



The RHODOTELLER

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NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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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.

Coming Events



6 March 2007 – Executive Meeting

The meeting will be held at the home of Diana and John Scott, 6432 Eagles Dr. Courtenay. Drive down Coleman Rd., turn left onto Left Rd., and Eagles is close to the end. Left on Eagles, their house is on the right hand side and has a push button gate. Meeting begins at 7:30 p.m.

13 March 2007 — Regular Monthly Meeting

Program: This month, Paul Wurz will show the Frank Fujioka Hybridizing Video. Frank is a well-known American Hybridizer, who has a wonderful property, and working garden on Whidbey Island. After the half hour program, Paul will provide information on growing Frank's plants in this region, discuss parentage, and field questions arising from the presentation.

(by Harry Wright)



Many years ago on my first trip to the west coast, I realized that it wasn't necessary for the landscape to stand naked for six months of the year. There were actually shrubs that retained their leaves, year around. They were called Rhododendrons.

When the move was made to BC and my work place was in the landscape trade, I found that in order for the landscape to retain some senses of balance year around it must include evergreen as well as deciduous plant material.

Rhodo's are one of the better evergreens to use, as there are so many forms and colours to choose from. By form, I mean height and width. Some will remain lower than 18 inches or less, and others will reach heights over your head in a few short years. There are many rhodos that are happy to stop growing around four feet high and wide. So it pays to do your home work when a plant is purchased; research it and plant it in the right location, which will mean that you will not have to re-locate it, or continually prune to keep it under control.

As my interest in rhododendrons grew, I realized it was the foliage that was my main attraction. Some have leaves less than 1/2" and others will be over a foot; there are various shades of green and even some with variegation. I then found out that some rhodo's were divided into scaly (lepidote) species and non-scaly (elepidote) species. Since

lepidote rhodos do not cross readily with lepidote, it is important for the amateur to know which is which.

A person who is not familiar with scales, but wishes to know more might say, "where do I look, and what do they look like"? The answer is that scales can be found on many parts of the rhodo, but the most convenient place to look is the under side of the leaf. The shape of the scale some what resembles a mushroom, in that it has a stalk attached to a round central part. This in turn is surrounded by a thin rim, or flange, which varies from very narrow to a breadth of about half the diameter of the central portion.



Underside of Leaf

There is considerable variation in the appearance of scales and it is this variation which can assist in plant identification. Within each species the colour, size, distribution and general appearance of the scales tend to remain the same. The size of some of these scales is very tiny, so magnification is required. 30x illuminated microscopes are available, at a very reasonable price and small in size, well worth having for plant identification.

One must wonder just what the purposes of scales are, other than to aid in identification. Well they are intimately concerned with the water balance of the plant. Regulating the process of transpiration, they can release moisture when there is an excess and retain it when in short supply.

Most of the lepidote species come from the eastern Himalayas, where the year is divided into three seasons - rainy, cold and hot. The moisture they take up by their roots must leave the plant by evaporation through the stomata (pores on the underside of the leaf.) With rhodo's, however, living in such a high relative humidity, the evaporation from the leaf surface is minimal, and it is then that the scales can act as water secreting organs to supplement transpiration. During the drier season the plant cannot afford to loose much moisture. It is during this period that secretions of gum and resin dry and seal over the scale preventing further loss of water. Also densely packed scales will maintain a layer of air over the transpiring surface of the leaf, reducing transpiration. It is also believed that in certain condition they may absorb moisture and pass it into the leaf.

See you at the meeting. Harry

HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY!



(by Dave Godfrey)

Our regular meeting on Tuesday, February 13th, was well attended with 38 members and guests. We wish to welcome Denis Benard and Helen Asselin, new members who joined that evening. Guests and new members are always welcome.



Member Notes

Following the business portion of the meeting, Noni Godfrey gave a short educational on her methods of seed propagation (as the grandkids call it "Grandma's Grow-op".) This was followed by President Harry's slides on rhododendron identification.

Guest speaker Nadine Boudreau, Horticulturalist for the City of Courtenay, presented a colourful presentation on the gardens of Courtenay and the "Mile of Flowers" program. Slides provided some 'before and after' views of the many changes that have occurred since Nadine began to organize the gardens 3 years ago.

The "Mile of Flowers" planting this year will be held on Tuesday, May 29th for all those who wish to help with this community project. Nadine and her "army" are to be commended for the wonderful job they do each year. It is a great asset to not only have Nadine with the City of Courtenay, but also as a new member of our chapter.

Following the meeting, draws were made for the door prize and the raffle. The door prize of rhododendron "Anna Rose Whitney" was won by guests Eric and Lindsay Caldwell-Waluk. The raffle prize rhododendron "Courtenay King" donated by Dorothy Law was won by new member Denis Benard. Congratulations to all.

Just south of Seattle, Washington is the Rhododendron Species Foundation and Botanical Garden, a non-profit organization and home to one of the largest rhododendron collections in the world. Over 10,000 rhododendrons grow in a beautiful 22 acre woodland of tall native conifers. Members travelling to the Seattle area are reminded that, with presentation of your NIRS membership card, you will receive free admission.

Our executive committee has arranged a garden bus tour to the Victoria area April 18th and 19th with an overnight stay at the Days Inn on the Gorge. If sufficient numbers are interested, a large 24 passenger bus will be available with the total costs split between those going. If you haven't already done so, please notify Noni Godfrey of your intentions to attend for your reservation on the bus and information on the group rate. More details on the gardens will be available in next month's newsletter.

Daylight Savings Time....

This year, on March 11, 2007, we will roll ahead the clocks almost a month earlier than normal. Dawn will change from approximately 6:30 AM back to 7:30 in this part of the country. However, the hour lost in the morning will be gained in the evening, and we can stay in the gardens later. So don't forget to switch your clocks ahead an hour before you go to bed on Saturday, March 10th!



ELECTIONS

It's hard to believe but it is time to start thinking about the coming annual general meeting in May, and the election of officers for some positions. The positions are for two year terms, and they are staggered so that only half of them are changed each year. This year's positions up for election are: Secretary, Treasurer, Ways & Means, and Librarian. All other positions are either continuing into the second year or are on-going. Any member interested in standing for election for a position is asked to notify a member of the present executive.



George Fraser Days

Saturday May 26th will be "George Fraser Day and Heritage Fair" in Ucluelet. This, the 7th annual event, will once again be attended by Lt. Governor Iona Campagnolo. The day will provide an opportunity to take a walking tour of the former garden areas of George Fraser, pioneer rhododendron hybridizer, and to relive his work and times at the Heritage Fair held in the Community Hall. The many rhododendron plants donated by the Vancouver Island chapters give a magnificent display at the entrance to the community.

Lt. Governor Campagnolo attended the event previously in 2004 to help mark the 150th anniversary of George Fraser's birthday. Her honour has decided to attend, in this her last year in office, to once again recognize Mr. Fraser for his many years of world renowned work in growing and hybridizing rhododendrons and other plants. George Fraser died at age 90 and was buried in the Ucluelet cemetery in 1944.

The memory of George Fraser and his grave site were almost erased from Ucluelet until researcher Bill Dale (NIRS associate member) helped form the community's George Fraser Project. Introduced to NIRS members Dave and Noni Godfrey, who lived in Ucluelet at the time, Bill convinced a group of community minded citizens to recognize the contributions of Mr. Fraser and to celebrate his historical importance each year.

It is the hope of the George Fraser Committee that members of the ARS chapters will attend this year's event, as an opportunity to revisit the early works of this great gentleman. The committee would also appreciate any donations of plants or garden related items which may be auctioned or raffled for this annual fundraising event. The George Fraser Project provides a lasting legacy of this pioneer of rhododendron hybridization and the committee is appreciative of any support members can provide.

Happy St. Patrick's Day!

The End of an Era

(by Robert Argall)

For over 80 years there has been a Baldheaded Eagle's nest on Wireless Road above Kye Bay. Situated at the top of a very large Douglas Fir, strong branches formed a perfect base for the nest.

Baldheaded Eagles build the largest nests of any bird on the planet, and the nests can weigh up to one ton. Conversely, hummingbirds build the smallest nest and weigh just ounces. I always liked the fact that I had both types of nests close by to observe. Of the 700 that have been recorded on Vancouver Island, this eagles nest was the largest one and had grown to a height of 12 feet.



It was, until the 1980's, surrounded by firs and quite well hidden. With the development of the land around it and only 100 feet of height protection, it was subject to stronger winds and had much less protection. Yet there it stood year after year with the eagles adding to it each year and raising their young. It was fascinating to see them fly along Wireless Road, and without missing a beat, break a fairly large sized branch off and swoop up to the nest with it.

The eagles often had two young ones and both would reach maturity, unlike so many where the parents are unable to feed both. As they got older, one could see them standing on one of the branches and flapping their wings as they prepared for their first flight. Their first flight was from the Douglas Fir their nest was in, to another Douglas Fir that was further along Wireless Road. This meant that they would pass over my property en-route, squawking and very unsteady. I once saw a young eagle trying to land on a branch, grabbing the branch, but not strongly enough; he ended upside down but still holding on to the branch. Quite a comical site!

I have lived on Wireless Road for almost forty years now, and the eagles and their nest have been a part of my life through the seasons' cycles. The same can be said for others who have moved here as the houses have been built. So it was with great sadness for all of us when we realized that, on Christmas Eve, being hit with yet another storm, the top quarter of the eagle tree and the nest had come crashing down.

Fortunately, the eagles are back, but whether they can find a suitable nesting site is uncertain. The grand old Douglas Firs are almost all gone, and the Balsams are not too reliable. As always, time will tell.

Garden Chatter, Natter and Notes

(by Mary Palmer)

Notes from the Feb. 2007 (No. 113) issue of Fine Gardening. I am so glad I bought this magazine, for it is stuffed full of beautiful pictures and useful information.

Here is another good idea for plant labels - use Popsicle sticks from the craft store - burn plant names onto them using a small wood-burning pen with a fine tip, apply a coat of outdoor polyurethane sealant and the sticks will not only last several years, but will blend in with mulch and plant stems better than stark white.

If you need a small decorative tree to enhance the rhodo garden, look for *Cryptomeria japonica* 'Sekkan-sugi'. It has filigreed foliage, pendulous branches, and sparkling golden new foliage. It needs acidic soil, and sun, but also protection from high winds. Regular watering in spring and a drink a week in summer keeps it happy. In an Oregon garden, it grows just 3" per year, though it might reach 35' eventually.

There is another good article on SOIL by Lee Reich. He talks about various additives that may (or may not) help the garden. For example, wood ashes (3-7% potassium plus other nutrients), don't spread it around plants that like acidic soil such as rhodos or blueberries. Alfalfa meal releases nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium as well as other micronutrients slowly as it decomposes. Soybean or cottonseed meal is a good source of nitrogen for plants that need acidic soil. In fact it can be good for all plants - one feed will last the season, and too much can burn roots as well as take on the aroma of a dead animal!

There are reviews in the magazine of 7 new gardening books. Another article talks about Aspirin (acetyl salicylic acid) for promoting plant growth. One or two aspirin tablets in a gallon of water seems to encourage growth, and can be used to water germinating seeds and new transplants. We have known for a long time that "willow water" made from steeping fresh-cut willow branches in water is useful when making cuttings, but did we know that willows also contain acetyl salicylic acid? However, the amount is unknown so perhaps it would be wiser to use an aspirin tablet. Plain, uncoated ones dissolve fastest.

The best part of this magazine is an article on Japanese maples, and 10 favorites are described in detail. These trees really enhance any garden, but are particularly spectacular as well as making just the right amount of delicate shade, when planted among the rhodos.

There is a useful article on Euphorbias, with photos of some striking ones. This winter's wet snow smashed some of mine down, though they looked beautiful up to that point. They may or may not recover. I have found that the ones that die back into the ground for the winter like *E. polychroma* or *E. griffithii* are safest in my garden, but I keep hoping - and trying!

Many of us have acquired an Amaryllis this winter, and there is another article on how to keep it going so it will live and bloom again. The main problem, in this area of dark wet and gloomy winters is that these darkest days are when the leaves want to grow - and grow. It needs a sunny window (even fluorescent lights don't seem to be enough) and not too much water for the rest of the winter, then out into the garden for late spring and summer, in a sheltered spot; remember to water in dry spells, then bring it into the house when frosts threaten in the fall. They like to be in pots just

a bit bigger around than the bulb.

This article suggests the following time-table: Stop watering in late June, place the pot on its side so it gets no water, and cut the foliage off when it has all withered (August). In October, repot or refresh the soil, and give a little water. Watch for the flower stalk (or leaves if it is not going to bloom until later) and by late October, increase watering and place the pot in a window with southern exposure. Hopefully, by December you will have flowers again.



BOOK REVIEW

(by Mary Palmer)

Firefly Encyclopedia of Trees
edited by Steve Cafferty
Firefly Books 2005



This is a large, encyclopedic book, with a great deal of scientific information in it. It would be wise to read the first two chapters first - How the Book is Organized and How the Classification Works, for there is a great deal of reading matter to comprehend, and if there would have been a picture of every tree, the book would have to be twice as big. I did like the little "world maps" showing where each tree family came from in the first place. This is a big help these days when we can acquire plants from all over the earth - but will they live happily here? Maybe not. Look at the maps to be sure.

There are so many details - for instance, in the Index of Common Names, page numbers in *Italic* refer to artwork, and page numbers in **bold type** refer to photos. And if you want to know how many kinds of Gum (*Eucalyptus*) trees there are, they are all listed in that Index (34), not counting the Gum Arabic Tree, of course.

The drawings of various kinds of leaves are so detailed - a great help in identification I am sure. You can learn all about the various kinds of forests, for instance, seasonally dry tropical, temperate deciduous forests, temperate rain forests, boreal forests - this is the kind of book that one needs to keep on a shelf close by your favorite chair - for ever!

I borrowed the book from our North Island Rhodo Society library - but would have to keep for 6 months, not just 1, in order to find out everything about my favorite trees.

Coming May Events

The City of Courtenay has officially declared May as Rhododendron Month. So mark your calendars for the official opening of the newly created 'BOVI' (Born on Vancouver Island) bed at the Comox Valley Rhododendron Garden to be held on Friday May 4th. The NIRS executive is finalizing plans for the event and details will be coming in our next newsletter.

Also, in May we will again be holding our biggest fund raiser for the year, our annual Rhododendron Sale and Show. This year, as in previous years, it will be held at the Indian Band Hall on Comox (Dyke) Road, on Sunday May 6th. Set up begins at 9 AM



with doors open from 10 AM until 2 PM. Many member volunteers are needed for a variety of positions, so if you can lend a hand please contact Diana Scott at 338-0208. Please think of our companion plants table when potting up some of your extras, and save any cardboard flats you might come across and bring them along.

Then on the following Sunday, May 13th, it is our annual Mother's Day Garden Tour event. This year we are hoping to find gardens in the Union Bay/Royston area willing to show for our tour. The gardens will be open to the public from 10 AM until 4PM, and require 2 volunteer members as gate sitters for each garden. There are two 3-hour shifts (10 – 1 and 1 – 4) at the six or seven gardens. Therefore, members are asked once again to contact Diana if you are available to help with this fund raising event.



The Birds and The Bees

Norm Todd wrote this article for the Victoria Rhodo Newsletter Feb. 2006 and I have copied it from the Whidbey Island newsletter...

"At the American Rhodo Society convention held in Victoria this last spring, two of the world's great rhodo gurus participated in a short but significant ritual. Peter Cox, plant explorer, author, and hybridizer had travelled from the UK to present the RHS Loder Rhododendron Cup to Warren Berg, of Washington State, plant explorer and hybridizer.

Both men have made outstanding contributions to the knowledge of the Asian plants in Western gardens. For many gardeners it is the creation of new hybrid rhodos that ensures their lasting renown. For a hybrid to be a success it must be significantly better or markedly different from its parents. There are now in excess of 30,000 registered rhodo hybrids. It is probably safe to say that a mere 10% of that number meets these two criteria.

Both Cox and Berg have demonstrated a ruthless scrutiny in the protracted assessment of the new progeny of their hybridizing efforts. A hybrid from Cox or Berg is almost always worth growing. Cox is the creator of a series of hybrids of small stature to which he gave the names of birds. Berg's most well known hybrids contain a 'Bee' in their bonnet. There are more Birds than there are Bees. Several of these plants have been around for about 25 years but it is not easy to find commercial sources for some of them. They are more easily available in British nurseries than they are in British Columbia and consequently are seen in more gardens over there. I recall admiring several of the Birds in a plot that was probably not more than 100 square feet behind the iron railing of a Georgian terrace house on a busy street in the centre of Glasgow. It was a tasteful tribute to Peter Cox's efforts.

Here are the names of the Birds known to me. *Chiffchaff, Chikor, Curlew, Egret, Eider, Grouse, Merganser, Phalarope, Pipit* (a natural hybrid), *Razorbill, Snipe, Wigeon, and Wren*. These are all Lepidote rhodos, i.e., the undersides of the leaves and often other parts of the plants have scales. Whether a rhodo has scales or not is an important factor in determining its botanical classification.

Berg's Bees are comprised of both Lepidote and Elepidote rhodos. Here are the names of the Bees that I know. *Ginny Gee, Golden Bee, Honey Bee, Jan Bee, King Bee, Patty Bee, Too Bee, Wanna Bee, and Wee Bee*. I grow a plant called *Queen Bee*, however, I suspect someone preferred the title Queen to King



(maybe an ardent feminist) because the Queen and the King are to my eye identical. Furthermore, the name *Queen Bee* was officially given to a plant that was registered by another hybridizer in 1962 and I am sure that Warren Berg would not endorse a name, even in a casual way, which was already taken.

A small area would accommodate all of the above for a period of say 20 years. If my memory is correct there is a bank in the Cox garden/nursery at Glendoick, Scotland, with some, or maybe all of the original Birds and some of these plants are now taller than a human. I have a plant of *Egret* that is over 30 years old and is almost shoulder height. Albert de Mezey, of local horticultural fame, and recently deceased at the age of 102, once advised me "to grow rhodos one needs a physical age of 30 and longevity of 300". This is true, but one also needs a garden that is ever expanding as the darn things can become quite big during that period of time.

It is always satisfying to give one's prejudiced opinions an airing, so I offer some comments on the worthiness of some of these plants. In this age of governance by opinion poll one cannot ignore the preference of the buying public. The winner is without doubt *Patty Bee*. She is a cross between *keiskei Yaku Fairy* and *fletcherianum*. It passes the test of being better than either parent in several characteristics - although I would not like to be without either. *Patty Bee* is more floriferous and reliably so from an early age, it is easier to please, the yellow flowers are of deeper intensity and of greater substance. Given a well drained but never dry, fairly open location, it will flourish and not outgrow a 75cm space for many years. The runner-up in the sales department is *Ginny Gee*. I can hear the protests already; "This is not a Bee". Warren Berg introduced both hybrids about the same time (1970s). I suspect he had not settled on a line of Bees at that time, but perhaps not. '*Ginny Gee*' is clearly a commemorative name and for that reason is cherished both by Warren and the chosen honoree. It grows in the same fashion as *Patty Bee*, its leaves are not so glossy and the flowers are pale pink and white. They both bloom in April. Having dwarf narcissus or other bulbs as companions solaces the sensibilities, even of those with acutely refined tastes.

My personal favorite is *Razorbill*. Peter Cox writes that this is a chance seedling of *spinuliferum*. Imagine being so fortunate as unexpectedly discovering such a treasure! The flowers on *Razorbill* are most unusual being up-facing tubes of rosy pink grouped in sizeable clusters. They are produced in profusion in March.

Cox's most famous dwarf is probably 'Curlew'. This won the Cory cup at the RHS for the best hybrid of any genus (1980+-) It has proportionately very large flowers for the size of the leaf. It is surprisingly robust given the miffiness of both parents. *ludlowii* and *fletcherianum*. I have seen the first parent only at the Cox nursery and brought back two plants to Victoria. One I gave to a much better grower than I but neither of us was able to satisfy its temperamental needs. 'Curlew's' flowers are a bright yellow with deeper shading and greenish brown spotting. Its bark is attractive and it has a somewhat open but interesting architecture. It does not like a hot site and resents too much fertilizer.

'Chikor' is a tiny bushy plant with soft yellow flowers in profusion - if well grown. This is one plant that certainly does better in the cooler Scottish summers. Gardeners who like the challenge of growing the higher elevation Asiatic primulas will enjoy 'Chikor'. 'Chikor' is a prairie-like Asian bird.

I really like Berg's 'Wee Bee'. It is very similar to 'Too Bee',

being a sister seedling. Warren tried to register it as 'Not Too Bee' but evidently this was not allowed. The flower buds of 'Wee Bee' are of quite a dark hue; some call the colour turkey red. They open to a rose pink on the outside and pale yellow inside. If I had space for only one plant I would choose 'Wee Bee' over 'Ginny Gee'. Thank goodness they are dwarfs so this seldom becomes a gut wrenching decision.

Most of these plants are described in Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons, 3rd edition. This book is recommended as an inexpensive reference. However, the best reference is to see thrifty plants in a local garden. The easy ones pay their rent every month; the more difficult ones boost the ego and give a muted reward when a whimsical name like 'Too Bee' or 'Wanna Bee' rolls subtly off the tongue of a showing off gardener."



From Squward

(by Rose-Marie Silkens)



Food gardening is still an important part of my gardening year. A descendant of at least a hundred generations of Dutch and Flemish farmers, I grieve that agriculture in contemporary western society can be such an unhappy illustration of progress gone wrong. Stores are filled with fruits and vegetables that only look wonderful. Both health and quality concerns make organic and locally-grown produce increasingly attractive to the public. For gardeners, truly fresh fruits and vegetables are part of daily life, but we also look beyond freshness and seek out varieties that have better flavour, or are suited to certain purposes in the kitchen. This usually means choosing older or heirloom varieties that were developed not because they could be shipped safely to another hemisphere, or could sit in a cooler for weeks before disintegrating, but because they taste great.

The 'one size fits all' concept isn't at home in the gardens and kitchens of those who have learned to delight in the enormous variety that orchards and vegetable gardens can yield. Yes, it's nice to have a selection of imported exotics year-round, but our own staple crops are also much more interesting when we explore just how many options are available.

Because my entire family is genetically programmed through Dutch and Norwegian lineage to require massive quantities of potatoes, I grow at least six varieties, each with its own particular purpose to suit individual tastes. There is the perfect masher, the one best for oven roasting, another for baking, one for French fries, two (a red and a white) for their delectable flavour as new potatoes, and always a few new ones to try. The hands-down family favourite is an heirloom yellow potato of ambiguous origins. My father got it from a neighbour many years ago, and we refer to it simply as the "Kelsey Bay yellow." Its flavour is superb, and it is excellent in whatever manner one chooses to prepare it, except that it is too waxy to mash well. It keeps remarkably well, having an almost new-potato texture until spring. I have always shared this potato with fellow gardeners and neighbours, believing that if some calamity were to befall my planting stock, I could get it back from one of many recipients. That hasn't worked. Most people come, shamefaced,



in spring to ask for more planters, as their spouse (it's always the spouse) cooked all theirs.

For those interested in growing some different potatoes, Eagle Creek Seed Potatoes in Alberta (formerly Becker's Potatoes in Ontario) markets at least 30 varieties. Their website is www.seedpotatoes.ca.

Heirloom apple varieties are in growing demand, with consumers becoming aware of the enormous number of apples that have been developed over the last few centuries. At the UBC Botanical Garden's October Applefest, visitors can see and taste dozens of varieties, and that event has become immensely popular. Closer to home, Denman Island's Larry Lepore and Jane Lighthall have done a wonderful job of finding, growing and distributing heirloom apples.

We are very fond of a couple of old varieties that were planted on Hardwicke Island many decades ago. The Orenco apple, developed in Oregon in the mid 1800's, never made it in commerce because it is such a shy bearer, but its delectable fruit is worth the four-to-five year wait between crops. It is a fall cooking apple, purported to keep well, but I can't verify that because we eat all ours right away.

Considered by our parents' generation to be the very best winter pie apple, the Bismarck is an old variety that was planted on Hardwicke before 1920. Bismarck apples are Australian, developed by German settlers there or in Tasmania in the 1870's. Our trees are still productive and healthy, and we hope to supply the Denman heirloom orchard with budwood for posterity.

For those interested in old trees – or lucky enough to have them – the Campbell River Museum sponsored a workshop at Haig-Brown house on February 18. Local horticulturist Marcy Prior conducted this session on dealing with winter damage and pruning old fruit trees and roses.

The popularity of the Comox Valley Seed Savers' Seedy Saturday is a testament to our interest in heirloom and organic seeds for our gardens. Open-pollinated seeds, non-hybrid, certainly not genetically modified, are available at a score of vendor booths at this event. As well, there is a large seed exchange where we can share our treasures. This year's Seedy Saturday is on March 3 at the Filberg Centre on Anderton Street in Courtenay.

MEMBER DISCOUNTS

As we approach another gardening season, don't forget to show your NIRS membership card when making purchases at many garden centres around town. The following businesses are offering a discount (typically 10%)

- Art Knapp Plantland in Courtenay
- Black Creek Farm & Feed Supply
- Serendipity Campbell River (ornaments only)
- Campbell River Garden Center (not seeds or bulbs)
- Shar-Kare - both Courtenay and Campbell River
- Growing Concerns in Black Creek
- Just 'n Tyme Greenhouse Supplies in Courtenay
- Mt. Arrowsmith Nursery in Coombs
- Paradise Plants (both Comox Valley locations)
- River Meadows Farms
- Comox Valley Ornamental Concrete

How Plants Survive Dry Summers



Will we have another dry summer this year? Who knows at this point! But we can plan for it by considering ways to prevent the loss of plants.

Plants use various strategies to help them survive in hot, dry conditions. For example, some have long tap roots that delve down to find all available moisture. Others, such as hebes and *Rhus typhina* have shallow, wide-spreading roots that will seek out all available water.

Some plants' leaves have adapted to limit the amount of moisture lost through transpiration. Thyme and *Gypsophila* leaves are tiny, for example, so there's just a small surface area for moisture loss on hot days. The feathery foliage of *Artemisia* work in much the same way. Lavenders and *Eryngium*s have silvery leaves that reflect light, while *Phormium*s have tough-coated leaves that hold on to moisture.

Another water-conserving strategy is to go into a dormant state to save energy when the going gets tough, as bulbous plants do. *Diascias* also put up shutters, and will sit flowerless during dry spells.

Beth Chatto lives in Essex, a very dry part of England, with usually about 20" of rain per year. Contrast that with our area, where we might have that amount during the 4-5 month summer season, but we also have hundreds of inches of rain during the winter. Beth has a "gravel garden" which has not been irrigated for 14 years. How does she do it?

This part of her garden started out to be a horticultural experiment, to see which plants would survive when hosepipe watering was banned. She explained "when temperatures soar and there has been the merest dribble of rain for weeks or even months (this sounds like our last summer), it takes courage to stand and watch. If plants look stressed, we go in with secateurs rather than the hose."

Yet by choosing plants adapted to dry conditions, the garden is a rich tapestry of shape, texture and colour in every season. Even in January, with hardly a plant in flower, it is furnished with grasses, seed heads and a variety of grey and silver plants, all set off by contrasting clumps of *Bergenia* foliage of shades of wine red, crimson and mahogany.

"I'm surprised and delighted by the woody plants such as *Juniperus scopulorum* 'Skyrocket' and *Amelanchier Lamarckian* - that have tolerated the conditions", she says. "Over the years the picture has evolved and dominant plants mature. The foreground consists of contrasting shapes and textures to cover the ground, and give an overall effect of simplicity."

Plants that looked absolutely happy and comfortable on a September morning included *Deschampsia caespitosa* 'Goldschleier', *Sedum* 'Herbstfreude', grey-leaved *Cistus* and *Caryopteris x clandonensis* 'Heavenly Blue'.

The land had been used as a car park for 25 years and had comprised ¾ acre of heavily compacted gravelly soil, irregularly shaped and backed by a tall hedge. In the winter of 1991-92 it was cleared of tatty grass, and the ground broken up to a depth of 1ft. "After leveling and a light roll, I used hosepipes to indicate where the beds should be" explains Beth. "Once the planting areas were mapped out, as much home-made and mushroom compost and bonfire waste as possible was added to give the plants a good start. All were soaked before planting, and then watered in thoroughly. By the time roots reach the underlying

sand and gravel, the plants have become established and the poor conditions promote tough and wiry growth, making them more resistant to both drought and winter cold."

We have to remember that most of Britain is Zone 8 or 9 all around the edges and only a small area around Perth, in Scotland, is Zone 7. Our area is partly Zone 7, partly Z8, and a few lucky members live closer to Z9. This means that several plants in Beth Chatto's garden are not hardy enough to be left outside all winter here. If you want to try a gravel garden do a little substituting (or plant the *Agapanthus* in a pot, lift it for the winter, and fill the hole with a hardy dwarf cedar, for instance. The plants Beth Chatto recommends for a gravel or scree garden include *Agapanthus*, *Allium flavum*, *Diascia*, *Gypsophila*, Lavender, *Nepeta nervosa*, *Nerene Bowdenii*, *Oregano*, *Phlox* 'Kelly's Eye', *Salvia*, *Thyme* and *Sisyrinchium*. There are many varieties of the plants listed that would be suitable.

Points to remember - remove the top layer of soil if it is infested with weeds. Surround the bed with dry-stone walling, and place a layer of stones at the base of the bed, to ensure good drainage. Then fill the bed with compost-enriched soil mixed with washed gravel. In the spring, plant groups (3 or 5) of small accent plants such as box or tiny junipers, shapes that will complement each other. Plant compact low-growing specimens such as *sedums* and *sempervivums*. In the fall, add some species *crocus* or *tulips* for colour in the spring. *Gypsophila repens* or *thyme* can be planted so they will spill over the edges of the stone walls. Keep the bed weeded and groomed, and the following spring add a thick gravel mulch.

EDITOR'S NOTE



SPECIES STUDY DAYS 2007

For the 6th consecutive year a comprehensive study session of the *Rhododendron* Species will be held at the *Rhododendron* Species and Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington on the following Saturdays: **April 7 April 21 May 19**

The sessions are personally directed by Steve Hootman, the co-Director at the garden, who is well known for his expertise and his many plant expeditions and new plant introductions.

No prior knowledge of the subject material is necessary as the course begins with the fundamentals and progresses in detail at each session. The format will follow that of previous years but will introduce new material for the benefit of past participants. The majority of participants will be individuals from previous sessions who continue to attend for the positive experience that the sessions generate.

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 botanical interest relative to the study of *rhododendron* species followed by instruction and keying of plant material which will be blooming in the garden at that time. After a short break for lunch between 12:00 -12:30, the afternoon will be spent touring the RSBG identifying and discussing the wonderful collection of rare and exotic plants.

The course fee is \$35.00 for each session (x 3) 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 evening prior to the session and stayed with a host overnight, returning Saturday evening.

It has been our collective experience that it is desirable to cross the international border before 7:00 a.m. en route to Federal Way. This helps avoid any delay at the border resulting from a change in the custom officers and also avoids the early morning Seattle traffic. This has usually permitted a leisurely drive to Federal Way with arrival at about 9:15 a.m. in plenty of time for breakfast at the location of your choice, but most of us prefer the Old Country Inn. Arrangements for car pooling will be made. The facilities for instruction at the RSBG are limited and a maximum of 28-30 people can be accommodated. It would be helpful to confirm your interest as soon as possible and to forward payment to the undersigned. Should unforeseen circumstances arise that prevent an individual from attending a specific session, a refund will be issued.

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Biography of Sue Holt

Moving from London (England) in 1970, Sue's first real encounter with gardening "Canadian Style" was in Saskatoon. Notwithstanding temperatures which fell to -30--40C, Sue produced an "awesome" vegetable garden. Cauliflowers to maturity in 6 weeks, not bad, Sue!

Moving to Canmore (Alberta) in 1988, with its sub-alpine climate she set about creating a garden on a steeply sloping lot.

She hand built several retaining walls from local rock, and grew many indigenous plants, snowberry, kinnikinnick and junipers, along with plenty of perennials. Those California poppies were everywhere!



Newly retired, Sue moved to Courtenay with her partner, Mike, to a half acre property in Craigdarroch, and is still marveling that things grow year-round here.

Mike is pretty handy, and Sue has plans to keep him busy... a level lawn area, with a stone wall holding back perennials, a greenhouse, (as she loves growing tomatoes), and a laurel hedge, which is just getting started,

Sue's love of birds is very evident in the many backyard feeders and nesting boxes, which attract hoards of feathered visitors. Even the resident squirrel is not turned away!

Having joined the Rhododendron Society, Sue has already picked up some very useful information, and confesses "before I joined, I knew nothing about Rhodos.... NOTHING"



KEEP COMING TO THE MEETINGS, SUE!!



RECIPE REQUESTS

PUMPKIN PIE SQUARES

- 28 oz. can pumpkin
- 13 oz. can evaporated milk
- 3 eggs
- 1 C sugar
- ¼ tsp Salt
- 2 tsp pumpkin pie spice
(1/4 tsp nutmeg; 1 tsp cinnamon; 1/8 tsp cloves)
- 1 yellow cake mix
- 1 C melted butter
- 1 C shopped pecans or walnuts



Mix first 6 ingredients together and beat well. Spread into a 9 x 13 pan. Cover with dry cake mix.

Drizzle melted butter over top until covered (may need a little more butter). Sprinkle with chopped nuts.

Bake at 350 degrees for approx. 50 mins (until knife inserted in centre comes out clean).

Chill and serve with whipped cream (or ice cream if preferred).



If you can read the following paragraph, you have an exceptional mind. Only 55 people out of 100 are able to read this. Can you?...

I cdnuolt blveiee taht I cluod aulaclyt uesdnatnrd waht I was rdanieg. The phaonmneal pweor of the hmuan mnid, aoccdnrig to a resechrear at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it dseno't mtaetr in waht oerdr the lttres in a wrod are, the only iproamtnt tihng is taht the frsit and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a taotl mses and you can sitll raed it whotuit a pboerlm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteer by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe. Azanmig huh? And I awlyas tghuhot slpeling was ipmorantt!

Happy
St. Patrick's Day

.....and the translation is.....

I couldn't believe that I could actually understand what I was reading. The phenomenal power of the human mind, according to a researcher at Cambridge University, it doesn't matter in what order the letters in a word are, the only important thing is that the first and last letter be in the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without a problem. This is because the human mind does not read every letter by itself, but the word as a whole. Amazing huh? And I always thought spelling was important!