

1984 25th Anniversary 2009



R. Courtenay Lady

# The Rhodoteller

www.nirs.rhodos.ca



## North Island Rhododendron Society

2008/2009 Executive

### President

Diana Scott ..... 338-0208

### Vice-President

Dave Crucq ..... 339-7845

### Past President:

Harry Wright ..... 338-8345

### Secretary

Pauline Thompson ..... 339-3423

### 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 at 7:30 p.m.  
the second Tuesday of each month  
(except May through August)  
United Church in Comox

February

## Coming Events

3rd February 2009 - Executive Meeting 2:00 pm

This month's executive meeting will be held at the home of secretary Pauline Thompson, 350 Torrence Road, Comox. Going north along Pritchard Rd. turn right on Dogwood St. to the end. Turn right on Torrence, and house (not visible from the road) is on the left just after Casey Rd. (350 is across the street from 327)

10th February 2009 - Regular Monthly Meeting

### "Plants from Around the World"

NIRS Member Dany Fortin began his career in landscape gardening 13 years ago working on the #5 Mine Park in Cumberland. Since then, he spent 3 summers working at the Filberg Lodge gardens in Comox, while a student at the North Island College. Dany then lived in England for several years working with a private landscaper, as well as 1 year at the world famous 'Kew Gardens'.

Dany, and his partner Jamie, then travelled the world for a couple of years adding to his plant knowledge base in such places as Europe, China, and South America. Returning to Canada, Dany once again began work for a landscape company in Victoria, which also included work for 1 year at Government House. Dany and Jamie now reside in Comox where he is currently employed with the Parks Department for the Town of Comox.

Dany's slide presentation at our Feb. 10th meeting will include many of the varied plants he has photographed in his travels around the world.

# President's View

...by Diana Scott

A bright sunny day in February is a great time for walking through the garden, reviewing the basic structure, and enjoying the work of seasons past. With perennials cut back and leaves removed from deciduous shrubs and trees, the basic bones of the garden are evident. Regardless of how well proportioned your garden might be, opportunities for change might just start calling to you! With shorter days and longer evenings, it's a perfect time to leaf through the plethora of beautiful garden magazines now available and jot down ideas and 'must have' plants! It is also a great time to browse the Internet Resources available to us before the spring work season begins. Be sure to check out The American Rhododendron Society website (<http://www.rhododendron.org/index.htm>) which has many resources for us including photos and descriptions of both species and hybrid rhododendrons, as well as a variety of interesting articles - many of which are aimed at the beginning Rhodie enthusiast.

This month you will be treated to a presentation by member Dany Fortin who will share some of his plant favourites from around the world. Dany is a knowledgeable plantsman and is sure to provide for an interesting program.

Enjoy the meeting!



...by Dave Godfrey

# Member's Notes

This month we should report that several of our members are in recovery mode during this quiet season for gardeners. Paul Wurz reports that his recuperation from hip replacement surgery just before Christmas is coming along well. Although he is still cautious about his movements, especially outside, he says that he's "on track" for a full recovery and hopes to make our February meeting. Antje Guertler reports that Peter needs to go back for more surgery on his shoulder repair; no word when this will happen.

Long time Rhodoholic and member of NIRS, Ken Gibson had a visit to the hospital early in the New Year. Having complained of tightness in his chest for a few days, Dot finally convinced him to go see the doctor. An ECG and scan didn't reveal any explanation, so Ken was then referred to a specialist in Victoria for a stress test and angiogram. These also proved normal results, although there were a couple of arteries in the heart that needed some early intervention. So they inserted a couple of stints for safe measures and gave Ken the boot the next day. He now reports that he's "back to normal" (whatever that is for Ken)

and able to carry out most of his daily chores.

Membership Director Brian Staton has suffered another setback with his back injuries, and was unable to make our January meeting. He's been coping well with the pain, but this latest setback is "the worst it's ever been." No word yet on Evelyn Wright's recovery from her broken ankle the night before our Christmas party, but we're sure their holiday in Hawaii has probably helped the healing process.

Our 'Sunshine Lady', Pauline Bonney, is herself recovering following an automobile accident in which she suffered a large gash (8 stitches) to the side of her head, as well as a sore hip and ribs. All reports are that she is recovering slowly; although it may be sometime before Dick hears the end of it. We wish all of these members well in their speedy recoveries.

At our January 13<sup>th</sup> meeting, Judy Walker provided an informative educational on various gardening tools. She gave a helpful and humorous talk on the many tools she categorizes as - 'must haves', 'dream tools' and 'what was I thinking when I bought this?' With helpful tips on such items as pruners, rakes, trowels, and plastic repair tape, Judy's presentation was very much appreciated by the 27 members and 5 guests in attendance.



Judy then joined Harry Wright and Dany Fortin on our experts' panel for the evening's 'question and answer' program. Moderated by Isabel Petch, the panel provided answers or suggestions for a variety of gardening problems and questions which some in attendance have been experiencing. The program was well received and enjoyed by all.

Following the program, draws were made for the raffle and door prizes. Christine Aldred was the lucky winner of the rhodo 'Augustinii' provided by Harry Wright. As a secondary prize for the evening's raffle, Dorothy Law won a beautiful 'mini daffs' planted pot, which was graciously donated by Denis Benard and Helen Asselin. They donated two prizes for the evening, and the second was won as a door prize by Amie Anderson. A secondary door prize of a set of cleaning brushes, donated by Judy Walker, was won by Lois Clyde; while Ann Chevrier and Pauline Thompson each won a 2009 garden calendar. Congratulations to all our winners for the evening.

As a special gift to commemorate the chapter's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a newly printed copy of the 'NIRS 2009 Yearbook', was given to those members in attendance. The yearbook was produced by Dave and Noni Godfrey, and contains information about our club and some of its history, plus a complete roster of 2009 members. Copies will be made available to all members attending future meetings, or mailed to out of town members.

Due to member enquiries, copies of the 'Members' Gardens' presentation shown at our December Christmas party will be available for anyone interested in their own personal copy. For an advance payment of \$5 each, CD copies can be ordered through Librarian Noni Godfrey or at the Ways & Means table next meeting.

Harry Wright is organizing a day trip of garden tours to Victoria for Wednesday, the 13<sup>th</sup> of May. Any members and spouses wishing to join the outing can contact Harry for details, or to reserve a seat on the chartered bus.

Speaking of garden tours, plans are already underway for our annual Mother's Day Garden Tour on Sunday, May 10<sup>th</sup>. This year's gardens will include Harry & Gwen's 'Haida Gold Garden', as well as the gardens of Bernie & Gloria Guyader, Nadine Boudreau, Charline & Terry Law, Evelyn Wright and Naomi and Nico teWinkel on Mulberry Lane in Comox. As this is the biggest fund raiser of the year for our chapter, the support of many members will be needed to once again make it a success.

Plans are also being arranged to hold this year's AGM at the Filberg Lodge garden in Comox. This being the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary for our chapter, the executive felt it fitting that we return to the place where the meetings all began in 1984. More details will be coming in future newsletters.

In the meantime, we look forward to seeing most of you at our February meeting when Dany Fortin will be presenting a slide presentation on - 'Plants from around the World.'

## Garden Chatter, Natter and Notes

### ARS 2009 Rhododendron Rendezvous

in Everett, WA. The dates are April 29 to May 3, 2009. The ARS Board meeting is on Wednesday, the 29th and tours start on Thursday, the 30th. There will be a half day of educational workshops on Saturday.

For more details, please see the convention web site at [www.ars-2009-convention.org](http://www.ars-2009-convention.org). There will be on-line registration with credit payment available.

Don Smart...Cascade Chapter...Convention Chairman

### Seedy Saturday Qualicum Beach

Location: Civic Centre Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2009 10:00 - 3:30  
Admission by Donation. Speakers: Sandra Mark, from Fanny Bay, is a long-time community economic developer. Her work has focused on strategies to re-localize food systems. She will speak on "The Island Dilemma" - why we want local food, why

there isn't much being much produced and what is being done to rectify the situation.

This year we are having a Farmers Showcase with local Farmers bringing their stored produce, winter vegetables, frozen meat and chicken, eggs, etc. We are also introducing in another room, a Children's Program (with parental supervision) under the direction of Charleen Forrest of Milner Gardens Shoots with Roots Program. They will be making oragami seed envelopes, finding seeds to plant in the Seed Exchange, planting in toilet paper tubes and taking home their 'bounty'. See <http://www.qbseedysaturday.com> for details.

### The Cowichan Valley Rhodo Society

...is again hosting an exciting 4 day spring bus tour to Washington State Gardens, and you are invited to join them. Contact Bill Dumont - [wedumont@shaw.ca](mailto:wedumont@shaw.ca) or 250 743 9882 for further info.

### pHD Tester Pen

If you're experiencing trouble growing some plants, it might be the condition of your soil. Don't forget for a small rental fee you can use the NIRS' pH Tester to check the conditions of your soil. The pen is available for one week at a cost of \$10 (\$5 is refunded upon return) and can be picked up from and returned to Harry Wright.

### ARS Journal Magazines

If members do not wish to keep their ARS Journal magazines, President Harry asks that you bring them to a meeting. They can then be passed along to new members or distributed to various locations for others to enjoy.

### Rhodos Going Postal

Canada Post has announced that they will be issuing two new postage stamps in March featuring spectacular rhododendron blooms. Trusses of R. yakushimanum 'Mist Maiden' and Dr. Craig's R. Minas Maid are believed to be the two selected for the stamps due to be released on March 13, 2009.

NIRS has been asked by the Courtenay Post office to help design a display for the release of these rhodo stamps. No doubt we will be pleased to assist where possible. For more information on these, and other new stamps, you can find more in the CP 'Details' magazine now available in the main post offices, or on line at [www.canadapost.ca](http://www.canadapost.ca)



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# 25 Years Young - A Look Back

## Rhodo society formed

The North Island Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society (ARS), has established itself in the Comox Valley.

The ARS is a non-profit organization whose objectives are to supply information on rhododendrons and azaleas, operate test and display gardens, register new hybrids and promote and develop interest in the growing and culture of rhododendrons and azaleas.

Much of Vancouver Island has excellent climate and conditions to grow rhododendrons and azaleas and until now the only B.C. chapters were in Vancouver and can provide guest speakers, slide shows, organized tours to gardens, access to journals and other information and contact with other enthusiasts from professional growers to just admirers of the rhodo family.

The meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month beginning Nov. 13 at 7 p.m. For further information please phone Harry Wright.

Oct 3, 1984

November 20, 1984

Dear Mr. Wright,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome the North Island Chapter as our newest chapter. I am only sorry that I was not in Vancouver BC to meet you and the chapter members. I know that I missed out on a first rate conference, especially since Vancouver BC and Canada has special meaning for me personally.

My family, mother and father, came from London, Ontario and my three brothers were born in Vancouver. Hence I have definite feelings of belonging. My recent trip to Australia and New Zealand also gave me recognition of kinship.

Please let me know how I can be of assistance to you at any time. The ARS has good reason to be proud of our active members in Canada. I'll be writing to Harold Johnson also. I know that Fran Egan (Executive Secretary) will be of assistance to you in any way she can.

May all of you have great pleasure with your rhododendron adventure.

With all best wishes,

Janet E. Binford

President

American Rhododendron Society



**FEB 2ND**

**GROUND  
HOG  
DAY**



by Nadine Bondreau

# January Surprises

January's 'Show what's interesting in your garden' was really a delight, and it confirms my belief that many of the group's gardens are like Heaven on Earth.

Diana showed us some of her *Sarcococca*, with its fragrant white dainty flowers. A genus with about 14 species of evergreen shrubs that bloom in winter and grow well in shade. The most common is *Sarcococca hookeriana* from West China, with a height of 4-6 feet, and spread of 2-4 feet, with an erect habit. The leaves are lance-shaped, slender and pointed and about 1 1/2 to 3 inches long. *Sarcococca hookeriana digyna* is about a third less in height and spread. *Sarcococca hookeriana humilis* is a low grower; it might reach 2 feet in height. These are great when mass planted. I had a planting in the centre of a trail crossing; it was great to come across the sweet scent.



R. Rosamundi

Bob floored me with his collection of flowers in his garden for January. His little snowdrops coming through the snow as it melted, his Rhododendron 'Rosamundi', buds swelling with awesome foliage, Viburnum bodnantense with its sweet scent.

He also has a Hamamelis (witch hazel) flowering already. A genus with six species of deciduous flowering shrubs to small trees. The fall foliage is often richly colored yellow to bronze. The flowers have long narrow petals, giving them a spider-like appearance. Depending on species and hybrids, flower colors range from light yellow, deep yellow, orange to red. Hamamelis mollis is a widely popular type with a strong spicy fragrance brought from China. It has smaller yellow flowers than newer hybrids, but is often the first to flower in late December or January. Hamamelis mollis has been bred with Hamamelis japonica producing a new group of hybrids under the collective name Hamamelis x intermedia, which include many good and popular varieties.

*H. x intermedia* 'Pallida' – best known variety, producing large sulphur-yellow blooms, delicate scent

*H. x intermedia* 'Diane' – intense red blooms stand out against bare branches. Wonderful fall foliage color of orange and purple.

*H. x intermedia* 'Arnold Promise' bares deep yellow blooms which usually peak in late February.

*H. x intermedia* 'Jelena' – coppery orange bloom, as with Diane this variety is not noted for its scent but rather their fiery flower colors and autumn foliage. As a general rule, yellow varieties have the best scent.

Hamamelis grow in full sun to partial shade. They prefer a moist, fertile, acidic soil. They can become quite large, so give them space. They make a great specimen plant; taller hybrids are good background shrubs.

The plant that had everyone taking in a deep breath was *Lonicera fragrantissima* (winter honeysuckle). This plants flower produces a rich, delicious fragrance, putting it at the top of my wish list. It is a Chinese native, deciduous (sometimes evergreen in mild winters) shrub with stiff arching growth to 8 feet. Leaves are oval, dull green on top and blue/green beneath, and between 1-3 inches long. The creamy white flowers are produced on previous year wood. They will grow in full sun to partial shade, moist, well-drained soil. These shrubs can grow to 10 feet tall and equally wide.

Dorothy Law brought in a flower from her Helleborus! Yes it too popped up as the snow started to melt. I'm not sure if it was Helleborus niger or *H. orientalis*, as I was too busy thinking that I was sure my Helebores weren't even showing signs of buds. Well the next morning, I went out in the garden and I was right, not a bud, zilch....Maybe next month!

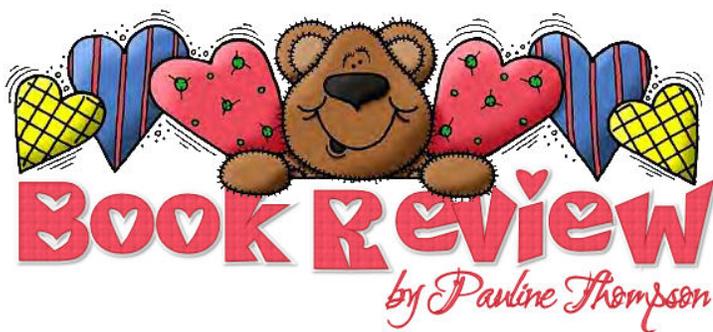


*Lonicera fragrantissima*  
(winter honeysuckle)



*Hamamelis mollis*  
'Arnold Promise'





# BOOK REVIEW

by Pauline Thompson

## *Propitious Esculent The Potato in World History*

by John Reader 2008

Why, you may ask, would someone be attracted to a book with this name? (*Propitious* – favorably disposed, *Esculent* – edible plant) Could be the same reason you are reading this review or it could be the gripping subtitle, *The Potato in World History*? No matter, you are in for a rare treat. This recently published book by John Reader, is an engaging botanical history that traces the potato from its most primitive living relative, a “tuber-bearing epiphyte – an air plant – called *Solanum morelliforme* (the name refers to the leaf form, which is similar to that of black nightshade *S. nigrum*, or morel)” that has “simple leaves, small star-like flowers and tiny berries and is found growing in dense shade on moss-covered walls and rocks and the mossy branches of oak trees – never on the ground – in southern Mexico.” There are hundreds of wild potato species, from which fewer than 10 settled in the mountains of Peru and Bolivia, where more than 8,000 years ago people began to manipulate its exceptional adaptability and now cultivate more than 400 distinct varieties. (What a shame that these innovative peoples do not benefit from their intellectual investment in this important food staple.)



The cultivated potato is a high quality source of protein, rich in amino acids, B complex vitamins, vitamin C, and carbohydrates that are assimilated slowly by the body to provide a steady stream of energy. It is the potato's balanced nutrition, exceptional productivity (more energy per day from a given acre than any other plant crop) and the advantage that it can be stored for months, that contributed to its wide dispersal throughout the world. It was

collected in South America by Pizarro in 1532 and by 1567 commercial quantities were being grown in the Canary Islands for export to Spain.

The book traces the economic and social impact of the potato in Europe and the rest of the world as it establishes itself as a staple food. From the fuel of the industrial revolution to the transformation of China's agriculture – making it the world's largest producer and consumer of the potato. The charm of the book is in its weaving of global statistics with local historical stories: from Papua New Guinea to Törbel, Switzerland; moments of botanical *eureka!* to terrible famines; stories as diverse and varied as the highly adaptable, vigorous and widespread group of plants that are the wild potato.

Although the potato may not be a natural companion plant for rhodos, it is an amazing plant with a compelling history. I think my rhodos will have a few tuber buddies this year. Reserve your copy of this book on-line through the Vancouver Island Public Library and curl up for a wonderful mid-winter read.

## The Question Box



### Rhododendron Ratings

by Norman Todd



**Q.** Should I rely on the rating numbers given in catalogues for selecting plants for my garden?

**A.** Many North American catalogues and publications list three numbers to rate a rhododendron garden's worthiness. The first is for the flower, the second for the foliage and the third for the growing habit. Number 5 is “perfection,” 3 is “average,” and 1 is not worth growing. A 5/5/5 would be sublime in every respect. Fortunately, there aren't any 5/5/5's There are lots that are close.

My opinion is that these ratings should not be given much credence. What is a good garden plant in Duncan is unlikely to behave the same way in Halifax, Nova Scotia, or Auckland, New Zealand, or Edinburgh, Scotland. Furthermore, I don't know how the ratings are determined. I believe the ARS has a ratings committee, but as far as I know they occasionally give a Superior Plant Award (SPA) but do not attribute any numbers. The suspicion is, therefore, that the plant breeder, individually or in a very small group, does the rating. Well, we all know how wonderful we judge our own grandchildren to be.



At the Regional Conference in Harrison Hot Springs during the breeders' round table, Frank Fujioka, a Washington State hybridizer of great repute, made a plea to discontinue the use of number ratings. I gave a hearty "Hear, hear." In the new Kenneth Cox book, "Rhododendrons and Azaleas: A Colour Guide" (a must-have book for the rhododendron gardener), the only award he recognizes as having any usefulness is the Royal Horticultural Society's Award of Garden Merit (AGM). He tells of overhearing through the thin tent walls at the Chelsea Flower Show, the post-prandial, inebriated ramblings of the jurors awarding the First Class Certificate (FCC). The judgement was decided by viewing a truss in a bottle—just like at our shows. You will agree this is not a very stringent method for bestowing a lifetime award. Cox accepts the AGM because it is made on the basis of field trials by a committee and is subject to revision.

So, how one should be guided in selecting a rhododendron? Readers of this have already taken the very best step—they have joined a rhododendron society. Local knowledge is far and away the very best guide. By all means, try out the new hybrids and the new plant introductions from our intrepid plant collectors. If you see a truss in a local show that takes your fancy, give the plant a trial in your own garden. Use the Internet to find the particular hue that your artistic eye deems essential to colour-echo that spiky plant in the foreground. Then, after a dozen or more years, you can disseminate your rating with smug professional profundity. It will be worth knowing.

significant Rhodo collections. The Cox family are world authorities on Rhododendrons, have written many books on the subject, and are well known for their plant-hunting expeditions as well as for hybridizing new rhododendrons and azaleas.



In checking out their new plant section, it was delightful to see the red-purple leaved hybrids that they have been working on for the past 20 years. One of my favourites from their site is "Everred" [85/1C]

which has reddish-purple leaves on both the upper and lower surface and dark red flowers in April. I can hardly wait until it is commercially available here!



Their other new hybrids are also very interesting. One that I find particularly stunning is VIKING SILVER (yak x pachysanthum) which has pale pink flowers in April-May. The most striking feature is the wonderful silvery foliage that persists all summer, especially in full sun. Another Rhodo to covet!

If you have not yet 'travelled' to Glendoick Gardens, I'd highly recommend the trip!

Photos from the Glendoick website

<http://www.glendoick.com/>

<http://www.glendoick.com/content.php?page=newplants>



BY DIANA SCOTT



## Rhodo Browsing

... via the Internet

During these shorter winter days, it is sometimes fun to travel via the internet. On one such travel session I ended up at Glendoick Gardens in Scotland, where one can find the Glendoick nursery and Garden Centre. This may strike a chord of familiarity to those in the 'rhodo world' as it is the home of the Cox family.

In 1953 Euan Cox and his son Peter Cox started a rhododendron nursery at Glendoick in Scotland. Ten years later Peter married Patricia Sherrard from Maryborough House, Douglas outside Cork in Ireland. Over the years the retail mail-order house maintained a small business until 1973 when the Glendoick Garden Centre opened under the direction of Patricia Cox. With family connections still in Ireland, the Centre's mail order nursery supplied most of Ireland's