



# The Rhodoteller

www.nirs.rhodos.ca

DECEMBER

## North Island Rhododendron Society

2010/2011 Executive

**President**

Diana Scott .....338-0208

**Vice-President**

Paul Wurz .....287-4301

**Past President:**

Harry Wright.....338-8345

**Secretary**

Pauline Thompson .....339-3423

**Treasurer**

Dave Godfrey .....335-0717

**Director: Ways & Means**

Nadine Boudreau .....339-0909

**Director: Membership**

Brian Staton .....337-5228

**Director: Revenue Table**

Chris Aldred .....335-3221

**Director: Newsletter/Library**

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

**Social Committee:**

Louise Casson.....334-2331

**Publicity:**

Helena Stewart.....339-1733

**Sunshine Lady:**

Nancy Munro.....334-3719

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



7th December 2010 - Executive Meeting 2 pm

The executive meeting will be held at the home of Dave and Noni Godfrey, 4686 Montrose Drive. South end of Courtenay, turn left onto Spindrift Road. Turn at first right, then first right again, go to end of Inverness Road and turn left onto Montrose. You'll recognize the house, hopefully with all the Christmas lights up.

14th December 2010 Regular Monthly Meeting



What is December without our NIRS Christmas Party?

Following tradition, we will be ending the year with a festive social get-together on December 14<sup>th</sup>. We will be starting at 5:30 to make it an earlier evening for the drive home in the December darkness.

Everyone attending is reminded to bring either a savory or sweet for the pot-luck "Finger food Savories and Sweets" table. **NO GIFT** required this year as we have it on good authority that Santa will be providing!

To lighten the evening a bit, Dave and Noni will be again hosting the "Christmas Jeopardy" game, with all new questions.

Your Christmas committee is working hard to try and make this year's Christmas party an even bigger success than last year. Come on out and have yourself a merry merry good time. Santa and maybe a few elves will be handing out hot cider and gifts as well as playing other games.

# President's View

...by Diana Scott

It's hard to believe that it is December already! The Executive has been busy planning the annual NIRS Christmas Party which will be on Tuesday, December 14<sup>th</sup> at the Church. As in past years, we will begin at 5:30 with some time to socialize before our Pot Luck "Festive Finger Food" Savouries and Sweets. We ask that you bring something for the table that can be eaten 'without a fork!' You will be met with a welcoming mug of hot cider, and Dave and Noni are working hard once again to provide a stimulating Christmas Jeopardy game to add to the spirit of the evening. This year we are making a small change to the evening's events -- instead of having everyone bring a wrapped \$10 gift to exchange, we have something else planned. It's a surprise.... So - no gift to bring this year, just yourselves and your yummy contribution to the food table! We look forward to an informal evening of eating and socializing! Ho! Ho! Ho!

Chris Aldred is heading-up the organization of our Christmas Hamper again this year and we really appreciate all the 'behind the scenes' work that she does to make this happen. NIRS has contributed a hamper to the Salvation Army Drive for a number of years now and although this is a strictly voluntary activity, we have been delighted with the club's participation. We hope that our Hamper can add some joy this Christmas to the receiving family. Donations can be brought to the Christmas Party or delivered to Harry and Gwen's house. If you have any questions please contact Chris at 250-335-3211.

I have at least one tree that is ready and decorated for Christmas. My arbutus unedo, also known as the Strawberry Tree, is sprinkled with

beautiful red jewel-like 'balls'. This evergreen shrub or small tree is in the family Ericaceae, as are rhododendrons, azaleas, shrubs like huckleberry, blueberry, and cranberry, and various heaths and heathers. The arbutus unedo is a native of the Mediterranean region and western Europe, north to western France and Ireland. This is a plant made for the Comox Valley - it is naturally adapted to dry summers and although it prefers well-drained soil and only moderate amounts of water, it seems to survive our cool, wet winters. Unlike most Ericaceae, it also grows well in limy soils. It has a bizarre, but attractive habit of having the fruits mature about every 12 months which means that it has the beautiful red berries at the same time as the new flowers. This flowering happens during our autumn/early winter so it is a very attractive plant at this time of year. The fruit is edible, though bland and mealy. The name 'unedo' is apparently derived from unum edo which means 'I eat one' - obviously not a berry to gobble down! For those handy in the kitchen, it can be made into jam, jellies, syrups, candied fruit, and can be distilled and fermented into wines and



My arbutus unedo, also known as the Strawberry Tree

liqueurs. I will be leaving mine for the birds!

I look forward to sharing a glass of hot cider with you all at the Christmas Party and I wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas and a safe and Happy New Year!.....Diana



...by **Dave Godfrey**

Another interesting propagation workshop was held on Saturday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, as 14 members gathered at the garden of **Ross and Nancy Munro**. For all the details see an article provided by **Helena Stewart** in this newsletter.

Before, during and after the demonstrations and discussions at the workshop, members were treated to coffee, tea and blueberry muffins fresh baked and served by Nancy. All those in attendance thanked Ross and Nancy for their generous hospitality in providing this very educational workshop.

At our November meeting, guest speaker **Ron Knight**, with his wife **Carla**, provided a wonderful presentation on dwarf rhododendrons. Over 50 were in attendance to enjoy the many colourful photographs taken in and around their Caron Gardens on Pender Island. Ron discussed the various advantages of growing dwarf rhododendrons (less than 2 ft tall) or low growing varieties (2 to 4 ft.)



As Ron explained, dwarf rhododendrons grow in the high alpine regions of the Himalayas, and therefore grow low to avoid the cold winds. They generally have smaller leaves and prefer full sun; thus they are less susceptible to powdery

mildew. The foliage of dwarfs can be much more colourful than their larger counterparts, and provide added garden colour when not in bloom. Dwarf rhodos are also ideal for growing in containers or around rock gardens. Many members took the opportunity to buy one or two dwarf rhodos that Carla had for sale at the meeting. Thanks once again to all who attended.

Congratulations to the many prize winners of the evening. **Helena Stewart** won the *Rhododendron 'Saffrano'* - a raffle prize provided by **Harry Wright**, and a second prize of *R. 'Bruce Brechtbill'* provided by **Dave Godfrey** was won by **Ruth Fowler**. The door prize of *R. 'Nancy Evans'* donated by **Ron Knight** was won by **Ross Munro**. As secondary door prizes, **Fiona Clark** was the lucky winner of the azalea 'Rosebud' donated by **Brian Staton**, while **Jill Gould** won a fancy sedum planter donated by **Noni Godfrey**; a collection of daffodil bulbs was won by **Don Law**, and **Lois Clyde** won a box of rhodo fertilizer - both provided by our Ways & Means committee. As always, the goodies were delicious. Our thanks go to all those members who pitched in to bring the treats, especially to **Peter Guertler** who always brings his specialties.

Members are also reminded that, at our Christmas party on December 14<sup>th</sup>, we will once again be collecting non-perishable items or cash donations for our annual Christmas hamper program. This program is strictly a voluntary participation. For details of items needed contact our hamper coordinator **Christine Aldred** at 335-3221. Any members wishing to donate but unable to make the Christmas party can drop off their donations before December 14<sup>th</sup> to **Harry and Gwen Wright** at Haida Gold Gardens.

Time is running out for those members who have not yet renewed their membership for 2011. We will be publishing our annual yearbook in January, which includes a members' roster. Members are asked to pay their membership dues at the party, or mail a cheque to the club's address found at the bottom of page one of this newsletter. Sorry, but if dues are not paid by the end of December, your name will not appear in the 2011 yearbook.

Ho, Ho, Hope to see you at the party!

# Sparkle of the Season Blueberries Propagation Workshop

...by Helena Stewart

If you walk into the homes of the 19 NIRS members attending Ross Munro's blueberry propagation workshop Saturday, October 30, you'll see some strange conforming sculptures: little black pots with brown sticks reminiscent of incense sticks in a Buddhist temple.

Even though the sticks don't look like much now, they will evolve into magnificent Blue Crop blueberry plants by spring—or so Ross, our propagation guru, promises. And Ross should know whereof he speaks since he once had a blueberry farm in the Fraser Valley's Hatzic Prairie.

Gathered in Ross's garage, we students were first given the basics, rules that are true for most types of propagation. First and foremost, cleanliness is important—tools should be disinfected in a ten percent solution of bleach and water and all tools should be sharp. Ross uses a fine sandpaper to hone the edge of his secateurs.

The best time to take a cutting is August (we were a wee bit late) and these should be green wood rather than brown. Scions should be about 4-1/2 to 5-1/2 inches long; another method is to take dormant 18" – 24" cuttings in January or February, wrap them and refrigerate so they can be planted in April or May. Unlike rhodos, blueberry scions will root more readily if they are taken from older, mature branches.

For a potting mix, Ross uses a mix of coir and shale because he finds that they both provide aeration and hold moisture allowing the cutting to get adequate oxygen. Other possible mixes include: peat moss and clean sand, peat and vermiculite, Perlite and sand or just fine fir bark. The main rule is that the mixture should be free-draining without added nutrients. To prepare the cutting, Ross begins about 1.5 inches up from the bottom of the cutting and cuts from top to bottom. He uses his secateurs upside down to ensure a clean sharp cut on the long slope downwards. Ross makes a hole in the damp (not wet) potting mix and dips the end of the cutting into a fairly strong rooting hormone for ten seconds. His favourite rooting hormone is "Roots and Shoots" but there are numerous other acceptable ones both powdered and liquid. The cutting is plunged into the mix for 2/3 of its length and then gently firmed in. Mist the cuttings gently.

As for the propagation environment, it all depends on

what you have or what you can afford. At the basic level, the pot can be covered with a plastic bag that is secured with an elastic band and then placed where it is warm and where it can get adequate light. The mini nursery should be checked frequently to make sure there is no mildew from excessive moisture. Once the cuttings begin to leaf out, a foliar spray is good. The next stage with the cuttings (in spring) is to transfer the now-rooted blueberry scions into a one-gallon pot. If all goes well and the new plant reaches 12" – 16" in height, the brand-new blueberry can be planted in the fall—the very best time to plant.

Adding to Ross's presentation, Roberts Smith and Arthur Ralf described their propagation practices. Bob talked about the equipment he uses and how he has built water-heated beds and automatic misters that are essential for mass propagation of thousands of scions. Arthur outlines another method using an outdoor cold frame that places a heating pad on bare ground with a plastic cover for protection and humidity. He suggested that hobby propagators experimenting with just a few rhodos make a cold frame to fit the size of the heat pad.

Perhaps the highlight of the morning was a sneak preview into what those little "sticks" will eventually produce. Nancy Munro kept the hot tea and coffee flowing as she brought in baskets of fragrant blueberry muffins. Delicious and thanks, Nancy.

*Note: I noticed the other day that two of my cuttings now have promising green nodules extending from my "sticks." You see, Virginia, blueberries do propagate.*



# Trip Down Under (to the other A.R.S.)

...by Harry Wright

The spring of 2010 in the Comox Valley was not very enjoyable, so this fall Gwen and I thought we would like to try and find spring, somewhere, as in warm weather and flowers in bloom. But in the fall, that means the tropics or down-under.

So off we went travelling to Vancouver where we boarded a cruise ship. We have enjoyed several cruises before, but always on those larger ships. This time we selected a smaller one, under the 700 passengers' category, and in the future we will always go small. The service and accommodations were wonderful and much more personable. The second day out I mentioned to the maître-de that there wasn't any lemon pie on the menu, one of my favorites. He gave me somewhat of a puzzled look, however, on our eighth night, shocker, lemon pie for dessert!

Upon arriving in the Hawaiian Islands, we cruised around most of them. The evening we were cruising by the big island of Hawaii, the volcano Mauna Loa was spewing lava and putting on quite a show. It is moments like these that seem to linger in ones mind, as this one sure did.

After a few days of enjoying the warm weather and the sights on the Island of Oahu, we were off by air to Sydney, Australia. Ten hours later we landed down-under, not as warm as Hawaii, but still very mild and pleasant weather.

During our three day stay in Sydney, we squeezed in a harbour tour and a city bus tour, which included the botanical gardens. We also spent a lot of time walking the downtown harbour area; beautiful, with several large water features. I even had the time and enjoyment of taking Gwen to the theatre at the Opera House.

Next stop was Auckland, New Zealand, where we once again met up with my cousin and his wife. They were on the cruise with us, but had stayed for a few extra days in Hawaii. We had two nights in Auckland, so we rented a car and hit the road. Sure glad my cousin was driving, but he drove on the wrong side of the road, as everyone else was. We saw forests of lumber trees, all planted in nice neat rows. We spent our nights in or around small towns; sometimes they can be just as interesting as larger ones.

One of our more interesting stops was at the Waitomo Caves, a huge cave with high ceilings covered in millions of glow worms, creating a starry sky within the underground night. As we travelled deeper into the cave, in small boats, the ceilings were still covered with tiny glow worms clinging to the cave ceiling. Quite a sight!

After Auckland, we spent two days in Rotorua with friends who we had met several years ago at a Rhododendron conference in the United States. They have a 2-acre Rhodo garden which they open to the public. It was a real joy to be able to wander through a large garden with such a assortment of plant material. One plant that seemed to be re-seeding itself all over the garden was Clivia, in all its different colours. Also while in Rotorua, we visited the geothermal pools; hot springs with warm water just bubbling out of the ground along with the pervasive smell of sulphur.

Leaving by ferry from Wellington, on the North Island, it was a 3 hour journey to Nelson, on the South Island. Two of our days on the South Island included a three hour bus trip through meadows, lots of pasture land with many herds of cattle, sheep and deer. Cool temperate rain forests, jungle-dense, complete with vines, climbers, perching plants, ferns, and tree ferns are some of the diverse areas of the South Island. Trees in New Zealand are mostly three types of Beech - Mountain, Silver and Red.

We travelled around lakes, up mountains a mile high to a tunnel - a mile long and then very quickly back down to sea level. We spent overnight on the yacht 'Milford Mariner' that sleeps 60, and cruises the Milford Sound. This area receives around 500 inches of rain a year, but fortunately for us, our two days were solid sunshine (as requested). Milford Sound is a narrow and deep fiord with many waterfalls falling hundreds of feet, a spectacular sight. In spots the tour boat was so close the water was falling on the decks.



While on the Mariner, we had the opportunity to embark on a tender boat and check out some of the shore line. On shore we saw New Zealand fur seals and sighted two Blue Penguins about 3 years old. Blue Penguins are the smallest of that species, about 10 inches tall. Our scenic cruise through the Milford Sound brought us out to the Tasman Sea and back.

We spent a day in Dunedin where we took time to tour New Zealand's first Botanical Garden. This 28 hectare garden is packed with so many interesting and different plants. I appreciate trees and with their climate their trees sure are huge!

Our last night in New Zealand was spent in Christchurch, where they were still doing clean up from the previous earth quake. There was a 4.5 after-shock on the evening we stayed, another new experience for us. So after I found Gwen, we retired early for a much needed good night's sleep.

Well rested, the next day we flew back to Sydney and then on to Melbourne, for the Australian Rhododendron Society's Golden Anniversary Conference in the National Rhododendron Garden, in Olinda.



Situated in the Dandenong Ranges, the garden is 100 acres in size, created by volunteers from the society. There are 15,000 rhododendrons, 12,000 azaleas, 3,000 camellias and 250,000 daffodils in the garden. The garden also incorporates extensive plantings of conifers, magnolias, cherries, beeches, maples and

many other plants, making it a true botanical garden. Some names of the rhodos were familiar, but most of them we had never heard of before. Being started in the 1960's, the National Rhododendron Garden is of the age that most of the plants were huge.

As the ARS Conference was held at the garden, we stayed at a nearby hotel and were picked up daily at 8 am. There were lectures in the morning and garden tours in the afternoon. The gardens were spectacular and large; one even had a small train to tour us around. During the three day conference we were back at the hotel by 4 pm, picked up again at 6 pm and dined out at "top notch" restaurants. With less than 80 delegates registered, which was more than they had expected, meant that it was very sociable. The weather was cool on the first day, but started warming up nicely for the remainder of our stay.

The Australian Conference was from Oct 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>, an extremely busy 4 days but very enjoyable. Yes, we accomplished what we had set out for as we did find spring and lots of plants in bloom.

At the end of the conference, we flew home to Comox via Los Angeles and Vancouver; a 14 hour trip. After a long, busy and exhausting holiday, we were met by family, flowers, and home, where the wood stove was already warming our autumn house.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Christmas Light Display  
Gwen & Harry Wright's  
769 Chaster Rd Courtenay  
Dec. 20<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> & 24<sup>th</sup>  
2010  
7 - 9 PM  
Cash donations accepted for  
The Sunshine Lunch Club



# Legends and Flowers

...Part 1

...by Helena Stewart

While your average passionate gardener usually prefers articles on soil chemistry or pruning basics, there are times when a good yarn is just as much fun as education. Scores of piquant legends for example reach back to classic times and involve some of our favourite plants and flowers. While you wouldn't want to bet your bank account on the relative truth behind these stories, they do touch eternal human themes: fear, love, loyalty, bravery, devotion etc. Take the tale behind the

## Christmas Rose as a timely example.



On that first Christmas, 2000+ years ago, legend tells of a young peasant girl who was upset because she had nothing to offer the baby Jesus.

When she began to cry, an angel appeared before her, sweeping away the snow to reveal a beautiful white flower that had sprung up from the girl's tears. The grateful little girl made her offering to the Child and so ever after the Christmas rose has bloomed at Christmastime.

There are legends around other Christmas plants like the holly and poinsettia as well. One tells of the Holy Family fleeing into the desert from Herod desperately looking for a place to hide their Babe but finding only barren bushes. The **holly** at this time was not an evergreen and all its leaves had fallen but Mary prayed for a miracle. Lo and behold, the leaves grew bushy and green so it could hide and protect the baby Jesus.



**Poinsettias**, native to Mexico, come in more than 100 varieties and were named after America's first ambassador to Mexico, Joel Poinsett who brought the plants to America in 1828. Mexicans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century thought the plants were symbolic of the Star of Bethlehem so the poinsettia became associated with the Christmas season. According to Mexican legend, a brother and sister named Maria and Pablo wanted to offer the Child a gift as was local custom but since they

were poor and had no money at all, they decided just to go and take a look. On the way to church on Christmas Eve, they spotted some weeds they thought might decorate the crib. As they were decorating, other children arrived and cruelly mocked the pair who began to cry with shame and helplessness. Suddenly the weeds burst into bright red petals that looked like stars. Everyone was awed and said that their gift of love was more precious than anything else placed on the altar

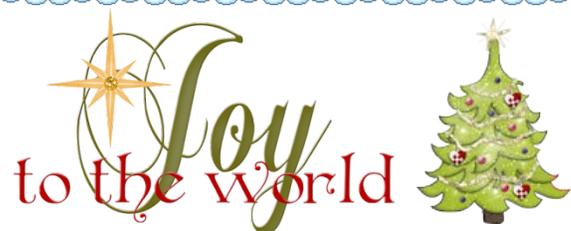


While we don't usually cultivate **mistletoe**, a Christmas legends and plants article would not be complete without reference to kissing under the mistletoe. It seems this tradition began with a Norse legend and the goddess Frigga. Frigga (goddess of love) had a son named Balder (god of the summer sun) who was a bit of a morose character. One night he dreamed of his own death which scared Frigga who knew that if her son died all life on Earth would come to an end. To avoid this, she took on the monumental task of contacting every animal and plant under and above Earth to make them promise to keep her son safe. Loki however (god of evil) was an enemy of Balder and he learned that Frigga had overlooked one plant that grew on apple and oak trees—the mistletoe. Loki made an arrow and wound mistletoe on the tip. (Mistletoe is reputed to be poisonous and historians say Alexander the Great was poisoned by the plant.) Loki talked Balder's blind brother (Hoder, god of winter) into an archery contest and rigged it so Balder was shot with the poisoned arrow and died. The Earth began to grow cold and plants began to die so Frigga decided to negotiate with mistletoe. Her tears on the plant became white berries and she promised that anyone who stood under the plant would never be harmed and would be entitled to a kiss as a token of love. Seems mistletoe was a bit more trustworthy than the Taliban.

Alas, after searching everywhere, I found no trace of a legend for our beloved **rhododendron**. I did learn however that in the past ancients had rituals and spells involving rhodos believing that the bush had magical and protective powers.



Anyone for a little incantation and spell casting at the next meeting?



The NIRS Rhodo family grieves the passing of one of our dearest friends.



Pauline Bonney passed away in her home on the morning of 27th November 2010.

Pauline was one of the founding members of the North Island Rhododendron Society and was always very active in the club.

She will be missed by all who knew, and loved her, and we will think of her often.

We have been informed by the family that, by her request, there will be no public service.

Dick advises, "Pauline wanted very little fuss and no funeral, no flowers, no cards, just kind thoughts from all her friends".

A family "tea in the garden" is all she wanted.

We will remember you Pauline...rest in peace!

BEHOLD  
I bring you  
Glad  
tidings  
of great joy

Cooked To Smile!



wishing you a  
**Scrumptious**  
Christmas

## Bacardi Rum Cake Bundt

(Diana Scott)

### CAKE

1 cup chopped, toasted pecans or walnuts  
1 18-1/2 ounce cake mix (yellow or ...)  
1 1-3/4 ounce (4-serving size) instant vanilla pudding mix

4 eggs  
1/2 cup vegetable oil  
1/2 cup cold milk  
1/2 cup Bacardi dark rum

### GLAZE

1/2 cup butter  
1 cup sugar  
1/4 cup water  
1/2 cup Bacardi dark rum

### Preparation:

**Cake:** Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Grease and flour 12-cup Bundt pan. Sprinkle nuts on bottom of pan. Combine all cake ingredients. Beat for 2 minutes on high with electric mixer. Pour into prepared pan. Bake for 1 hour (40 minutes in my convection oven...). Cool in pan. Invert on serving plate. Prick top with fork. Drizzle glaze over top of cake. Use brush or spoon to put extra dripping back on cake.

**Glaze:** Melt butter in saucepan. Stir in water and sugar. Boil 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and stir in rum. Note: The rum will cause steam. Be careful not to burn yourself.

## Blueberry Muffins:

(Nancy Munro's delicious muffins)

2 C flour  
3 1/2 tsp BP  
3/4 C sugar  
1/2 t salt

Mix together in large bowl, then add:  
3/4 C milk  
1 tsp vanilla  
1 egg  
1/4 C melted butter

Gently mix then add 1 C blueberries  
Nancy says...Bake 350°F for approximately 20 - 25 minutes, then eat slowly!

Something To Smile At!



Until Next Month  
Noni

