



The RHODOTELLER

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#

Coming Events



2nd June 2008 - Executive Meeting 2.00 pm

The meeting will be held at the Comox Valley Rhodo Garden

14 June 2008 - Wrap Up Picnic Pot Luck

Picnic Protocols! The season's finale beckons!

This year the gathering will be held at the home of Ross and Nancy Munro, 3700 Hilton Road, Royston. South along Island Highway turn left at Hilton Road (sign for Greystone Manor) Watch for "NIRS" signs to guide the way!

Attendees to this year's gala will have a chance to play the famous "Bean Bag Toss Game", or be pitted against the best and go on a "Scavenger Hunt??. New members will be welcomed, old friends embraced - warmly, in both cases. Do wear your name badges. Festive dress would be highly desirable...but any old thing will do.

Members are requested to bring one or more dishes...each suitable for serving several people...of delicate appetizers, seductive savories, buttery breads, crunchy salads, virtuous fruits, and elegant desserts.

The annual phenomenon of a perfect balance of dishes for all tastes will again be manifest. But...do bring necessary eating cutlery, and also serving utensils. (Only a limited supply of clean gardening trowels is available!)

And, your best outside mugs and drinking vessels for the communal tea and coffee, (or your own harmless or otherwise punches).

The picnic committee has requested that members bring their own plates...whether Royal Doulton, Value Village, or chipped crockery...whatever may be available. To avoid sullyng your dress garments with grass stains, please bring lawn chairs from home.

4:00 P.M.
See You There!



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 331-0395

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) United Church in Comox 7:30 p.m.

President's View

...by Harry Wright

Well the busy part of the year has come and gone! With lots of support from our membership and the public, our sale and garden tour were very successful, leaving our bank account in a healthy condition.

The CV rhodo garden is looking great, and we've received numerous positive comments, especially how much people enjoy the stroll through when in full flower.

We enjoyed a great return trip to Whidbey Island this spring to renew friendships and visit newer members of our rhodo family.

I have been told by Noni that she won't be asking me for any more "President's Views" since this is my last one. When our meetings start again in September you will have a new leader, "Diana".

Looking back, I don't know where the time goes. In the last two years, the club membership has grown and we have been having great attendance at our meetings and work parties. The membership has been very supportive in assisting the executive in carrying out their wishes. I can't say enough about your executive; what a great group of people to work with. They certainly have the best interests of the Society at heart.

Thanks for the trip. Hope to see many of you at the potluck picnic on June 14th...Harry

Member's Notes

...by Dave Godfrey

May is Rhododendron Month and a busy month it has been. First we held our annual Rhodo Sale and Show on Sunday May 4th, and although there was no door opening crush of customers, we still did better than previous years in raising funds for our budget. Thanks to more than 30 members who came early to help with all the preparation and the running of the day's event. Special thanks go to Bernice Morrison for inviting members back to her garden for a "bunwich" supper that afternoon. Bernice and her family have decided to make this an annual invitation in memory of her late husband, Gerry, who always enjoyed such social gatherings.

On the following Sunday, May 11th, we again held our annual Mother's Day Garden Tour, raising over \$2000 for our upcoming year's activities. Everyone agrees the success of the day was due in big part to the fantastic article on Bob and Adela Smith's garden in the Friday paper. This helped boost the last minute tickets sales, and brought a record number of sales at the garden gates. Thanks to all the gate sitters and hosts for donating their time and efforts to our financially best tour in years.

Once again a draw was made for a rhododendron for both the sale and the tour. Dorothy Duxbury of Bates Rd., Courtenay, was the lucky winner of the rhododendron "Dora Amateis" at the plant sale; while Janice Langley of Campbell River was the Garden Tour ticket winner of the rhododendron "PJM Compact". This year's truss show 'People's Choice Award' with the most ballots (12) was the rhododendron 'Elsie Frye'.

Our annual general meeting scheduled for the garden of Terry and Charline Law had to be moved indoors to our meeting hall due to inclement weather. Many members brought trusses for an expanded

Show & Tell following the business portion of the meeting and it was nice to see so many varieties of rhodos in bloom.

Elections were held at the AGM, and by acclamation Diana Scott is our President-elect for the 2008/09 term beginning in September. Congratulations also go out to Pauline Thompson as our new secretary; while Brian Staton remains as Membership Director and Christine Aldred remains as Public Relations Director.



Don, Diana, Dave, Pauline

Congratulations also went out to President Harry Wright and wife, Gwen, for their 50th wedding anniversary. Social Director Evelyn Wright backed a special cake for the occasion and all those in attendance at the meeting had an opportunity to share a piece.

Amongst all the business of the month, a work party was also held to complete the building of the wall around the "Stump" bed in the Comox Valley Rhododendron Garden. Bernie Guyader was the works foreman and chief brick layer, with help from Dave Crucq, Dave Godfrey, Don Law and Harry Wright as Supervisor. The bed has been topped with fresh mulch, and is ready for planting this fall. President Harry advises that a couple of deadheading parties will be held throughout the summer, with the usual goodies and coffee to be enjoyed by those who can attend. See you there...

Vest and Name Tag Order

In the next few weeks, orders will be placed for club vests and name tags. Any member wishing to place an order for either should contact Dave Godfrey for vests (cost \$50) or Brian Staton for a name tag (cost \$6.) Vests come in Black, Navy, Charcoal, or Olive Green and sizes XS to 3XL. Please specify when ordering.

The last opportunity to order will be at our season wrap-up garden party on Saturday, June 14th. After this date it may be quite some time before there's enough interest to place another order. So give some serious thought and order while you can!

Colchicums

Powdery Mildew - The Kiss of Death

This plant, if you have room for it, is one of the stars of the late-summer and fall garden. There are several varieties, all quite expensive individually, but once you have a few, you will soon have dozens or hundreds, for the corms multiply quickly. Also, you must remember that beginning in early spring (even in December in my garden) a cluster of very large, deep green leaves arises from each buried corm - too large to accompany small rhodos. In late May or early June, the yellowed leaves can be removed. The corms lie hidden in the soil until blooming starts in the fall. It is easy to slice them in two when planting other things in what appears to be a vacant area.

I have found that if you plant the colchicums in the same area where (horrors!) variegated Bishop's Weed flourishes, you can cut off all the colchicum and Bishop's Weed leaves at the end of June, and enough of the B.W. will re-grow by August to help hold up the colchicum flowers. The pale green, white and pink combination is lovely. Various perennial geraniums will do the same job, and some of these also need a haircut so they will put out another showing of flowers in September, when the colchicums are blooming.

Colchicum is one of the finest plants for Sept. blooming, commonly called meadow saffron or fall crocuses, though they do not belong to the same family as crocuses. Although the flower is crocus-like, colchicums are of the lily family, and crocuses belong to the iris family. Colchicums like full or partial sun, but in shade they tend to flop badly.

As soon as August ends (or when the first fall rain starts), as many as a dozen flowers will push up from a corm buried 2-3" below the surface of the ground. The flowers are goblet- or tulip shaped, on tubular stems, which are an extension of the flower. They occur in shades of pink, mauve, lilac or white. There is even a double one named Water Lily. Colchicum autumnale, is a native of sub-alpine meadows in Europe, has flowers 2" long and up to 4" across, mauve-pink but white at the base, and supported by a stem 4-6" long.

Other species include *C. byzantium*, dark rosy-purple, *C. cilicium*, like *byzantium* but with narrower petals and flowering a bit later, *C. speciosum* in several forms, like *C. speciosum x autumnale* "The Giant" large mauve-pink flowers with stems a foot high, "Album", Violet Queen" and "Lilac Wonder". "Water Lily" is a fully double mauve-pink, didn't survive its first winter in my garden.

The corms increase in number by division (they are lilies, after all), and the small cormlets rapidly increase in size so that the largest might become as big as a man's fist. It is a good idea to separate them after 3-4 years, best done shortly after the leaves die down. You will soon have dozens to share with friends. Don't plant them under your rhodos!

Remember colchicum is highly poisonous because it contains colchicine, an alkaloid used to double chromosomes in plants. This also has medical uses.



The Portland Rhodo newsletter had this interesting article in April 2004. Locally I have not heard much about it for several years. Was it the very hot dry summers we have had lately that killed off the spores?

Several gardens are experiencing problems with powdery mildew. You may have noticed some plants in your own garden that have been completely defoliated by this curse. PM is a common fungal disease that can strike any number of plants. All PMs are not the same and different treatments are needed for different plants.

There are several ways to treat PM, including a number of commercial solutions and systemic granular mixes. In some cases, PM can be traced to soil deficiencies. Copper, for instance, has been shown necessary to give plants resistance to certain fungus diseases. While copper may be in the soil, the soil balance may be so unbalanced that it may not be available to the plant.

Things get complicated when applying a remedy to a large garden, and areas near moving water. Warm days and cool nights can bring on a wildfire case of PM. Older leaves are often the first infected. The mildew is embedded in the leaf and cannot be rubbed off. Controlling the spores and spread can be difficult in even a small space. Raking up the fallen foliage and putting it in the garbage will help. Some methods used to control PM include:



1. 2-3 tsp. baking soda, 1 gal. water, 2-3 tbsp. SunSpray Ultrafine Oil. Spray every 5-7 days and be sure to get the undersides of the leaves.
2. Boil a potful of fresh horsetail for 15-20 minutes. Let liquid cool and spray it on plants. It

does not disturb the soil life, unlike more powerful antifungal sprays.

3. 1 tbsp. baby shampoo, 1 tbsp. hydrogen peroxide, 1 tsp. instant tea granules, 2 cups water. Apply mid-afternoon on a cloudy day for best results.
4. 4 tbsp. baking soda, 2 tbsp. Murphy's Oil soap, 1 gal. water. Apply liberally.

While an established rhodo may survive a PM attack, the plants may be weakened and need some additional care to bring them back to their glory. Keep an eye out for insects and other garden marauders that may attack. There are several reference books listed that include recipes such as these, and further information on PM. Gardening Without Poisons, by Beatrice Trum Hunter, The Experts Book of Garden Hints, Rodale, Slug Bread & Beheaded Thistles, by Ellen Sandbeck, and Backyard Problem Solver, by Jerry Baker.



Garden Chatter, Natter and Notes

By Mary Palmer

MULCH ALERT

The Island Grower had this useful article in the Summer 1997 copy.

"Many gardeners have bark mulch on shrub and flower beds, and while this keeps the roots cool and conserves moisture, you can get a nasty surprise during our hot, dry summer spells if you are not careful. Bark mulch tends to form a crust (the finer the mulch, the 'crustier'), so water rolls right off. This is particularly true of fine peat moss. Try to find the coarse type when buying this item. Prevention is simply to work a cultivator or rake through the surface periodically to keep it broken up.

Also, in a dry spell, rain or watering can often moisten only the mulch if it has been allowed to dry out. It will soak up all the water like a sponge, translocating it horizontally instead of allowing penetration into the soil below. Be sure to dig down occasionally and check if you are getting the water where the plants need it, and water long enough to get good soil penetration".

NOTES ON THE DREADED LATE BLIGHT

(Also the same Early Blight)

Late blight is a fungus disease of potatoes and tomatoes that originated in Mexico and has since spread world-wide. The same disease caused the Potato Famine in Ireland in the 1850s. It has become a serious problem in B.C. since the early 1990s and needs vigilance on the part of the home gardener if we ever hope to control it.

The disease is carried by spores and one of the main transmission factors is wind, which can transport them several kilometers. It is known that often spores are trans-located in raindrops, and certainly the disease seems to show itself most readily when weather has been cold and wet. A cold, rainy spell in late September after a hot dry summer can create the perfect environment for the resulting blight.

Avoid the use of overhead sprinklers for potatoes or tomatoes. Keep fertilizing to a minimum, especially nitrogen, since heavy lush foliage is more susceptible to infection as it stays wet longer. Check the plants often, and you see a suspicious-looking leaf, remove it and seal it in a plastic bag until you can remove it from the property. Tomatoes are best grown completely under cover for the whole season, and be sure, when watering, to wet the soil, not the leaves. *This material taken from an article by Barbara Hess, in the Coastal Grower, 1997.*

Companion Plants When A Drought Looms

M.J. Harvey wrote this useful article in the Victoria newsletter in May 2005, one of our very dry summers, and it will likely be very useful again. In 2008 so far, we have had about 25mm of rain in March, a similar amount in April, and we are almost half way through May now, with 3 mm. So here goes, with a few additions/revisions. Thanks to M. J. Harvey for this good advice.

Some Victorians are deeply wedded to the concept of the perfect, weed-free, emerald green lawn. This has high costs both monetarily and

ecologically. When questioned, one gets comments through gritted teeth such as "I am not going to have a brown garden".

These attitudes reveal a lack of knowledge of the alternatives now available. Basically one has to search for attractive plants native to regions of the world with climates similar to that of Victoria. This is true of the whole east coast of the Island, from Victoria to Campbell River. The most important areas include the Mediterranean Basin region, South Africa, California and Australia. The following are a few pointers.

It is a given in Victoria that no garden, ever, will have broom. This phobia arose as a result of the first independent settler not brought over by the Hudson Bay Co., Captain Walter Colquhoun Grant, getting a little homesick for his native Scotland and bringing in various plants including broom. In 1851, in Sooke, 3 seeds germinated to his great delight and now broom is an ecological disaster displacing native plants from BC to California.

The lesson of broom for gardeners is that here is a plant ideally fitting our climate, covering itself with flowers (to the secret delight of some), and thriving in the complete absence of fertilizer or summer rain. The question is - are there similar drought-adapted plants with attractive flowers which will not spread like a plague across the countryside. The answer is YES. And here he gives a useful list of various brooms that do not seed themselves over the countryside.

Mt. Etna Broom:

I first came across Mt. Etna broom while working at Kew. Every day I walked past a Georgian terrace on Kew Green opposite the cricket pitch. In May or June there was the most wonderful fragrance that traced down to a garden with a tall, semi-weeping tree reaching to the second floor and covered with yellow flowers. This is *Genista aetnensis*, a tree which deserves to be more widely grown in Victoria.

The particular specimen at Kew must be over a century old so do not worry about a monster-sized broom taking over. They clip beautifully in any case. The seed on offer comes from a plant at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific. The seeds have a peculiarity in that when they germinate, 25% of the seedlings are albino and die within a week or two.

There are other broom relatives such as Spanish broom, *Genista tinctoria*, and the low, almost creeping *Lydia genista*. Do practice saying, when accused by a hypersensitive neighbour, "O, that's not broom, that is *Genista*!"

Less controversial than broom are some deep-rooted perennials. These include *Acanthus spinosissimus*, *Centaurea macrocephala*, *Euphorbia characias* and *Yucca filamentosa*. These plants are very hardy (and almost impossible to get rid of) once they are established. They need water the first couple of summers, until the roots get down a metre or so.

Less drought tolerant and liking a nice bit of clay are the graceful South African *Dieramas* and *Agapanthus*, as well as *Inula racemosa* and the yellow tree peony. The older they get the more drought tolerant they become. I no longer water mine. Try it!



Don't forget Father's Day June 15th



HANDS ACROSS THE BORDER

(NIRS meet WIRS)

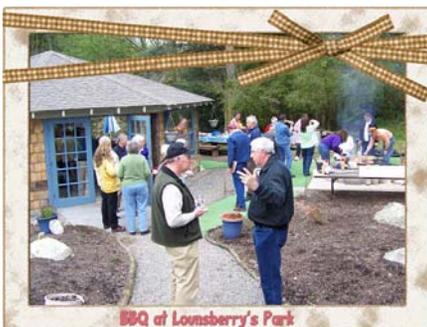
On April 22nd, 2008, a group of 27 members from the North Island Rhododendron Society paid a visit to the Whidbey Island chapter to tour some of the beautiful gardens found on Whidbey Island, WA. A rented van provided transportation for 15 members, while seven other couples chose to drive their own vehicles. The visit was a reciprocal trip to one made last year when members of the WIRS paid a visit to the Comox Valley to view some of the stunning gardens here.

Arriving on Tuesday afternoon, members of the NIRS were treated to a salmon barbecue dinner at Lounsberry's park before heading off with hosts from the WIRS chapter. The next day, the group toured several prominent gardens of WIRS members in the Coupeville area (Dickerson's and Schwarzman's) before meeting for lunch and a tour of the famed Meerkerk Garden.

Afternoon tours included Glynneden Gardens owned by Bill & Mary Stipe, Frank Fujioka's gorgeous garden in Freeland and Barry & Kathy Rix garden back in Coupeville. At the end of the day, members of both societies enjoyed a pot-luck dinner hosted by the Rix's at their magnificent home.

The evening gathering afforded members an opportunity to meet and discuss the various aspects of gardening; in particular, the cultivation and hybridization of rhododendrons. The likes of Bill Stipe and Frank Fujioka from Whidbey were found in discussions with growers Paul Wurz and Harry Wright of the NIRS. Paul Lowry, President of the Nanaimo Chapter, joined the NIRS on the tour, and announced that Nanaimo will be hosting the Western Regional Conference in the spring of 2012. He invited all members to attend and enjoy the beautiful gardens in the Nanaimo area.

Everyone agreed that this visit was well worth the journey. Most also had the added opportunity to visit the annual Tulip Festival held in La Conner. Is it possible that this could become an annual cross border visit to be enjoyed by those who attend?



BBQ at Lounsberry's Park



Christie at Meerkerk Gardens

Remember To Deadhead

(If you can reach the trusses!)

Stuart Robinson, writing in the Times Colonist, reminds us of a very important task. "If you want your flowering shrubs to perform well every year, deadhead them as soon as they're finished flowering."

Deadheading means cutting off the spent blooms before they set seeds. It's important to do this because when plants make a lot of seeds, they slow their growth activity and become less vigorous. If you allow this to happen year after year, the shrub will gradually become less active and produce fewer flowers. The flowers might even become paler and smaller over time.

Removal of flower growth applies to all of the popular early flowering shrubs, like forsythia, kerria, philadelphus (mock orange), rhododendron, spirea, syringa (lilac) and weigela.

For a shrub that's up to 1.5 metres tall use pruning shears, but for taller shrubs, use a pole-pruner to reach the uppermost branches. (If you have some of those 20-30 ft. rhodos that live on our Island, just forget reaching up to prune the top branches, unless you have a cherry-picker. We know no one deadheads the rhodos growing on those Chinese hillsides pictured in various books. Nevertheless, we should try to prune as much and as high as possible.

The best time to deadhead early flowering shrubs, as well as do any major pruning, is right after they are finished blooming and before they start putting on early summer growth. That way, you can direct where growth will happen in future. Summer growth produces the flower buds for next year's flowers. So if you wait too long before pruning, you will spoil the show for next season.

Here are the best ways to deadhead shrubs: Kerria, Rhododendron, spirea japonica and syringa: These need to have their flowerheads removed as soon as they've faded. Cut off the heads just behind the bloom without removing any foliage growth. If you wish to shorten the branch, cut off some of the foliage further back. Make sure to cut just above a leaf node so you don't leave a stump behind.

Forsythia, spirea thunbergii, spirea vanhouttei and weigela: the long sections of their branches need to be removed just below where the flowers started. Don't be afraid to pruning them too much. When you cut off the branches that have flowered, you'll encourage the plant to grow new branches with new buds that bloom next year. If these shrubs are getting too dense, remove two or three of the oldest branches at ground level to open up the centre of the foliage, thereby letting in more light and air.

Philadelphus blooms on short flower stems growing from new branches. Trim off all the flower stems after they've finished blooming. The plant will benefit from additional pruning. Take every branch and cut it back by 1/3 of its length. This will encourage new growth and new flowers. Cut off the oldest canes at ground level, as they are slower to produce strong new flower branches".

I know this all sounds quite drastic, but it works. I had several poorly shaped old rhodos that we cut back to 6" and the plant immediately made new growth and even bloomed the next year.

8th Annual George Fraser Day and Heritage Fair

Wanda McAvoy reports that the George Fraser Day and Heritage Fair in Ucluelet on Saturday, May 25th, was another great success. The weather was kind as the overcast skies opened to sunshine by the afternoon.

A bench located at the waterfront George Fraser Memorial Park was dedicated by the committee. The bench is situated such that it affords a view of the memorial stone and the harbour entrance. The inscription on the plaque reads:

“PROUDLY HONOURING THE HERITAGE, HISTORY AND CULTURAL IDENTITY WE SHARE AS A COMMUNITY

– Dedicated May 24, 2008 by the George Fraser Committee.”



Following the unveiling of the bench, many enjoyed another interpretative walking tour to view some of the heritage property and gardens where Fraser once lived. Many of Mr. Fraser's original rhododendrons still thrive along Helen Road. The tour ended at the George Fraser Gardens on Peninsula Road, where a plaque dedication took place for Robert Sinclair.

As with George Fraser, Bob Sinclair lived and worked in Ucluelet for many years. Although not internationally known, he was second only to George Fraser as a rhododendron grower and propagator from Ucluelet. Many of the rhododendrons in the George Fraser Gardens were donated by Mr. Sinclair's wife, Judy. Bob passed away in 1995, but his wife and most of his family were present for the dedication and were honored by the recognition given to Bob.

The Heritage Fair was also another great success, with Bill Dale and his daughter, Cathy, attending. Also in attendance was NIRS associate members Terry and Verna Richmond. Lynn Watts of ARS was scheduled to attend as a guest speaker, but illness prevented him from traveling.

All in all, Wanda reports the day's events were a tremendous success thanks to the efforts of the many members of the committee and those who attended.



–*Growing a garden in the Pacific Northwest: by Valerie Easton, (who writes regularly for the Seattle Times newspaper)*

Sasquatch Books, Seattle, 2002.

This is a most delightful little book, comprised of material from some of Ms. Easton's newspaper articles. Not only lively and interesting, but you would usually swear she was writing about gardening on Vancouver Island. I think most of us are a climatic zone lower than that of Seattle, but we can grow, and complain about nearly every plant she mentions.

She talks about plants that are in bloom in March, the real beginning of the gardening year, and goes on to describe jobs to do and plants in bloom in May, June, July and the rest of the year. There are chapters such as "Oh, Deer", "Nose Against the Windowpane", "Spooky Plants" and "Warming up Winter" and I found it difficult to put the book down.

For instance, in the chapter "Rejuvenate" for instance, I found this, so true, after a winter of downed trees and smashed rhodos. "Most pruning books show how to make elegant cuts on tidy little illustrated plants that exist all by themselves somewhere in garden la la land. Such advice is pretty useless when you are up against a gnarled old wisteria weaving through a towering laurel." Several excellent books on renovating a garden are recommended (you will have to read the book for their names).

On lilies: "Plant the bulb in November and feel like a wizard eight months later when a tall, glamorous trumpet flower graces your garden. The only time a lily will break your heart is when, on a drizzly morning, you find that a slug has slimed its way up the stem and eaten out the heart of the flower"

Richard Hartlage, Director/Curator of the Elizabeth C. Botanical Garden in Seattle has produced dozens of beautiful photographs of flower and leaf close-ups, and plants in the garden and in pots. This is a book everyone who gardens should have to brighten their lives, especially during our dark wet winters.

Western Regional Conference

The 2008 Western Regional Conference is scheduled for September 23rd to 28th in Hilo Hawaii. Details can be found on the ARS website.

(www.rhododendron.org)

In The Land of Giants

Here is an article written by Roy Lancaster for the May 2006 Gardeners' World magazine. While on a visit to Nepal, Roy came across forests of mighty tree rhododendrons, smothered in spectacular bloom. Just right for a cool April day!

"Picture a rhodo taller than a double decker bus. Now picture a mountainside clothed with them in full flower. Sounds like a dream, but it is reality. Until I visited the Nepal Himalaya in the early 1970s, my experience of rhodos in the wild was limited to the alpenrose, *R. ferrugineum*, in the Spanish Pyrenees, *R. hirsutum* in the Swiss Alps, and a handful of exotic species I'd seen in Malaysia's Cameron Highlands in 1957.

Of course, as a gardener, I was familiar with a host of species and hybrids grown in cultivation, my earliest memories being of the ubiquitous *R. ponticum*, which provided the nearest thing to a jungle in the woods where I played as a child.

But it was only when I began visiting the woodland gardens and estates of south and south-west England in the 1960s that I saw my first real giants of 10m (33 ft) plus. One is an old hardy hybrid growing by a roundabout on the Winchester Road into Southampton. Made up of several individuals, it forms an impressive mound that's a real traffic-stopper in March or April, when it is covered with pink blooms.

One particularly well-known hybrid is 'Cornish Red' also called Smithii group, which is well represented in the south west. Its notable size comes courtesy of the dominant parent, *R. arboreum*, a tree rhodo from the mountains of the Himalaya and south-west China.

This whopper was first introduced to western cultivation as long ago as 1810 and features in many gardens, especially in western Britain and in Ireland. Established trees can be recognized by their normally columnar or conical habit and dense canopy of thick, tapering leaves. The undersides of the leaves have a dense pelt of short hairs that range, depending on variety, from silvery white to buff, cinnamon or foxy red.

In cultivation, *R. arboreum* flowers from around March to April, or sometimes earlier in mild, sheltered spots, and it never fails to attract admiration. But seeing *R. arboreum* in cultivation is one thing, - seeing it in the wild is quite another.

In 1971, I went on a seed-collecting expedition to East Nepal led by my good friend the late Len Beer. From September to December we combed the mountains and valleys east of the Arun River on the lookout for anything that might prove of garden merit.

Naturally, we found lots of rhodos - the southern slopes of the eastern Himalaya with its wet summers nourish a rich variety - and, of course, we found *R. arboreum*. We saw it growing on its own, in groves, and in wave on wave across hillsides, at around 1,600 - 3,500 m (5,250 - 11,500 ft). We camped in its shelter and collected its seeds, the results of which are now growing in a number of collections.

However, we did not see this amazing plant in flower on this trip. It wasn't until a second visit two years later that I enjoyed the spectacle of its mass flowering. And spectacle it most

definitely was - whole hillsides peppered with exquisite pink, crimson, and occasionally, white blooms. I was leading a party of plant enthusiasts on a trek along East Nepal's Mike Danda Ridge, and we were following a steep trail up to the village of Dhankuta.

Above the village, we saw our first *R. arboreum* in flower - it was a form with silver-backed leaves and beautiful trusses of crimson blooms, mostly individuals on baked hillsides, their rich, waxy blooms shining blood-like against the blue sky. As we climbed, the rhodos became more frequent, until they formed dense forests at around 2,700 - 3,000 m (8,850 - 9,850 ft). Here their single or multiple stems sport beards of grey lichen and hummocks of green moss. Some even supported ferns, orchids and other plants enjoying an elevated existence above the forest floor.

For two days we followed an ever-climbing trail that led us beneath the cool, dark rhodo canopy and through sunlit glades in which *Daphne bholua* formed suckering thickets alongside *Rosa serica* and yellow-flowered *Piptanthus nepalensis*.

Here, *R. arboreum* was king, some majestic individuals 20m (65 ft) or more tall, with bare lower stems, dense brown-backed foliage, and trusses of rose-red flowers - a vibrant tapestry against the mist-shrouded hillsides. One huge tree, with branches to the ground, was skirted by *Daphne bholua*. This winter-flowering shrub fills the air with a pleasing scent that you'll remember forever.

Rhodos filled our days. They were the last thing we glimpsed in the gathering gloom and there to greet us in the cold light of dawn. My favorite memory is when we met a group of villagers coming down the trail, with their heavy loads and the womens' hair decorated with rhodo blooms, which are, incidentally Nepal's national flower.

It wasn't all sweetness and light. Leeches lurked on twigs and foliage in the glades and bush-fringed trails, ready to suck the blood of unwary plant hunters and passing animals.

But an adventure without drawbacks or risks is no adventure at all, and there were so many bonuses that we hardly noticed the occasional bite."

From the desk of... **EDITOR'S NOTE**

This is the last issue of The North Island Rhododendron Society's Newsletter, The RhodoTeller, until September. I'd like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a pleasant and fruitful summer! A little rest from the computer is in order, however there is still time to enjoy and work in the garden, and of course the odd golf game. So I will leave you with this last verse or garden proverb:



The kiss of the sun for pardon
The song of the birds for mirth
One is nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth





Recipe Requests



Banana Crunch Cake

(Recipe corrected and reprinted) ...Diana Scott

2 C flour
 $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp salt
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp baking powder
 $\frac{1}{2}$ C margarine (butter)
 2 or 3 mashed bananas
 2 eggs

1 tsp soda
 $1\frac{1}{3}$ C sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ C sour milk
 1 tsp vanilla

Mix and sift dry ingredients, Cut in margarine, add half of the sour milk, bananas and vanilla. Beat well then add eggs and remainder of sour milk. Bake 350°F for 35 min in 9x9 pan (watch middle to ensure baked) Cool.

Topping:

Mix $\frac{1}{2}$ C marg/butter, 1 C brown sugar, 3 Tbsp cream, 1 C coconut and $\frac{1}{2}$ C chopped nuts.
 Place under low broiler until soft and bubbly - around 3 - 5 minutes



Bavarian Rhubarb Cake

...Peter Guertler

Separate 3 eggs keeping whites in separate bowl
 Beat 150 gr. ($1\frac{1}{4}$ C) unsalted butter until creamy
 Add 3 egg yolks and 2 more eggs, beat until creamy
 Add 150 gr. ($1\frac{1}{4}$ C) sugar, beat until smooth
 Add 150 gr ($1\frac{1}{2}$ C) flour, 75 gr (5 Tbsp) corn starch
 Add 1 tsp baking powder and 1 pack vanilla sugar
 Mix all ingredients until smooth and pour evenly into a 10 inch spring form pan
 Peel rhubarb (600 gr.) cut into 1" long pieces, place on top of dough, $\frac{1}{2}$ " apart
 Preheat oven to 180 C (375 F) Bake 25 minutes

Topping:

Beat egg whites until very stiff,
 add 175 gr. ($1\frac{1}{2}$ C) sugar, beat until creamy
 Take from oven, spread egg white evenly on top.

Bake 20 minutes more

Remove from oven, leave in pan until cool.

Japanese Cabbage Salad:

...Marlene Crucq

$\frac{1}{2}$ head cabbage, chopped or shredded
 1 pkg bean sprouts
 2 C fresh sliced mushrooms
 2-4 green onions sliced
 $\frac{1}{2}$ C sliced or slivered almonds, lightly toasted
 $\frac{1}{4}$ C sunflower seeds, lightly toasted
 2 Tbsp sesame seeds
 3 oz. pkg. instant noodles, broken up (I used the chicken-flavour)



Put all ingredients in a large bowl, toss. Pour dressing, below, over and toss again. Shrimp or chicken can be added to salad.

Dressing:

Seasoning from noodle pkg.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ C oil (I used olive oil)
 2 to 4 Tbsp Soya sauce (I used 3)
 3 Tbsp vinegar
 1 tsp sugar
 1 tsp salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp pepper
 Combine all ingredients, put in container and cover.
 Keep in fridge until used.



Chocolate Boil (Dessert Squares)

...Marlene Crucq

$\frac{1}{2}$ C butter or margarine
 2 Tbsp cocoa
 1 Tbsp milk
 1 C packed brown sugar
 2 large eggs, beaten
 3 C graham wafer crumbs
 $\frac{1}{2}$ C medium coconut
 $\frac{1}{2}$ C chopped walnuts



Bring butter, cocoa, milk, sugar and eggs to a boil in saucepan, stirring often. Boil 1 minute.
 Stir in next 3 ingredients, press into greased (or foil-lined) 9x9 inch pan cool. Cool in fridge.
 Icing: Melt 1 C semisweet chocolate chips and 2 Tbsp butter in small saucepan over low heat, stirring often. Spread over cooled bars. Allow to set before cutting. Store in fridge

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