



The RHODOTELLER

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Coming Events

5th February 2008 - Executive Meeting 2.00 pm

The executive meeting will be held at the home of Dick and Pauline Bonney: 3293 Seabank Road, Courtenay.

12th February 2008 - Regular Monthly Meeting

Warren Berg, a Gold Medal honoree, was a life member of the ARS, and his family has produced a DVD video of his life and gardens, so that his legacy may live on forever. We are pleased to present a viewing of this video for our February program.

Warren was an ardent plants-man and expedition leader, primarily for rhododendrons in the Far East, bringing back plant materials for introduction into his noted garden in Port Ludlow on the Hood Canal, Washington. Some of his registered hybrids: 'Berg's Bonnie Bee', 'Berg's Queen Bee', 'Berg's Yellow', 'Ginny Gee', 'Golden Bee', 'Golden Princess', 'Honey Bee', 'Jan Bee', 'June Bee', 'King Bee', 'Patty Bee', 'Peter Bee', 'Too Bee', 'Wanna Bee', 'Wee Bee', and 'Whid Bee'.



President's View

... by Harry Wright

Well so much for December and most of January! I think we have had enough rain and cold weather for awhile. I have heard rumblings about being able to see that thing in the sky, called the "SUN", soon I hope.

With January almost behind us, now is a good time to start organizing a little on your seed planting projects. Check through your supply of seeds, make sure everything is still dry and not moldy. Discard anything that even looks suspicious as it probably won't germinate anyway and why waste materials trying.

February

NORTH ISLAND RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

2007/2008 Executive:

President

Harry Wright 338-8345

Vice-President

Dave Crucq 339-7845

Past President:

Paul Wurz..... 287-4301

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

Revenue Table Committee:

Louise Casson .. 334-2331

Sunshine Lady:

Pauline Bonney 339-7594

The club meets the second Tuesday of the month (except May through August) at the United Church

I usually plant in mid-February any seeds that I have collected from the previous season. If you start seeds any earlier you will have to supply heat and possibly light to them much longer before they can go outside, frost free. Anyone planting annuals can actually wait until March if planting indoors as they germinate and grow much faster.

I did a lot of Rhodo crosses last summer, however we didn't have much of a warm or dry summer. Unfortunately I didn't harvest too many seeds, but I do have some extras if anyone is interested.

Hybridizing can be a lot of fun, and it's a bit of a thrill to have a plant that no one else has. Better still if you have a plant that turns out to be superior to both its parents. If you would like some assistance in hybridizing just give me a call, when we get back from Hawaii at the end of February.....Aloha Harry

MEMBER'S NOTES

...by Dave Godfrey

With the holidays behind us and the New Year begun, members and guests attending the general meeting on January 8th found our annual "Ask the Experts" program interesting and informative.

Following introductions by moderator Harry Wright, each member of the panel (Nadine Boudreau, Paul Wurz and Isabel Petch) gave a brief overview of their horticultural background. They then fielded a variety of gardening questions from members of the audience, answering such concerns as transplanting a potted rhodo, relocating well-established clematis, pruning fruit trees, and eradicating invasive species, to name a few.

The discussions also brought responses from other members who related their experiences with some problem areas of their garden. The session concluded with a discussion on some rhododendron diseases for which members had brought in foliage examples.



Everyone agreed that these programs give valuable information, and even the more seasoned growers gained some additional knowledge by attending. A big thank you

was extended to our panel members for providing us with their expertise.

During the business portion of the meeting, Past President Paul Wurz reminded members of the Species Study Days being offered in the spring. The four day program (March 15/16 in Victoria and April 5/6 at Qualicum's Milner Gardens) offers some valuable training from experts such as Steve Hootman of the RSF in Seattle, Norm Todd, Glenn Jamieson and others. The registration fee is \$120 for the program which is limited to 6 members from each of the 5 Vancouver Island chapters. Billets may be available for those wishing to help reduce travel costs. Interested members are asked to contact either Paul Wurz at 250-287-4301 (pwurz@oberon.ark.com) or Art Lightburn of MARS at 250-468-7516 or email: slightbu@shaw.ca

Paul also reminded members of the upcoming trip to visit Whidbey Island the third week of April. Those members wishing to travel with the group in the rental van on April 22nd returning April 24th, are asked to contact Paul as soon as possible. The last trip to the Whidbey area two years ago was enjoyed by 20 members and spouses, and several other members have expressed an interest in joining this next trip. So don't delay – book today!

For those members or couples who wish to save on travel costs, the Whidbey Chapter members have offered to billet our members. Please inform Paul if you require this accommodation.

For the "Educational" program, Diana Scott gave an overview of the 2011 Rhodo of the Year (R.O.Y.) program. Diana explained that the "proven performers" are selected for each region 3 years in advance in order to allow growers to produce sufficient supply of stock for the public in the year they are advertised as R.O.Y. Example photos of the selection were posted and members were given an opportunity to vote on their favourites. The NIRS nominations for 2011 candidates are as follows:

Elepidote: **Loderi King George** (15) Leptidote: **Patty Bee** (8)
Deciduous Azalea: **Irene Koster** (8) Evergreen Azalea: **Rosebud** (10)

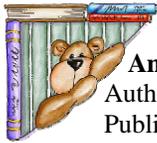
President Harry reminded all members that our AGM is coming in early May, at which time elections will be held for various positions coming open on the executive. Members are asked to give serious consideration if approached to take a position. Remember without an executive board our club will cease to function!

Also our annual pot-luck picnic will be held on Saturday, June 14th and President Harry has asked members to consider the use of their garden for this summer event. Due to holiday plans, Harry, and several other members of the executive, will not be in attendance for the February meeting. So please be sure to let your availability to host the AGM or picnic known as soon as possible.

At the conclusion of the meeting, a draw was made for the raffle prize with new member Pauline Johnson the lucky winner of *R. oreotrephes* (Greig form). Another of our newer members, Corinne Innes was the winner of the door prize – an Herb Gardening Book donated by Sue Holt. Congratulations ladies!

Book Review

by Mary Palmer



American Azaleas

Author: L. Clarence Towe

Publisher: Timer Press, 2004.



This is a very interesting book, describing mainly the deciduous azaleas which grow mostly in the Eastern United States. I loved the interesting stories he tells of "old timers" who live among azaleas in the eastern mountains and hills of America. There are beautiful photographs of these plants, and chapters on collecting, growing, landscaping and propagating.

I was fascinated by some of the methods for propagating these plants, particularly because most of us have found it very difficult. Here is a method used by the late August Kehr to root evergreen azaleas. "He placed a small amount of damp peat in a zip-lock plastic bag and squeezed the peat into a lump in the bottom of the bag. He then stuck short azalea cuttings into the peat, blew into the bag to inflate it, and closed the bag. He attached the bag with a pin to the back of the curtains in his living room, which had northern exposure. In a few weeks, white roots could be seen inside the bag. This method worked because it contained the key elements necessary to root cuttings: a moist rooting medium, high humidity, adequate light and an even and moderate temperature inside the bag".

There are all kinds of interesting little insights to the world of azaleas, and this is a very easy book to read. Get it from your library (This copy came from the Courtenay library and returned to Campbell River.)

BC-Grown Seeds Database Online!

BC farmers and gardeners now have a new seed-finding resource this growing season: www.bcseeds.org.

This website is dedicated to helping BC gardeners source BC-grown seed. The website was started by the BC Seed Security Project, a small group of organic farmers dedicated to promoting the growing and use of BC-grown seed.

Buying BC-grown seed not only helps support small-scale farmers and seed growers, it also ensures gardeners and farmers are purchasing seed that is well-adapted to their growing climate. With rare and heritage varieties being a small-scale specialty, gardeners will have no trouble finding the seed they want from the large selection provided by BC growers.

Check it out today! www.bcseeds.org



Garden Chatter, Natter and Notes

...by Mary Palmer

The first topic, of course, is "What is blooming in your garden right now, at the end of January?" The winter of 2007-08 has been a rather different one, with snow in early December, and rather chilly weather ever since. Not as cold as "in the old days, 30 years ago here", but cold enough to slow down production of flowers in our area, central Vancouver Island. In my garden, I have a *Helleborus niger* that has had flowers on it since October, and it is still pushing out more. The other hellebores have buds moving slowly out of the ground. The big Mahonia has bloomed since September. Snowdrops are popping out, and the winter-blooming viburnums are covered with flowers as usual, but no sign of any daphnes opening out yet. *Hamamelis Jelena* and *H. pallida* started blooming in early January instead of their usual display by Christmas.

Norma Senn, writing in the Fraser South Rhodo newsletter in March 2006, had an interesting trip to Van Dusen Gardens around the time of a February cold snap. She says "*I had the chance to get to Van Dusen Gardens just ahead of, and just after, a mid-February cold snap. On my first visit, several species of Rhodos were in bloom, including R. rizei, R. barbatum, R. strigillosum and R. Stewartianum. After the cold, the only one still looking good was their R. barbatum, and I suspect it survived the cold because it had better overhead protection than the others. Of course, other lovely Rhodos include R. cilpenense and R. moupinense, but these plants also need frost protection for their flowers.*"

There are many other winter treasures to enjoy, for example Hamamelis mollis, Lonicera fragrantissima and Lx purpusii."

I would like to add that my *R. cilpenense* has the misfortune to always bloom in early March. It always snows at that time and the flowers turn to mush. I must remember to cover the plant this year!

Growing Fragrant Rhodos

Dave Goheen wrote a long series of very informative articles for rhodo members and this is from one of these.

Rhodos, and many other flowering genera, rely on attracting insects to their flowers, where, in their search for nectar, the insects transmit pollen from one flower to another, and thus make cross-pollination possible. This occurs, primarily, during daylight hours where light and colour are the principal attraction for the pollinating creatures.

But what about those flowers that are open at night and have taken advantage of the presence of night-flying moths, birds and bats? Light and colour play a minor role in this nocturnal activity and the production of aromatic substances becomes very important for the cross-fertilization process.

Detection of chemical aromas can be very keen in insects. Certain moths have been shown to be able to detect, with their antennae, from long distances the presence of female moths. They do this by intercepting air borne chemicals called

pheromones which are produced by the females.



Although the aromatic chemicals in rhodo flowers are not strictly pheromones, they accomplish the same purpose and moths and other night pollinators can locate flowers whether or not there is any light or colour. This is probably why most fragrant Rhodos are not highly coloured. There is no need to produce bright colour to attract pollinators.

I have found that fragrance is most apt to be found in Rhodos in the Maddenia and Fortunea subsections and from hybrids derived from species in these subsections. Most of the fragrant flowers are white or very light pink or yellow. I don't believe I have ever encountered a red rhodo with a pronounced scent. Some of the Madennii group with yellow flowers are scented. The tropical vireyas or "Malaysian" Rhodos may have a strong fragrance combined with deeper colours. Many of these flowers have long nectar tubes and hummingbirds and even bats are suspected of being attracted by scents as well as colour. They use bills and tongues to secure nectar from the long tubes, and in so doing, cause transfer of pollen from flower to flower.

Even though most fragrant Rhodos are not highly coloured, they generally are large flowered and form pleasing additions to the rhodo collections. The largest flower in the Genus is found in the species *R. nuttallii*. Its trumpet-shaped fragrant corollas can be 5" long and 6" wide, and although mostly white, can be pleasingly tinged with pale pink and yellow. It and its fellow Maddennii species, such as *R. lindleyii* and *R. formosum*, can only be grown in the most favored climates, but when grown indoors, their fragrance can pervade an entire room. The more hardy *R. fortunei* and *R. discolor* are also pleasantly scented and are very welcome specimens in the garden. Probably the most well-known rhodo hybrid group, the Loderii hybrids, are esteemed as much for their fine aromas as for their large white to pink flowers.

Perhaps in the future, hardy hybrids that combine bright colours and fragrance will be developed, but I think this will not be easy. Thirty years ago, David Leach in his book "Rhododendrons of the World" stated that he believed this would be difficult to accomplish, and time has proven him right. In the meantime, there is a lot of satisfaction in growing and flowering the light-coloured scented Rhodos that are available.



WINTER HEATHERS

DO I NEED TO CUT THEM BACK?

Yes, you do, otherwise they will become lanky after about 4 years or so. Also, if you leave it that long before you trim them, then cut into old wood, you may find they don't grow back again. Ideally, prune winter- and spring-flowering types immediately after flowering, and do this every year to keep nice bushy vigorous plants.



Rhododendrons For Shade

Some Rhodos are quite happy to be in a spot that is mostly sunny. They all welcome some high shade, especially in the hottest time of the day, from about 11:00 am to 4:00 pm, even in our comparatively cool climate. Here is a list of plants, (taken from a MARS newsletter) that might be of use when you are considering buying a rhodo, or having to move one because it is unhappy.

R. calendulaceum, a Native American species, commonly known as the Flame Azalea, grows 4-6 ft. high and has clove-scented yellow to red-orange flowers in early summer. This plant is deciduous.

R. Carolinianum, another native American, grows wild in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. It is 3-6 ft. in height, has a naturally rounded shape, and has dark green leaves and clusters of rose-pink flowers in mid-spring. There is another variety, with lighter green leaves and white flowers. Look for *R.c. 'Album'* for this one.

R. kiusianum is a low-growing Japanese species, only 18" high. The plant changes from deciduous to evergreen leaves at maturity. Leaves often change colour in winter. In mid-spring, there are lilac-pink flowers, and you will find many named hybrids derived from this species.

R. Loderi 'King George'



...is a tall hybrid rhodo that blooms in mid-spring, producing huge perfumed pale pink flower clusters that turn white as they mature. It will grow from 6-12 ft. (Note by MP - We have had to cut ours back several times or it would probably be 25 ft. by now).

R. Schlippenbachii is a beautiful deciduous species, of Japanese origin, with soft green leaves that grow in whorls around the stem, and turn yellow and crimson in fall. Pink star-shaped flowers bloom in mid-spring.

R. Snowlady

.....is a small hybrid rhodo, growing to 30" only. It has an abundance of snowy white flowers and fuzzy green leaves. (Note by MP - find a sheltered spot for this plant. Though it is not damaged by weather, it blooms so early it is often covered by snow).



Valentine's BEE #1





R. williamsianum

...is another rather small species plant, growing to 3 - 4 ft. This lovely plant forms attractive mounds of bright green foliage with dainty pale pink bell-shaped flowers in mid-spring. There are many hybrids with this plant as a parent, and many produce bright red new leaves in spring, which gradually turn to green.

The larger Rhodos and azaleas like "King George" and flame azalea make excellent specimen plants or informal groups in woodland settings, while the smaller plants flourish in the shade of arbors and trellises. Some can be used in the foreground of border plantings, or handsome pot plants.

Note by MP: When our club first started, we had easier access to the Rhododendron Species Foundation, and American nurserymen who brought plants north every spring. Now we rely on people like Harry Wright and Paul Wurz for many of these and other species plants. It is rare to find them in an ordinary nursery).



(information obtained from various Internet sites)

pH is a measure of how acidic or basic things are and is measured using a pH scale between 0 to 14, with acidic things having a pH between 0-7 and basic things having a pH from 7 to 14. For instance, lemon juice and battery acid are acidic and fall in the 0-7 range, whereas seawater and bleach are basic (also called "alkaline") and fall in the 7-14 pH range. Pure water is neutral, or 7 on the pH scale.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOIL pH

The pH of soil or more precisely the pH of the soil solution is very important because soil solution carries in it nutrients such as Nitrogen (N), Potassium (K), and Phosphorus (P) that plants need in specific amounts to grow, thrive, and fight off diseases.

If the pH of the soil solution is increased above 5.5, Nitrogen (in the form of nitrate) is made available to plants. Phosphorus, on the other hand, is available to plants when soil pH is between 6.0 and 7.0.

Certain bacteria help plants obtain N by converting atmospheric Nitrogen into a form of N that plants can use. These bacteria live in root nodules of legumes (like alfalfa and soybeans) and function best when the pH of the plant they live in is growing in soil within an acceptable pH range.

For instance, Azaleas grow best in soils having a pH of 4.5 – 5.0, while Rhododendrons grow best in soils with a pH of 4.5 – 6.0, and Geraniums are best at 6.0 – 8.0. Many other crops, vegetables, flowers and shrubs, trees, weeds and fruit

are pH dependent and rely on the soil solution to obtain nutrients.

If the soil solution is too acidic plants cannot utilize N, P, K and other nutrients they need. In acidic soils, plants are more likely to take up toxic metals and some plants eventually die of toxicity (poisoning).

Herbicides, pesticides, fungicides and other chemicals are used on and around plants to fight off plant diseases and get rid of bugs that feed on plants and kill plants. Knowing whether the soil pH is acidic or basic is important because if the soil is too acidic the applied pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides will not be absorbed (held in the soil) and they will end up in garden water and rain water runoff, where they eventually become pollutants in our streams, rivers, lakes, and ground water.

Are you curious about the pH of your garden soil? Why not rent the "pH Pen" from the club and know for sure the conditions of your soil. The pen is available for one week at a time for \$10 (with \$5. refunded when pen is returned). The pen can be picked up and returned to Harry Wright at Haida Gold Gardens. While the Wrights are on holidays in Hawaii for February, the pen is available at the Godfrey's.



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 Artemisia, should be cut back to a basic framework in order to have a shapely bush when it grows again. 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 or 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 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.

Snippets From Sayward

by Rose-Marie Silkens

Editor's note: Rose-Marie's condition is still very serious as she continues to recuperate in the Victoria Hospital. We fear her brain injuries may require several months of rehabilitation. Hopefully we will have more and brighter news of her recovery for next month.

In honour of Rose-Marie Silkens tradition of writing articles for our newsletter, we felt it fitting to reproduce some of her past articles until such time as she is able to write and contribute again. Please say a prayer for her as you read through the following article that was originally printed in the January 2001 issue of the NIRS newsletter:

"It is always wise to save seedling plants that volunteer in your garden. Most volunteers are useful, and sometimes they prove absolutely delightful. For years, I have been searching retail nurseries for a hybrid holly with yellow berries. There are numerous varieties in existence, but holly of any kind does not seem to be a popular plant in the west coast trade at present. Because I have a fairly large collection of various Ilex species and hybrids, seedling hollies pop up all over my garden.

About 8 years ago, I planted a number of these where I wanted a year-round screen, and where it doesn't matter whether or not the plants are berry-producing females. This fall, on of these young hollies, apparently an I. aquifolium seedling produced not only a good crop of berries, but large berries of golden yellow. It may be only one plant of dozens of holly seedlings I have saved and potted up, but the thrill of having this new plant makes those odds perfectly acceptable.

Another plant that self-seeds prolifically is verbasicum. I have an established group of verbasicum chaixii, with a reddish-purple eye, as well as a nearby clump of the early-blooming V. phoeniceum, in white and shades of pick and violet.

While it would take several more acres to accommodate all the seedlings that appear, I do try to save many because every now and then a perfectly splendid open-pollinated result occurs. One such volunteer rivals the popular hybrid 'Helen Johnson' for subtle colouration. The tall spikes are a pale old rose with a deep amethyst centre, most Victorian, and they bloom literally from late spring well into September (with reasonable deadheading). I plan to take root cuttings this winter, and if they take I will bring some plants for the NIRS revenue table."

FEB 2ND

**GROUND
HOG
DAY**



Recipe Requests

Dark Chocolate Cookie Mounds (Noni Godfrey)

Prep time: 10 minutes.....Bake time: 12 minutes

- 2 C all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 2 eggs
- 1 ½ C sugar
- 1/2 C Mayonnaise
- 2 tsp vanilla
- 4 -1oz squares unsweetened chocolate, melted
- Icing sugar or decorative sugar



In small bowl, mix together flour, baking powder; set aside. In large bowl, with electric mixer, beat the eggs, sugar, mayonnaise, chocolate and vanilla for 2 minutes. Beat in the flour mixture until

blended. Shape the dough by level tablespoonfuls into balls then place on ungreased baking sheets, 2-inches apart.

Bake in 350°F oven for 12 minutes or until tops crack. Immediately transfer the cookies to a wire rack, sprinkle with the icing sugar while still warm.

Chocolate Zucchini Cake

- 2 ½ cups flour
- ¾ cup cocoa
- 2 ½ t. baking powder
- 1 ½ t baking soda
- 1 t salt
- 1 t cinnamon
- ¾ c. cup soft unsalted butter
- 2 cups sugar
- 3 eggs
- 2 t vanilla
- Grated peel of one orange
- 2 packed cups coarsely grated zucchini
- ½ cup buttermilk

Preheat oven to 350.

Sift together the flour, cocoa, baking powder, baking soda, salt and cinnamon and set aside. With a mixer, beat together the butter and sugar until thoroughly combined. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Mix in the vanilla, orange peel and zucchini. Alternately stir the dry ingredients and the milk into the zucchini mixture. Turn batter into 2 prepared 9" cake pans, and bake for about 35 minutes, or until a wooden pick inserted into the cake comes out clean. Cool in the pans for 15 minutes. Frost with the following:

Cocoa Cream Cheese Frosting

- 1 ½ pounds soft cream cheese
 - 1 lb. confectioners sugar
 - 2/3 C. cocoa powder
- Use an electric mixer fitted with a whip to mix thoroughly.

