



THE DECEMBER EDITION

RHODOTELLER

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2017-2018**

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DECEMBER 2017

COMING EVENTS

5th December 2017-- Executive meeting

This month's meeting will be held at the home of members *Joanne and Doug Williams 614 Jubilee Court, Comox*. The meeting will start promptly at *10 a.m.*



12th December 2017 -- Christmas Party

What better way to kick off the Christmas Season than with a fanatical group of rhododendron lovers! Good friends, great food, lots of laughter and so much more. For details please read "President's Notes".



9th January 2018 --Regular Meeting

We kick off the first meeting of the New Year with our Panel of Experts. What a wonderful opportunity to ask those questions that have been nagging you about rhododendrons forever and to share the answers with the membership.



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

Since Christmas is just 30 days away, and New Years isn't far behind, it's nice to look back and be thankful for our good health, our family, friends, and accomplishments of our wonderful NIRS group. We've had lots to celebrate, and we've certainly entertained well, both locally and internationally with the Whidbey Island and Pilchuk chapters joining us for our 20th Anniversary celebration of the Comox Valley Rhododendron Garden.

We've made some changes, both in the meeting facilities and format, so now you get a chance to let us know what you think. Do you like having the guest speaker at the beginning of the evening? Do you have enough time at the break for socializing, buying plants, raffle tickets, signing up, borrowing books, etc.? Have you enjoyed our guest speakers so far? I personally think they've been outstanding and we've attracted new people at every meeting.

These dark evenings have made it very easy to nestle in with the Christmas movies (yes, I'm a junkie for them all), but I'm looking forward to our annual Christmas party on December 12th.

Doors will open at 5, and dinner will be at 6. Our Potlucks are wonderful, and if you haven't put your name down yet, never fear, just bring a savoury dish. There will be guessing games for candies in a jar, and loony/twoony games (so bring your cash), trivia contests, (so bring your thinking caps) and centrepieces to be won. Please remember to bring your own cutlery and mug.

The paper dinner plates will each be numbered to determine your game team later, but feel free to sit wherever.

We'll have hot cider to welcome you (nonalcoholic of course since' we're in a church), and ham to share. Hats off to the executive for decorating the hall and making the centrepieces.

We hope to see you there. If you're unable to make it, have a very Merry Christmas, and see you in the New Year.

Cheers!

Judi

COMMITTEE REPORTS

MEMBERSHIP

Jill Gould

Our renewals got a big boost in November, with some mail-ins and some renewals in person: 19 renewals, one associate membership (Doug Kitts of MARS) and two new memberships. Our newest members are Monica and Ed Dahl, and Marg Hundt.

Some new name tags were requested, but I would like to point out that old tags can, in some instances, be refurbished. **Engrave-It**, the company we deal with, can change a pin tag to magnetic tag (and vice versa) or repair a faulty fastener, for a fee. If this interests you, please give me your tag and I can take it in and see what they say. Of course, you can always take it in yourself. They are located at the top of Mission Hill, near the Ford dealership on Highway 19A.

Our roster currently stands at 94, with 60 renewals for 2018. We would like you to renew by Dec. 31 of this year in order to appear in the 2018 Membership Book. You can renew by mail (address at the bottom of this page) or at the December meeting (party). Persons not renewed risk having their membership dropped, which means you don't get the Newsletter!

THE RHODO GARDEN

Maureen Denny



The sun was out for our last work party of the season at The Comox Valley Rhodo Garden on Nov. 16th. There were four members and we all pitched in with our rakes to get a good clean up done. Wolfgang donated a Rhododendron Makinoi from his garden which we planted in an empty spot in one of the beds. Then we had coffee and a treat at the cafe.

Our next work party will be in February 2018.

PROPAGATION GROUP

report by Diana Scott

The Propagation Group has had a very successful season of both plant production and sales. Our new cuttings are coming along nicely in the warm greenhouse, with Wolfgang keeping a watchful eye on the temperature and humidity. Our more mature cuttings are under cover in the cool greenhouse but will need attention to make sure they don't dry



out. They are looking pretty good and we are hopeful for some good growth next spring. We are very proud of how well the original stock matured, and like keen 'foster parents' were both excited and a little wistful as so many headed to their new homes over the summer and fall. Our NIRS members have been very supportive and bought a LOT of these babies, and we were delighted to share our sales with both the Nanaimo and Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Chapters. We hope for a kind winter and look forward to having

some wonderful plants for our Spring Sale. Thanks once again to the Smiths and Charlie for their continued support, to the hard working members of the Propagation Group who are there when needed, and to Wolfgang for his ongoing supervision and expertise!



MILNER GARDENS RHODODENDRON SPECIES GARDEN

RHODO TRANSPLANTING

by Jill Gould

(Photos by Glen Jamieson, Art and Susan Lightburn)

On November 10, approximately 15 volunteers were at the Milner Gardens Rhododendron Species Garden for a work party. Art and Susan Lightburn of MARS had donated 14 large (some very large!) species rhododendrons for the garden, which is in its preliminary planting stage. These rhodos had been packaged, loaded onto wooden pallets and transported to the garden the previous week, and sat awaiting our attention.

Art's packaging system was interesting. The rhodo root ball was encased in landscape fabric or recycled lumber wrap, bundled with tough string, straps of folded lumber wrap were placed on the pallet, and the rhodo plonked on top. Flaps of fabric were left at 4 to 6 locations around the plant. Small diameter plastic pipe strung through with string in a slip knot were slid over the flaps, which made a grabbing handle.

When we were ready to plant, the rhodos on their pallets were moved by a Bobcat to the prepared site. Four to six people grabbed a handle each and the plant was slid/lifted into the hole. Another of Art's ingenious contraptions was used to slice the wrap from under the root ball. Three or more people would tilt the plant, a sharp linoleum knife taped to a long stick was inserted underneath, and the wrap sliced. The severed wrap was tweaked out from under the plant, handles were disengaged, and on to the next rhodo. I had not seen it done quite this way before. It was pretty slick!

The grounds of the Species Garden were prepared last year with a deep layer of sand, which raised the planting site. A shallow depression was made for the rhodo. Once in place, we back filled with a wheelbarrow load of sand, a scattering of compost (very little should be used), and applied bark mulch/chipped material liberally over top. So, basically the rhodo sits up above the path level, almost like a raised bed, which provides good drainage. The area is well supplied with water through an overhead sprinkler system.

This was a great learning experience! Next spring we'll see how we did, as the plants flower and grow. You may find it worth a trip to Milner Gardens to see them.



Species garden volunteers



Rhodo wrestling

My Favourite Dwarf Rhododendrons

Part 2 - hybrids

By Chris Southwick

(Reprinted with permission from the Nanaimo Rhododendron Society newsletter - Sept 2017)

Our newsletter editors limited the choice of plants to speak about to only three and since I couldn't do that, I chose to write two articles, the first on dwarf hybrid rhododendrons and this article on dwarf species rhododendrons. Choosing three dwarf hybrids was a challenge, but choosing three dwarf species is going to be even more difficult since I've become a species "nut".

The topic of hybrid versus species rhodos could be a topic in itself. Species rhododendrons in general are fascinating in their size, texture, shape, hardiness, adaptability, as well as colour of their leaves, stems and flowers. They have been classified by some as "collectors" plants. Their very distinctive gestalt or overall look enables a more experienced gardener to know which species a certain plant is. This is generally not the case for the many thousands of hybrids.

Once again, I am also limiting my selection to plants which are available and to those that I currently grow. Most species, however, cannot be purchased at local nurseries or garden centres with one or two exceptions. Fortunately, for those of us who live in northwestern North America, we have access to a number of nurseries and botanical gardens which sell species plants. If you're interested in purchasing collector plants, some species can be found in the spring at our local American Rhododendron Society's annual plant sales.



R. campylogynum is easily one of my favourite dwarf species due to its compact and mounding form, consistently healthy and glossy green leaves and interesting long flower stalks that hold nodding bell-shaped pale rose purple, salmon-pink, carmine, or deep purple flowers. According to the experts, this species has a number of forms including a very tiny-leaved form called *R. campylogynum Myrtilloides* Group. In the last few years, this species has been more available in the nursery trade likely because it is easy to propagate. The Cox family has used it in their hybridizing to create the exquisite pure white hybrid "Egret" which I wish was more readily available in our local nurseries. The Bodnant form (Windsor) won an AM (Award of Merit) in 1971.

I love blue-green leaves. Near the top of my list of dwarf species is a beautiful dwarf named *R. lepidostylum*. It has luscious foliage which cups raindrops in the leaf axils (as the leaf petioles are so short) and has very prominent hairs along the leaf margins. It is both compact and wider than tall and, according to the ARS



website, grows to become two feet tall in ten years. It is cold hardy and has noticeable scales on the underside of the leaves - hence the name. Mine has not yet flowered but the flowers are yellow and sometimes spotted orange. The geographical origin is southwest Yunnan in China. This photo of *R. lepidostylum* was found on the Chimacum Woods website and shows the distinct habit of collecting water on the leaves - just think of *Alchemilla mollis* after a rain. Thank you, Bob Zimmerman for permission to use the photo. I believe *R. lepidostylum* challenges the much larger *R. campanulatum* ssp. *aeruginosum* for the glaucous cast of its new growth. It won an award of merit (AM) in 1969. Beautiful!

Saving the best for last, is an exquisite plant named *R. forestii*. It has several named forms, the Repens Group and the Tumescens Group (mound-forming).* The former is a sweet little creeping or ground-hugging plant which was a favourite of my paternal grandfather, Ted Greig. He used to grow it in a stone trough perched on top of a stone wall at the Royston Nursery years ago. This photo by Jens Birck from the Hirsutum website is very reminiscent of the Royston garden.



Rhododendron forrestii can be very shy flowering and needs very specific siting and planting conditions. In its native habitat high in the mountains of Tibet, Burma and China, you can imagine that it could withstand a blanket of ice and snow, high winds or driving rain. It has been slow to flower in my garden where I have it planted in two very different spots to try and get it right. It is a little fussy requiring excellent drainage, an open aspect, yet decent water. Alleyne Cook recommends planting on clay covered with gravel.** Since it is such an early bloomer, the flowers can get nipped by frost. Protection with a cloche or Reemay cloth is recommended to protect the flower buds.

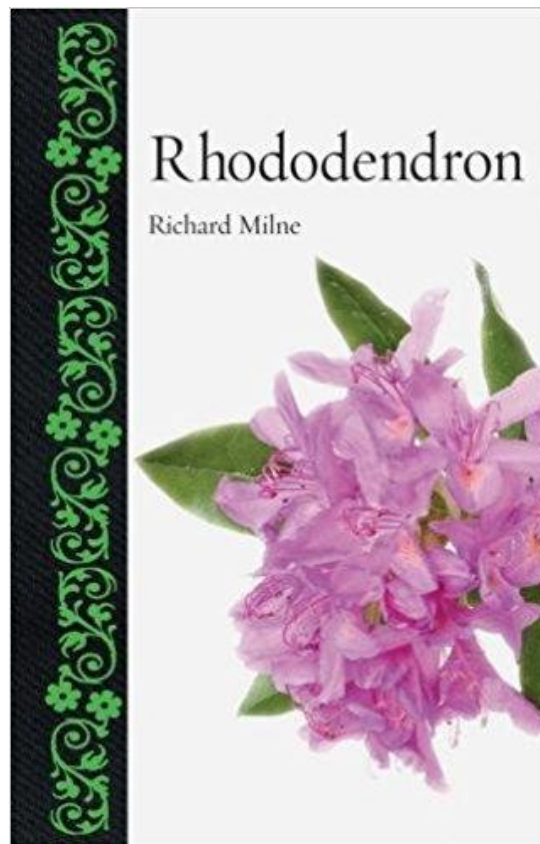
R. forrestii has been a prolific parent over the years. Many famous and worthy hybrids such as "Carmen", "Elizabeth", "Riplet", "Scarlet Wonder", "Little Ben", "Ethel", "Lori Eischelser", "Kimbeth" and "Royston Red" all have some of its exceptional qualities.

If you're interested in more historical and scholarly information about *Rhododendron forrestii*, read an article written by Alleyne Cook in 1983 for the ARS Journal which aptly illustrates the culture of this very interesting rhododendron. Follow the link below.

Dwarf rhododendrons are perfect for gardens these days. Most of my gardening friends have chosen a property that is appropriate for smaller plants. Some of these friends have only a deck for outdoor growing space in their home. That makes truly dwarf plants an excellent choice whether they're species or hybrid rhododendrons.

*J.F.J. Mcquire and M.L.A. Robinson **Pocket Guide to Rhododendron Species** pg. 210.

** <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JARS/v37n3/v37n3-cook.htm>



Rhododendron,
by Richard Milne. Pub. Reaktion Botanical series.
(NIRS Library #10-04)

Richard Milne is a senior lecturer in the School of Biology at the University of Edinburgh. He is a keen field botanist with an interest in creative writing.

Has a group of plants ever inspired such love in some, and hatred in others, as rhododendrons? Their propensity towards sexual infidelity makes them popular with horticultural breeders and early plant collectors faced mortal peril to bring stunning new species back to life. They can clothe whole hillsides or gardens with colour, but there is a darker side to these plants. Numerous Chinese folk tales link them with tragedy and death. They can poison livestock and intoxicate humans, and their narcotic honey has been used as a weapon of war.

This book, therefore, will examine the history of rhododendrons, both in the wild and in gardens, before examining their significance to mankind outside of gardens, especially in medicine and culture. A chapter on “potions, petals and poisons’ is quite enlightening.

The indomitable *R. ponticum*, or as Milne describes it ‘The Black Sheep of the Family’, has run riot across the British countryside and garners a chapter to itself. The full story of this implacable invader contains many surprises.

Richard Milne explores the numerous ways in which rhododendrons have influenced human societies, relating this to the extraordinary story of the plants’ evolution. Tales are told of mythical figures, intrepid collectors and eccentric plant breeders. More than one thousand species exist, ranging from rugged trees on Himalayan slopes to rock-hugging alpinists. However much you know about rhododendrons, this richly illustrated book will reveal something new and will close with a look at the future for rhododendrons!

BOOK REVIEW *(Submitted by Noni Godfrey)*

THE RHODO IN THE BANNER

With the deadline rapidly approaching for this newsletter, I began to search my brain for a rhodo that was somehow appropriate for the Christmas Season. Stumbling around the caverns of my brain is hazardous at best and doesn't often end well. But, in this case, the answer almost jumped out at me -- almost scared the you-know-what out of me. I silently yelled, "Voilà!", which is kind of odd 'cause I don't speak French. But the answer was clear -- *Rhododendron spinuliferum*. What an unusual rhodo -- the colour is perfect -- reminds me of those Christmas Crackers that my brothers and sisters enjoyed so much at dinner. Or how about a Christmas ornament for the tree? Hopefully, you agree and enjoy the photos below which were taken by our own Garth Wedemire. I found a great description of *R. spinuliferum* on the web-site of St Andrews Botanic Garden in Scotland. They describe it as "a really stunning plant" which was first discovered by Abbe Delavay in south Yunnan in 1891. The epithet means 'bearing spines', for the branches and leaves are softly pubescent. Due to its flower colour, the Chinese call it the "firecracker flower".





MERRY CHRISTMAS

to

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