



The
Rhodoteller

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Rhododendron
Society
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2015/2016**

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(Help Wanted)

DECEMBER 2015

Coming Events

1st December 2015 -- Executive meeting

This month's meeting will be held at the home of *Margaret Griffith-Cochrane*. The meeting will start at **10 a.m.**

8th December 2015 -- Christmas Party

Every meeting at the NIRS is informative and fun but our Christmas Party is just pure fun. Team games, great music and a delicious meal. See the article inside for full details.

Rhodo in the Banner

This contest has been cancelled due to the Christmas Party and will resume in January. The rhodo in this banner is a snow covered *R. strigillosum*

Nadine Boudreau was the proud winner last month and was awarded a beautiful rhododendron "*Olive*".

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

PRESIDENT'S NOTES



I don't like November -- that is one seriously ugly day out there! It's 3 o'clock and the light is already fading -- The Dark Time is clearly back in town. The sad thing is that I sat down to write this column for our December newsletter -- a piece full of words like joy, merry, happy with maybe a dash of dark rum. Really hard to get in the mood, though, with the wind smashing those big, fat raindrops violently against the window. Luckily, just as I was starting to think about quitting and grabbing a nap, I happened to press my face against the window to check on the garbage can and that's when I saw it. Just to the right of our office window is a little yellow rose which has been bravely struggling to bloom for some time. Some of the blossoms are almost fully out now and it's amazing how they just light up like a child's face on Christmas morning. That little yellow rose was like a light at the end of the Dark Time Tunnel and, suddenly, I could see the subject of my column clearly in my mind. Early blooming rhododendrons. Have you ever noticed that my thinking process is somewhat convoluted?

We've all heard of the Christmas cactus and Christmas rose (*Helleborus niger*) but is there a Christmas rhododendron? It would be easy to get excited when you go to the books and see the name 'Christmas Cheer' but as you read further that excitement would be quickly dashed. 'Christmas Cheer', sadly, doesn't bloom at Christmas -- actually, it's closer to the end of February or early March. And, even sadder, it seems that Christmas in the Rhododendron World does come a little later -- at least in our part of the world. But that doesn't mean there isn't a light at the end of the tunnel -- it just means that it's a long tunnel. So which rhododendrons will you see early in the new year? Well, definitely, 'Christmas Cheer' is early but there are many more. At my house, I guess, 'Snow Lady' is first to come into bloom. What a beautiful plant -- I like the description in Greer's -- "In flower it might remind you of new fallen snow. Its soft, fuzzy green leaves dress it like a real lady". But, when I'm all snug in my bed, I have visions of 'Cilpinense' dancing in my head. A 3 footer with "flowers that sparkle in the sunlight like big apple blossoms". Look at that picture -- would that be an awesome late-Christmas present or what? Or if we move into the realm of the species rhododendron maybe something like *R. strigillosum*? Bright green leaves, stiff bristles, indumentum and long, tubular-bell-shaped deep blood red flowers -- WOW! Or maybe *R. pachysanthum* and just go WOW!! all year long. These are just a few rhododendrons that should be on your Rhododendron Christmas Wish list but I would also highly recommend that you have a magic, little yellow rose to light your way through those dark, dismal, days of November.

Merry Christmas





Claudia, Judi, Maureen and Nadine Present

NIRS

CHRISTMAS PARTY 2015

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 8TH

5:00 – 6:00 PM – SOCIAL HOUR

PLEASE SIGN-IN THEN ENJOY SOME OF NONI'S APPLE CIDER WHILE MINGLING WITH FELLOW MEMBERS AND TAKE PART IN OUR GUESSING GAMES BY CORINNE. IT'S A GOOD TIME TO DROP OFF CHRISTMAS HAMPER ITEMS ALSO.

6:00 – POT LUCK DINNER

ENJOY A HAM DINNER WITH AN ARRAY OF APPYS, SAVORIES AND DESSERTS BROUGHT BY MEMBERS.

PLEASE CONTACT MAUREEN (250-890-0522) WITH YOUR CHOICE OF ITEM TO BRING. THIS ALSO GIVES US AN ATTENDANCE COUNT!

6:45 ISH – DRAW PRIZES AND JEOPARDY GAME

DRAW PRIZES WILL FOLLOW DINNER LEADING TO OUR JEOPARDY GAME BY DAVE. ALWAYS A FUN TIME

8:00PM - CLOSING CEREMONIES.

CHAIR STACKING AND TABLE FOLDING AND GENERAL CLEAN-UP!

COMMITTEE REPORTS

In order to cut some time from the business section of our meetings and make that time available to the Speaker of the evening, we are including the following information from the NIRS Committees. Your feedback on every one of our programmes is encouraged and each idea will be thoughtfully considered.

MEMBERSHIP

Jill Gould

We have most members signed up for 2016 (we have a total of 81 members, including associates), but there are a lot who have not yet. Our dues have not gone up—it is still \$35.00, which includes your Significant Other, if you wish. A bargain! You can mail your cheque to NIRS or, if you are coming to the December 8 Christmas Party, you can renew then—I will bring my receipt book. Our deadline remains the last day of the year—December 31, 2015. This enables us to get our little Who's Who booklet printed for distribution in January.

Our attendance at the last meeting was 51, with one guest.



UPCOMING PROGRAMMES

Paul Wurz

Dec 8.....NIRS Annual Christmas Party

Jan 12.....Garth and Sue "Convention Tour in New Zealand".

Feb 9.....Peter Guertler "England Garden Tour"

Mar 8.....Sean Rafferty "Searching for Rhodos in Tibet"

THE RHODO GARDEN

Wolfgang Hoefgen

Shhhh! The garden's sleeping!

The decision has been made -- the next work party will be in Spring 2016. We were looking for one more day to put the final touches on when it turned cold. Too cold! The City of Courtenay has blown the leaves into the beds from the walkways and it's looking fine. Thank you very much to all our members who attended the work parties in 2015.



EDUCATIONAL CORNER by Nadine Boudreau

Judy Walker presented a great segment in November on using leaves as mulch and compost.

It makes sense to follow nature's system, replenish nutrients, improving soil structure, giving winter protection and creating an 'eco system' for insects and micro organisms.

Small leaves can be left as is on the garden beds, leaves can be raked off lawns and spread around plants. Larger, coarser leaves are best shredded first as these can create a mat over perennials and soil surface. If you don't have a shredder, just rake the leaves onto your lawn, mow over with your lawnmower then spread on the garden. Once a couple of rains soak the leaves they are less likely to blow around in the wind.

The nutrient level of leaf mulch is superior to most mulches we buy, so not only is it beneficial to your soil but economical as well. Pine and fir needles are good to use as they become near pH. neutral when shed. In the spring I use my cultivator to mix what is left of the leaves into the soil. By then it is looking more like a composted soil layer.

If you feel you have too many leaves for the garden beds, put the excess in the compost bin. Repeat layers of approximately 6" of shredded leaves with a 2" layer of a organic material higher in nitrogen than the leaves, such as manure, grass clippings or kelp. You can use a lower nitrogen rich layer between the leaves such as straw or sawdust, but use a nitrogen supplement like bone meal or blood meal. Keep the heap moist, but not soggy. Turn the heap three or four times before late spring and you should have fine compost for spring planting.

Leaf mold makes a great soil conditioner. It can increase water retention in soil up to 50% (just what we need for our drier summer!), improves soil structure and provides a superior habitat for soil life including worms and beneficial bacteria.

Leaf mold is very easy to make, you just need patience as the breakdown process is slow as leaves are basically carbon. Shredding leaves helps speed up the process. Pile leaves into a wire or wood bin at least 3' high and wide. Thoroughly dampen the entire pile. Let it sit, check moisture level occasionally during the dry periods, add more water as necessary. Fork the pile over every so often. Covering the pile with a plastic tarp will help keep a consistency of warmth and moisture. Another method is to use large plastic bags, fill with leaves, and cut slits into bag for air and to check moisture. Turn the bag to mix leaves. When the leaf mold is ready, 6 months to a year, dig into garden beds, around perennials, and use in container soil mixes.

Now when you see the leaves falling don't think of work ahead, think lush, healthy gardens ahead!



CHRISTMAS HAMPER

Margaret Griffith-Cochrane

Hello Everyone,

At the November meeting, people were generous and either brought food or gave financial donations (so I could purchase food items on their behalf to fill the hamper). If you still wish to contribute to the Christmas hamper, you can see below what is "crossed off". I will be at the December NIRS Christmas party. The gift for the 6 month old girl is still available.

As always, thanks for your support of this project. Treats for the parents are always a nice option too. Please phone or email if you have any questions.

250-941-5559, mgriffico@shaw.ca

Thanks,

Margaret Griffith-Cochrane

Christmas Greetings in November! It has again come time to think about the NIRS Christmas Hamper.

As in previous years, this is a totally optional initiative that many of our members join in.

This year, to obtain the family description earlier, I have moved the sponsoring agency from the Salvation Army to Royal LePage. (The two agencies collaborate with each other, so there is no duplication in hampers being given to the same family.)

What is helpful? Please bring either a nonperishable item (see the accompanying list), or a cash donation to the November or December meeting.

We are sponsoring a couple with two children, ~~a boy 13 years~~, and a girl 6 months. We are asked to give a gift to each of the children, but of course if you wish to bring something for the parents, that is fine too. The list below is the basic list for the hamper, we are able to add extra items if so desired.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. SUGAR (2 KG.) | 13. CANNED SALMON OR TUNA |
| 2. FLOUR (2 KG.) | 14. JAM OR HONEY |
| 3. COFFEE (300 GRAMS) | 15. PEANUT BUTTER |
| 4. TEA (SMALL PACKAGE) | 16. SPAGHETTI |
| 5. JUICE (TETRA PACK -2 | 17. SPAGHETTI SAUCE |
| 6. SOUP (ASSORTMENT) | 18. SNACK TREATS |

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 7. CANNED VEGETABLES (2) | 19. RICE |
| 8. COOKIES | 20. ITEMS FOOTHPASTE , HANDSOAP, |
| 9. CRACKERS (2 BOXES) | SHAMPOO |
| 10. STUFFING MIX | 21. PAPER PRODUCTS (NAPKINS, TOILET |
| 11. CRANBERRY SAUCE (TIN) | PAPER, PAPER TOWELS) |
| 12. CEREAL (2 BOXES) | |

\$40. in envelope to cover our purchase of perishables, such as turkey, bread, buns, milk, fruit & vegetables.



TRIVIAL FACTS FOR TRIVIA LOVERS

by Helena Stewart

Reader alert: This article is not for those members whose knowledge about rhododendrons is encyclopedic (and you know who you are) but for those of us who identify a rhododendron by its shape and colour not its multisyllabic Latin name.

Big Ones, Little Ones, some a lot bigger than your head...

Rhodos can grow from 3.9 inches to almost a hundred feet in height and can survive up to 100 years under optimal environmental conditions. I wish the people who planted the 10-foot high rhodos right next to the foundation of my house had known that.

While most rhodos have fibrous roots, some grow as epiphytes or "air plants" with aerial roots. They grow by supporting on other plants and by collecting moisture and nutrients directly from the air.

The immigrant rhododendron

While rhododendrons were around in Asia since who knows how long, the shrub was introduced to Britain in 1656 from the European Alps and was given the name "alpine rose" for *R. histrum*. (The rhodo had been "discovered" in the 16th century by a Flemish botanist named Charles l'Ecluse.) The rhodo is also known as "rose tree" because it often produces flowers in trusses, just like some types of roses ("rodon" is a Greek word for "rose" and "dendron" for "tree.")

There's one in every family

While most rhodos are welcome additions to any garden, *R. ponticum* is recognized as a particularly invasive species (worse than broom) especially in the British Isles. Due to its adaptations, it can out-compete any native plants trying to grow in the same area. Because any attempts to control this "invasion" are either too expensive or dangerous to other organisms living in the area, Brits are looking into such techniques as preventing insects from pollinating the flowers (What? Contraceptives for male insects?). A well-established *R. ponticum* requires an herbicide with unique chemicals and several treatments over many years in order to kill it and keep it from returning.

A favourite emblem

Close to home, *R. macrophyllum* is the floral emblem for Washington State while *R. maximum* is the state flower of West Virginia and is on that state's flag. Further afield, *R. arboreum* is the national flower of Nepal and the state flower of Sikkim in India. In Nepal, they are known as laligurans or gurans and form magnificent pink and white mountain forests. At lower elevations, the flower is red. Ninety percent of the world's rhododendrons are found in SE Asia.

Rhododendron exploration was the result of a partnership between English Quaker Peter Collinson and botanist/farmer John Bartram of Pennsylvania in the mid-18th century. These include *R. canescens*, *R. nudiflorum*, *R. viscosum* and *R. maximum*.

Kissing Cousins

Rhododendrons belong to the family Ericacea which includes heathers, mountain laurels, blueberries, cranberries, manzanita, trailing arbutus, madrone, huckleberry, kalmiopsis, sourwood, among others.

Take a Pass on the Rhodo Ragout

Newcomers to the Comox Valley soon discover that the Valley's overabundance of deer means serious attention has to be paid to fencing if you want a garden. Said newcomers are advised to plant rhododendrons since deer don't eat them. Why? A type of grayanotoxin known as andromedotoxin is present in the leaves and flowers of a rhododendron plant. This poison is similar in structure to pinene, a component of turpentine. While our body can break the toxin down, it is harmful if a large amount is eaten and it can cause stomach pain, abnormal heart rate and rhythm, convulsions, nausea and vomiting, low blood pressure, muscle weakness, lack of muscle coordination, coma, death. You might ask why anyone would even think about eating large quantities of leathery rhodo leaves or even flowers—well, maybe a particularly enthusiastic vegan? However honey produced from nectar of certain types of rhododendron has hallucinogenic and laxative effects. Best to stick to mushrooms for the former and Ex-lax for the latter. Historical records reveal that people have actually died after eating honey made by bees that have collected pollen and nectar from rhodo flowers. We're told that horses are particularly sensitive to this toxin but who is dumb enough to put honey in their feed bag?

However. While it's said that rhodo leaves are especially toxic, "Labrador tea" is a herbal tea made of three closely related species of rhododendron and in Nepal pickled flowers and juice are consumed. Medical studies showed that flavonoids, phenolic compounds and saponins extracted from rhododendron have anti-inflammatory properties. They also act beneficially on the function of the liver. Hmm— anyone able to explain this?



MORE EARLY BLOOMING RHODODENDRONS



Top row: 'Christmas Cheer' 'Snow Lady' 'Bo-Peep'
Bottom row: *R. moupinense* *R. dauricum* 'Olive'



PROPAGATION BY GRAFTING

Noni Godfrey

On Wednesday afternoon, 28th October, with the weather feeling colder than it should for the end of October, several rhodoholics gathered at Dick Bonney's outdoor covered garage, eager to learn all the ins and outs of grafting. Braving the chilly day in the name of science and learning were; Dave and Noni, Antje and Peter, Claudia and Jake, Ruth, Garth, Maureen, Jill, Carolyn, Paul, Dick and not to forget our master grafter Wolfgang.

All the grafting techniques we discussed at this workshop used the following terms and procedures with only a few variations or placements.

Grafting

There are two main reasons to graft, other than it is fun to do:

1. To propagate plants that are known to be difficult to root, or
2. To change the root section of a plant for a stronger or more suitable root ball.

Grafting terms

- *Scion* - the portion of the cultivar that is to be propagated. It consists of a rhododendron shoot with dormant buds that will produce the stem and branches (remove about 50% of greenery).
- *Rootstock* - Cunningham's White in our adventures- provides the new plant's root system.
- *Cambium* - a layer of cells located just under the bark of a stem from which new bark and wood cells originate. These cells are called meristematic tissue and are capable of dividing and producing new tissue.

Grafting supplies

- *Grafting tape* – Used to secure the two pieces together. Wolfgang had strips of a rubber band material that will hold the graft for up to a year before it disintegrates. A sticky 'grafting tape' is available through garden centers but duct tape or electrical tape is often substituted.
- *Sharp knife* – Used to make the cuts. Make sure it is very sharp and sterilize the blade with alcohol.
- *Labels, notebook, pens* – Make a note of the name of the rootstock, the name of the scion and the date that the graft was made.

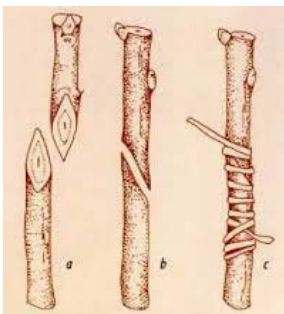
Procedure

- Select a scion about 3 to 5" in length that has the same diameter as the branch onto which it will be grafted.
- Identify and label the rootstock and the plant that you will use for the graft. Choose a scion from a plant that will match the rootstock in size at maturity and other characteristics.
- Cut the scion and rootstock so that the angles are the same and place them together so that the cambium layers are moist and in contact.
- Bind the two pieces together with a special grafting rubber banding, grafting tape or duct tape if you prefer.
- Keep a plastic bag over the plant and keep it out of the sun to keep the graft from drying out. If you are grafting to a plant in the garden, protect the graft from the sun and secure a plastic bag over the joint.

Four conditions must be met for grafting to be successful: the scion and rootstock must be compatible; each must be at the proper physiological stage; the cambial layers of the scion and stock must meet; and the graft union must be kept moist until the wound has healed.

Different Grafting Techniques were discussed and a couple were demonstrated at the workshop.

1. Summer Grafting:

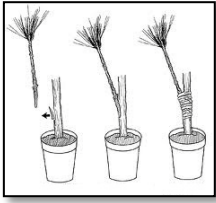


Wolfgang headed up the demonstration this month with a few samples of grafting he had done in the summer following Marc Colombel's procedure as discussed at the Western Regional Conference in Victoria last May. There was an article on this full technique in the ARS Journal Vol 68 Number 3 Summer of 2014. (This article by Marc Colombel of Fouesnant, France is still available on the ARS Web site for those interested.)

Using Marc's "Summer Grafting" technique the graft had fully healed, had formed a callus after only 3 weeks and was ready to start new growth on the new root ball. Summer weather seems to speed up the procedure, as long as the plant and the graft are kept moist.

2. Side Grafting:

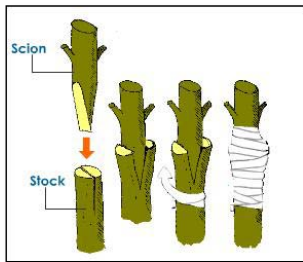
We used this particular method with the scions that we had all brought to the workshop. Wolfgang had brought along several small pots of 'Cunningham's White' which is THE universal root stock. It has proven its strength and stability over the years and is used by many nurserymen. We were fortunate to get a supply of these at Green Thumb Nursery during our visit earlier in the year. The side grafting prepares the root stock in much the same manner, but not cutting the top of the plant off, just joining the scion to the side of the plant as shown in the diagram. Wrapping and bagging the plant in the same way as all other grafting methods is the best way to ensure success. Green Thumb Nursery however, just buries the whole pot of grafted plants into their mulch beds inside a heated greenhouse for the winter and then plants up around May or June of the same year. This gives them about a 70 to 80% success rate.



3. Piggy Back:

We talked about this procedure and Wolfgang did up a sample for all to see. Two scions are grafted together by scoring at the bottom edge as per the summer grafting method. They are also scored slightly on the opposite side to the grafted edge and prepared on that side for rooting. 'Cunningham's White' is also good for this procedure as it is a good fast rooter. After the plant is fully rooted the 'Cunningham's White' is cut off past the callus that should be fully formed at the graft union.

4. Saddle Graft:



As the name implies, the cuts on the root stock are in the shape of a "V" or a notch, and the scion is scored on both sides like an arrow to slip into this notch. This method can be reversed but I imagine would be more difficult to line up.

Thoughts on completed rhododendrons: Do you want a plant that retains flowers from the rootstock and the newly grafted scion? If so, then you might want to think about complementary colours, timing of the blooms and/or multiple grafts on one rootstock. Other things to keep in mind are to find a rootstock that is similar to the scion plant you are grafting in terms of characteristics such as sensitivity to sunlight and cold.

And finally if your graft doesn't take. – Either the rootstock or the scion dried out. The union may not have been securely wrapped. The two pieces may not have been the same size and the cambium layers may not have intersected. My only advice if this happens is to try again, nothing ventured nothing gained!

(Photos of our day workshop are available on line www.nirsrhodos.ca in the photogallery under PropGroup-15)

Thank you to all the contributors to this newsletter.
and a special thank you to those on our board of directors.

HAVEN'T RENEWED YOUR MEMBERSHIP?

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY WOULD BE A PERFECT TIME TO DO IT.

THE LAST CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR NAME LISTED IN THE YEARBOOK.

See you at the Party

Merry Christmas