



January

**North Island
Rhododendron
Society**

2009/2010

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Social Committee:
Marleen Crucq 941-1957

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.



5th January 2010 - Executive Meeting 2:00 pm

The 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)



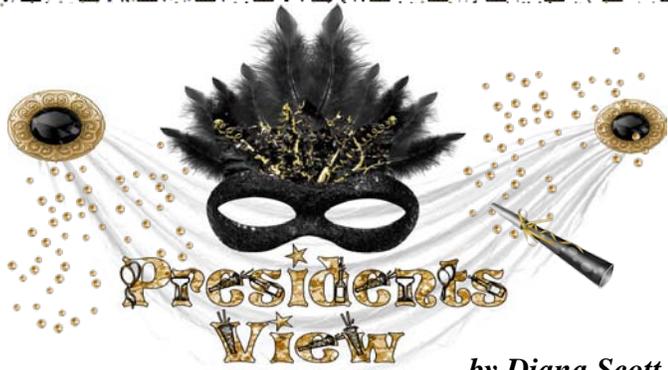
12th January 2010 - Regular Monthly Meeting

"Panel of Experts"

~Facilitated by Paul Wurz~

Once again, our ever popular panel of local experts will be discussing various aspects of gardening, with Paul Wurz as panel moderator. Although the emphasis will be on rhododendrons, the panel consisting of NIRS members Bernie Guyader, Arthur Ralfs and Ross Munro will take questions and try to provide answers on any aspect of gardening. So be sure to bring along any questions or concerns you may have from your gardening experiences.





As the temperatures dip below freezing, I watch the garden take on the frosty hues of winter. The Rhodos in our garden sustain winter damage from time to time, but usually 'weather' the mild cold that we typically get here on the coast. Over the past few winters we've had some pretty COLD spells, which may be the beginning of a nippier trend in years to come.



Looking out our window at the garden, we can usually tell how cold it is by the curl and droop of the Rhodo leaves! Folks new to Rhodo growing may not be aware that the sight of droopy, shriveled-looking leaves on their favourite Rhodo is an appropriate protective response to the drop in temperature. Rhodos that are cold-hardy seem to show more leaf movement than those that are not.

Biologist Erik Tallak Nilsen in his research paper "Why Do Rhododendron Leaves Curl?" <http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/796.pdf> helps to explain his view of this interesting phenomenon.

Nilsen begins by crediting Charles Darwin for first categorizing leaf movements in his book "The Power of Movement in Plants" published in 1880. Darwin reported that many plant parts, particularly leaves, move in response to both environmental and physiological factors. The key factors are light intensity, light direction, water content, and temperature. The leaves of plants in

hot, dry environments respond to temperature by moving upward to avoid excess light absorption. In contrast, many Rhodo leaves droop downward and curl inward in response to cold temperatures.

According to the research described in Nilsen's article, the droop and the curl are two distinct phenomena, both serving to protect the leaf from cold damage. Thermotropic (temperature related) leaf movements have been commonly thought to be a mechanism to prevent leaf desiccation or loss of water during cold periods or a way for the plant to shed snow, but Nilsen's research does not support these theories. The droop and curl seem to be related more to the protection of the cell membranes from the effects of freezing. The leaf drooping is controlled by hydration of the leaf stalk or petiole, and the downward angle this produces may serve to protect the leaf from membrane damage due to strong sunlight and cold temperatures. The inward curl appears to be a response to leaf temperature (as opposed to air temperature) which reduces the amount of leaf area exposed to light, preventing cell damage by slowing the rate of thaw. Most damage caused by leaf freezing is a result of ice crystals piercing the cellular membranes, followed by too rapid a rate of re-warming. Drooping and curling may both reduce the area exposed to sunlight thus slowing the rate of re-warming after a period of cold. Leaf movement seems to be a significant factor in determining cold hardiness in rhododendrons.



Despite what it looks like in your garden, the Rhodos that appear the most shriveled may very well be the ones that are taking the cold weather in stride! I hope that over the upcoming months you will be taking our cold winter temperatures in stride along with your Rhodos!

I wish you a very Happy New Year and look forward to seeing you at our next meeting January 12, 2010!...Diana

Luck for the new Year

MEMBER'S NOTES

...by Dave Godfrey

Wow! Another wonderful Christmas party on December 8th and by all reports every one of the 40 members and guests in attendance seemed to enjoy. Thanks to all those who pitched in to make this party one of the best in recent memory. Special thanks to Diana, Chris, Corrine and Nadine for their prep work. And thanks to those who helped during the evening's activities.

Myrna Trimmer graciously stepped in to organize the kitchen when Louise Casson was called away at the last minute. Pauline Thompson prepared a delicious hot apple cider for everyone, and Dorothy Law helped serve it up. The assortment of hot and cold finger foods made for a delicious dinner, complete with a variety of desserts. Thank you one and all for these.



The highlight of the evening was a new "Christmas Jeopardy" game organized and run by Noni and Dave Godfrey. We thank Garth Wedemire of the Fraser Valley chapter for providing the original presentation, which was adapted for our local needs. Congratulations to the winning 'yellow' team of Harry Wright, Marjorie DeWitt, Ken Webb, Evelyn Wright, Dorothy Law and our newest member, Ruth Rose. They each received a potted rhododendron prize.

Congratulations also to Sheila Medori winner of the recipe box guessing game, and Barb Staton who guessed the number of peppercorns in the jar. The call for a recount is still in progress at the time of publication! Draws for three beautiful prizes were won by Harry Wright, Pauline Thompson and Evelyn Wright. Our thanks to Ken Webb of Victoria for donating the small potted rhodo prizes and to John Scott for building and donating the fancy gardener's tool box. And once again, our thanks go to Harry & Gwen's daughter, Debbie McLaren, for making and donating a beautiful wreath for the door prize that was won by Antje Guertler.

welcome



We welcomed our guests Madeleine and Ken Webb of the Victoria Chapter (now associate members of NIRS) and Diana's friend Janet Taylor visiting from Winnipeg, who joined us for party. The food, the fun and the friendship made this year's party a wonderful success. During the gift exchange, Myrna Trimmer became the proud caretaker of 'Miss Piggy' for the coming year. Marjorie Dewitt had the prized porcine displayed in her garden for the past year and was pleased to hand over the responsibility to Myrna.



More photos are posted on our website's Photo Gallery page for all to enjoy.

Our January meeting will once again feature our NIRS 'panel of experts' to answer questions members or guests might have relating to any gardening aspects. On the panel this year will be Bernie Guyader, Arthur Ralfs and Ross Munro, with Paul Wurz as the moderator. Be sure to attend on January 12th and bring along your questions.

The Christmas 'Open Gardens' at Gwen & Harry's "Haida Gold Garden" were once again a tremendous success on the evenings of Dec 20th, 22nd, and 24th. With over 1000 people passing through the decorated pathways of their garden, the Wright's raised \$1550 in donations to the Sonshine Lunch program.

In closing, we would like to thank all those members who once again donated to our annual Christmas Hamper program. Christine Aldred organized the project again this year, and was extremely pleased with the generosity of our members in helping a less fortunate family of five this holiday season.

Tidbits...

Louise and the kitchen crew!

I wish to thank Myrna, Dorothy & Isabel for taking over the task of food preparation for our great Christmas party. A big thanks to everyone who made the chore easier for the team. Also, I wish to thank all members who have been very generous with delicious goodies for past meetings. A special mention has to go out to Peter and Antje Guertler for their never ending contributions of tempting calories at most meetings.

Next meeting, I will be looking for volunteer names and dates when they can take their turn at bringing goodies. We must keep up the tradition of visiting and enjoying goodies with our coffee and tea. I know there are many who repeatedly bring sweets or savouries. However, I am looking for new members who have yet to tempt us with their delicious baking, so please step forward and offer up some of your choice treats. (call me 250-334-2331)

Thank you very much to all of you for your support in making my task less daunting. We are always eager to test any new recipe you wish to bring to our conversation table of mouth watering treats.

See you Tues. Jan. 12, 2010..... Louise



Christmas Hamper Drive!

The response to our appeal for foodstuffs and gifts for a needy family has been great. With some monies donated, I bought the last few items that we needed to top up our hamper.

We had gifts for all members of the family, and I am sure they were much appreciated - we have always had good feedback for our efforts.

I delivered our boxes to the Salvation Army facility, and they were picked up by the family we sponsored.

Once again, I would like to thank all those who donated food, gifts, or cash for a Valley family less fortunate than ourselves.

A Thank You card from the family has been hand delivered by the Salvation Army. A letter was also received from the organization thanking us for our continued support of a large family.

Hoping everyone has had a Safe and Peaceful Christmas and will see you in the New Year....Christine



Our Annual Hamper for the Salvation Army

Sister Seedlings

...by Harry Wright

Sister seedlings are seedlings that have the same parents and come from the same seed lot. Sorry boys, but they are always sisters. These gals can vary greatly in personal characteristics; no difference between plants and humans really.

Despite their noticeable differences, 'Courtenay Queen', 'Courtenay Princess' and 'Iona Cee' are sister seedlings. Their parents are "Haida Gold x Golden Star" but they vary greatly in looks and growing habits. Several other plants from the same seed lot are growing in our field. Unfortunately, in colour and habit, they are too much like their parents, so their future is questionable.

One appreciable difference between these 'sisters' is that the blooming period varies greatly. The Princess blooms in mid-April, the Queen in mid-May and Iona Cee in mid-June. These times may vary with the season, but it extends a nice showing. Their height at maturity seems to be about the same for the Queen and the Princess, with Iona Cee being a little smaller and a bit more compact.



Rhododendron 'Iona Cee'
Hybridized by Harry Wright - registered by Bill Dale.
Courtenay Queen x Haida Gold.
(First year's bloom in my small forest garden)
Photo courtesy of Iona Campagnolo.



In colour, 'Courtenay Princess' and 'Courtenay Queen' get their touch of pink and fragrance from *R. fortunei*, which is related to Haida Gold. While 'Iona Cee' is a lot like her mom, 'Haida Gold'. The biggest difference is 'Iona Cee' blooms approximately one month later, which again prolongs the beauty in the season.

I know someone will ask... Even if I had given these plants male names would they then be called 'Brother Seedlings'? The simple answer is "NO!"



Just a reminder that NIRS membership brings discounts at many garden retailers. Those businesses now providing discounts for 2010 include:

- Arrowsmith Greenhouses - Alberni Hwy, Qualicum
- Art Knapp's Plantland, Courtenay
- Bees and Blooms Nursery in Courtenay
- Black Creek Farm & Feed Supply
- Campbell River Garden Center (not seeds or bulbs)
- CV Ornamental Concrete on Knight Rd. in Comox
- Growing Concern in Black Creek (seasonal opening)
- Just 'n Tyme Greenhouse Supplies, Courtenay
- Paradise Plants, Courtenay
- River Meadows Farms, Courtenay
- Serendipity, Campbell River (garden ornaments only)
- Shar-Kare - both Courtenay and Campbell River
- The Plant Collector Nursery and Gardens



Check our website www.nirs.rhodos.ca for information on The Ultimate Rhododendron Conference.



Vancouver Island Hybridizers

The Victoria Contributors-Part I

by Alan Campbell, Cowichan Valley Chapter

The Victoria Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society came into being in 1980 through the desire and need seen by notables such as Fred Collins, Bill Dale, and Norman Todd. The Victoria Rhododendron Society was by no means the first horticultural society to be chartered in the Garden City, but becoming the new kid on the block was not a detriment. Membership swelled in this genus-exclusive society, drawing gardeners from throughout Victoria and southern Vancouver Island. Among those filling chair seats at those early Chapter meetings were leaders, if not legends, of the local horticultural scene. Three men with highly educated and of diverse backgrounds, would come to touch the rhododendron gardens and gardeners of Victoria.



Albert de Mezey often used *R. williamsianum*

Albert de Mezey (1903–2005)

Albert de Mezey was born in Hungary to an upper-class family, which assured him of a classical education and paved his way into his chosen field of engineering. Forced out of his home and country after his father's death and political upheaval in central Europe, he and his sister Mary, along with their mother, found their way to the Canadian Prairies in 1928. The Dirty Thirties notwithstanding, Albert de Mezey continued his education into university, obtaining a firm grasp of engineering principles, which would hold him in good stead as boom times developed with the Second World War.

The de Mezeys found their way to Victoria in 1946, and Albert quickly became infatuated with the native flora of Vancouver Island. His membership in the Vancouver Island Rock and Alpine Garden Society undoubtedly found him scrambling over the scree of the central highlands of the Island. Now, we all know how to identify a rock and alpine gardener, don't we? Their

noses to the ground and posterior regions catching the sun. It is with this picture in mind that I put into words a vision of mine. It isn't documented anywhere, but I can picture Albert de Mezey and Ted Greig scrambling over the moraines of Forbidden Plateau and bumping heads over a rare specimen of *Saxifrage lyallii*. I know it just had to have happened that way.

The de Mezey home in Victoria was a Samuel Maclure mansion built in the Fairfield district, and the garden quickly became a mecca for garden enthusiasts. Albert's interest in hybridizing and his generosity would see his work flow out to the gardens of neighbors and friends. Should he become especially enamored of someone he would name one of his hybrids for that person. Some of his known hybrids are 'Jean Todd' (*R. williamsianum* x *R. gymnocarpum*) (not registered) and 'Shirley Smith', of unknown parentage and again not registered. One very familiar hybrid on the Island is known as 'Mary's Favourite', named for Albert's sister, but when Herman Vaartnou attempted to register the plant it was found that the name had already been taken, so it was renamed and registered in 1989 as 'Mary de Mezey' (*R. williamsianum* x *R. wardii*). A second plant of the same cross which is seen in some gardens is 'Mary's Favourite Sister' (not reg.). The plant 'Albert de Mezey' (not reg.) is another *R. williamsianum* cross. Yet another of his crosses is named for Princess Abkhazi, also of Victoria garden fame—'Peggy Abkhazi' ('Penjerrick' x 'Aurora') (reg. 1989 by Bill Dale).

In his often-published article "The Birds and the Bees" Norman Todd tells of being told by Albert de Mezey that "to grow rhododendrons one needs a physical age of 30 and a longevity of 300." This indicates to me that he realized the effort, dedication, and deliberation needed to grow rhododendrons well. On the other hand, another well known member of the Victoria Chapter states ". . . Another problem that comes out with Albert de Mezey's plants is that he used the same (unregistered) name for all the seedlings from a cross—you have almost no idea what the plant will look like! Worse, there are so few records you might not even know what rhodos are crossed. It's a shame." Did a man so educated, such an astute businessman, an engineer, all aspects which demand precise record-keeping, become so lax when it came to his hybridizing hobby? Apparently so. Of course records can be lost or misplaced. Are there more de Mezey hybrids hidden in Victoria gardens? I like to think so, but for now we can enjoy and purposefully preserve those plants he has left us.continued next month.

