eh?

A more disgusting subject. I hope you always wear gloves in the garden, and scrub your hands and especially fingernails when you go back in the house. Why? "Pet poop", according to *Amateur Gardening*, "sometimes contains a parasitic worm which lives in the intestines of dogs and cats. Eggs are passed in pets' stools and can lurk in garden soil for up to 2 years. These eggs can get under your fingernails and if you eat without washing your hands, they can be transferred to your mouth. Swallowed eggs may hatch and migrate to the eye, damaging sight, or even to the brain. Children can be infected through this route".

BOOK REVIEW

(by Mary Palmer)

Colour Encyclopedia of Ornamental Grasses
Rich Darke. Timber Press 1999



This book is in our club library, and well worth taking home to absorb the useful information and wonderful colour pictures of about 500 different grasses, sedges, rushes, cat-tails, restios (probably not hardy in our area) and some bamboos.

I reviewed this book about 3 years ago, and since then have added many more grasses to my own garden. As our summers become hotter and longer and water becomes more precious, it is important to add drought-resistant plants to our gardens, and many grasses fill the bill.

Mr. Darke has spent the past 25 years traveling around the world, observing and photographing grasses, and now has a photo collection of about 15,000. Some of the photos in this book, showing how grasses can highlight or be a garden feature, are enough to encourage us to get digging and planting.

About 500 different plants are illustrated, with descriptions of soil and climate needed and useful zone numbers. Here is the description of one grass that I love - and hate.

"*Sasa veitchii* native to moist woodlands in Japan. Uniquely beautiful in late autumn and winter, when the leaf margins dry and become lightly cream-coloured, contrasting boldly with the dark green centers and creating an effect that rivals the best variegated plants". Why do I hate it?

He doesn't mention that unless it is restrained by sheets of galvanized iron, it will rapidly take over any amount of garden. Let me know if you need a piece!



WINTER BLOOMING RHODODENDRONS

There are not many rhodos that bloom between November and February, and those that do can be bashed down at times by heavy rain or snow. My poor *R. cilipense* invariably gets covered by one of our March snowfalls. I finally gave up on several others that insisted in blooming in January. *R. praestans* evidently blooms - for somebody - for Christmas. As for *R. Christmas Cheer* - she is another March bloomer. *R. Rosamundi* also blooms in March, and one or the other always gets zapped by snow. Meantime we can be content with our "Christmas Roses", that is, *Helleborus niger*, which may bloom at Christmas for somebody, not me. This plant can bloom any time between July and February. But it is lovely when it does bloom. Just put a couple of sheets of glass around it to spare the flowers from heavy rain.

Happy New Year!



SNOW LADEN SHRUBS

In response to a question about whether or not it is necessary to remove heavy wet snow from shrubs, the following information was offered in an old issue of a garden magazine:

Heavy, wet snow usually falls when the weather is fairly warm, often in early winter while many deciduous shrubs and trees still have their leaves. Although this type of snow usually melts quickly, some plants are especially susceptible to damage. It's a good idea to gently brush snow off these if it starts to accumulate or the branches droop from its weight. However, don't remove snow from garden beds, as it provides insulation and prevents heaving. This occurs when sun-thawed ground refreezes, causing the soil to expand and literally heave up plants, dislodging them.

To remove snow from shrubs and trees, use your hands or a broom to gently brush the excess off branches and twigs. You can also lightly shake some small trees. Keep in mind that woody stems tend to become more brittle in cold temperatures, so use care to avoid snapping them. It might be best to leave bent branches or trees to recover on their own as the temperature warms.

Snow from high branches can be removed by standing near the branch and, using a long-handled broom, tap it from beneath. Occasionally, melting snow will form a layer of ice on branches, twigs and leaves, so be careful when it begins to fall. It is important to be extra careful when removing snow from iced plants, as they are prone to snapping.

To help protect tall hedges or shrubs, it is a good idea to bind them with heavy twine in the fall to help protect them from becoming misshapen by the weight of heavy snow. It is also a good idea to reshape hedges or shrubs the next time you prune so the plants are wider at the base than at the top.

Keep in mind also, that a blanket of snow also helps protect any bud sets from subsequent freezing temperatures. Therefore, it is sometimes beneficial to leave light snow on some plants, such as rhododendrons and azaleas.



VIBURNUMS

I never become bored with these beautiful plants, and Fine

Gardening Sept-Oct 2000 offered an interesting article about the bushes. In general viburnums have lovely flowers that are often perfumed, and bright berries which are loved by the birds. The leaves of many varieties are also loved by the deer, but once the plant gets to be 10-12 ft. in height they no longer bother with them. There are 150 species, many native to North America, Zones 2-9.

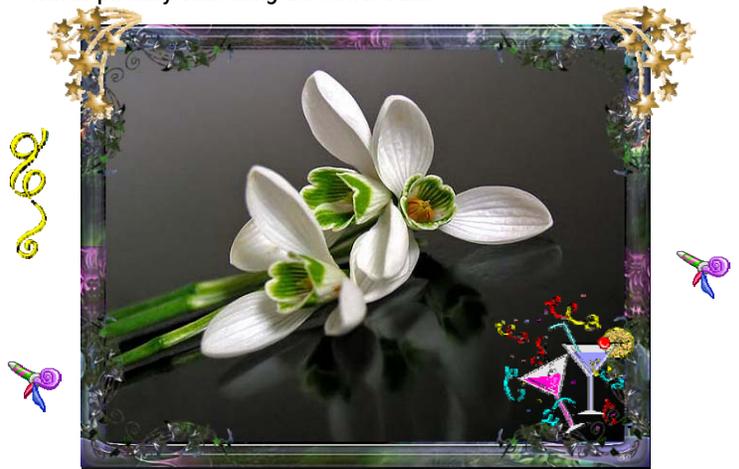


SNOWDROPS

Gardenwise magazine had a lovely article on Snowdrops and Snowflakes in the Early Spring issue, 2003.

Long before the large crocus, daffodils and tulips show their colours, the tiny snowdrops ring in the new season. Depending on the kind of winter we have in this area, snowdrops can poke little spikes out of the ground as early as Christmas, and even show themselves through a few inches of soft snow.

There are hundreds of varieties of these plants, (*Galanthus*, members of the *Amaryllis* family), and they are deer resistant. There are 3 types of snowdrops, based on leaf types. *Nivales*, with thin, grey-green leaves with a flower stalk in the centre, *Plicati*, with V-shaped grey-green leaves, and *Latifolii*, which have grey-green or grey-blue leaves partially embracing the flower stalk.



The most popular snowdrop is *Galanthus nivalis*, but there are many others, including a double. It is better to acquire snowdrops "in the green", in other words, just after flowering, while leaves are still healthy. Bulbs bought in stores might be dried out, so it is best to beg or borrow from a friend. Over time, a few bulbs will become a large patch which needs to be split up, so you will be doing your friend a favor.

Related to the snowdrops are Spring Snowflake (*Leucojum vernum*), Summer Snowflake, (*L. aestivum*) and Fall Snowflake (*L. autumnale*). Differences include time of flowering (April to November), height of flower stems (1 ft. or more), and shape of the flowers. Deer, mice and squirrels do not bother with these plants.

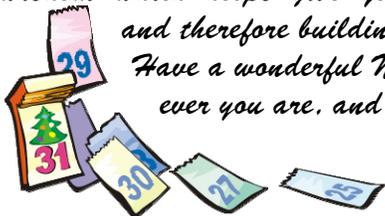
INVASIVE PLANTS

One person's treasure is a curse in another area. Purple Loosetrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) is spreading aggressively in many parts of the country - and yet, you can still buy seeds for the garden in Britain. Broom is everywhere here, and also in the Northeast states of the U.S. *Euonymus alatus*, whose leaves turn a brilliant red in fall, is a problem in many parts of New England, but is very well-behaved here. *Berberis thunbergii*, an attractive barberry with yellow flowers and red fruit, is a menace in parts of the Northeast U.S., because it spread prolifically by seed. Not here though.

EDITORS NOTE

I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone all the very best for whatever ventures you may take, whatever opportunities may come your way and whatever obstacles you may have to face. May this year bring you courage, strength and wisdom which helps give you hope, perseverance and therefore building character.

Have a wonderful New Years' Eve, where ever you are, and I'll see you in 2007



- H** - ours of happy times with friends and family
- A** - bundant time for relaxation
- P** - rosperity throughout the year
- P** - lenty of love when you need it the most
- Y** - outhful excitement at life's simple pleasures

- N** - ights of restful slumber (don't worry be happy)
- E** - verything you need
- W** - ishing you love and light

- Y** - ears and years of good health
- E** - njoyment and happiness
- A** - angels to watch over you
- R** - embrances of happy years!



I would also like to take this opportunity to introduce a very special person and one of the newest members of our club. This lady has been very instrumental in the upkeep and maintenance of our Comox Valley Rhododendron Garden. With her help we have been able to coordinate several meaningful work bees with club members and city crew. The most recent addition of the "Born On Vancouver Island" rhododendron bed, was admirably completed by many able-bodied members, however it would not have been such a smooth job without Nadine's competent assistance and help.

Biography of Nadine Boudreau

My love for gardening began with helping my Dad in the garden. The passion grew as I became a home owner and stay at home Mom. When my daughter started school I returned to work in the clerical field. I was hired by the Township of Esquimalt in the parks department. In 1987 a

job posting came open. After interviews and an exam, I was the successful candidate; the first women in the Parks Dept. It was quite a shock to all, as I had always been known to wear high heels to work. Off they came and on went the work boots.

I was now in the Gardener 1 position for the Kinsmen Gorge Park, in Victoria. I was taking every course I could and learning from great gardeners, such as George Radford at work. I also learned from gardeners at the Horticultural Society and its subsidiary clubs. A year past and the Head Gardener position at Kinsman Park was posted. Again I was lucky and was promoted to this Gardener 3 position. It was a 26 acre park with much diversity.

The best came another year later, when the Saxe park head gardener position came open. It was also a Gardener 3 position, but it was a park that had so much beauty and potential. I won the position and was given the chance to work there for 11 years. A dream job for a gardener The Park consisted of 16 acres on the ocean; with native forested areas, herbaceous borders, lawn areas and seaside plantings.

We decided to move to the Comox Valley as my husband was commercial fishing here. My first year was spent fixing up my little house. I worked the two following summers for the Town of Comox in the Parks Department as a seasonal employee, watering and doing garbage duties etc. When the Courtenay Gardener position was posted, I was lucky to be chosen. I started in May 2004 as the head gardener. I'm now responsible for all the annual plantings, shrub beds, trees, and overseeing the contract areas.



I have my certificate of Horticulture from the University of Guelph 1991. A certificate of Parks Maintenance & Landscaping from Camosun College in 1988. My various other studies from Camosun include: landscape design, plant propagation, botany native plants and water gardening.



MEMBERS TIDBITS

(by Diana Scott)

With all this snow that has been wrecking havoc in my garden, I was interested in finding out why snow is sometimes called the 'poor man's fertilizer'. Apparently snow contains nutrients as well as moisture. When it falls on ground that is not frozen, the nutrients in that snow can penetrate and actually do some good for plants that will grow in the soil later that year. The content of nitrogen, sulphur and various other nutrients has increased over the last several decades because of acid rain and the nitrogen in particular is good for the soil. I was encouraged to find that there are benefits to this 'wealth' of snow we've been shoveling!

A neighbor recently gave me a stack of old gardening magazines and I'm having a great time reading my way through them. I was interested in this excerpt by Helen Lang from a 1992 copy of Gardens West: "If you know a weaver you are in luck. A suggestion for foiling slugs is to spread raw sheep's wool around your planting area. The rain won't damage it and for some reason slugs won't cross this barrier." If anyone tries this, I'd love to know how well it works! Folks seemed to enjoy the Vegetable Pizza I brought to the Christmas party. As usual, I didn't actually follow the recipe, but here it is! I used less cream cheese and didn't use tomatoes. I also only made 1 package of crescent rolls and did approx half the recipe. It makes almost a cookie sheet full which is usually lots! I used Knorr Vegetable soup mix because I had it!

RECIPE REQUESTS

VEGETABLE PIZZA

(½ recipe will make almost a ¾ cookie sheet)

2 (8 ounce) packages refrigerated crescent rolls

2 (8 ounce) packages cream cheese, softened

1 cup mayonnaise

1 (1 ounce) package dry Ranch-style dressing mix or several TB of Knorr Vegetable Soup mix

¾ C fresh broccoli, chopped

¾ C chopped tomatoes

¾ C chopped green bell pepper

¾ C chopped cauliflower

¾ C shredded carrots

¾ C shredded Cheddar cheese



DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).

2. Roll out the crescent roll dough onto a 9x13 inch baking sheet, and pinch together edges to form the pizza crust.

3. Bake crust for 10-12 minutes in the preheated oven.

Once finished cooking, remove crust from oven and let cool 15 minutes without removing it from the baking sheet.

4. In a small mixing bowl, combine cream cheese, mayonnaise, and dry Ranch dressing. Spread the mixture over the cooled crust. Arrange broccoli, tomato, green bell pepper, cauliflower, shredded carrots, and Cheddar cheese over the cream cheese layer. Chill for one hour, slice and serve.

HOW TO CARE FOR CHRISTMAS GIFT PLANTS

As far as I am concerned, several are "no-nos". I love cyclamen, and have dozens in the garden. But *Cyclamen persica*, the houseplant variety, with large flowers, does not survive for me. I follow directions carefully, but when the flowers and leaves die down, and I put the corm away in a cool place for a few months, it invariably dies.

Another is Poinsetta. They look lovely in the house for many months, and even survive in the garden for the summer. But as for keeping the plant and producing bracts again the next winter - forget it. They go onto the compost pile in this garden.

It is not possible to keep the bulbs of *Narcissus* such as 'Paperwhite' or 'Grand Soleil d'Or' after they finish flowering during the winter. They just rot. But any others that you have forced can be left in a cool place, watered a little, until the leaves die down. Plant them in the garden, and though they may take a year's rest from flowering, they will survive.

Amaryllis make a spectacular showing with their huge bells on strong stems. Variety and colours increase every year and with a little care the plants will last for years. After flowering, keep them in a cool room with lots of light. They can go into a shady spot in the garden for the summer. Leaves can be cut off when they get long and raggedy, give

the bulb a rest for a few months, then start to water it when new leaves (and hopefully a flower stem) start to grow again. No guarantee it will bloom for Christmas every year, but it will bloom in time.

Orchids, the latest "craze" in flowering houseplants. Most of the time one can find a variety of these exotic plants in nurseries, Home Depot, flower shops, grocery stores - everywhere. The easiest to grow (for me anyway) variety is *Phalaenopsis*, also the easiest to find. Just remember to sit the saucer under it in another dish of water or pebbles in water. They do not need much other care - no sunlight, but a bright window or fluorescent light, a drink of water once a week, and a bit of very weak fertilizer a couple of times a month. The flowers last and last - I had one plant that bloomed, one stem of flowers after another, for a year and a half. That's value for money!

Begonias. There are so many kinds - those that can be planted in the garden border for the summer, tuberous types that need to be started in warmth, and planted out in pots for summer, and many kinds that live in the house. Rex begonias have interesting leaves - large or small, plain or frilly, many shades of green, grey, red - the flowers are small, but often in huge hanging sprays. There are others with masses of red, pink or yellow flowers, plain green leaves that last for months in the house. I have had no luck with cutting them back and getting a second blooming from them. I am sure there are other members of the club who have had other