



THE MARCH EDITION

RHODOTELLER

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MARCH 2017

COMING EVENTS

7th March 2017 -- Executive meeting

This month's meeting will be held at the home of Lynn Gray and will start at precisely 10 a.m.

14th March 2017 -- Regular meeting

Noni and Dave Godfrey have invited us along for an exciting evening as they re-visit their recent trip to Ken Cox's Glendoick Gardens in Scotland.

14th March 2017 - District 1 President's Meeting

On the 14th of March, the Presidents of the chapters of District 1 will meet at President Judi's home at 11:30. The participants have been invited to attend the monthly NIRS meeting in the evening.

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

PRESIDENT'S

NOTES

Well, turns out American Groundhog Punxsutawney Phil got it right this year, compared to Wiarton Willie in Ontario. Six more weeks of winter will end just before St. Patrick's Day and our first day of spring. Spring...sounds so wonderful on the tongue. Almost like "Plus 1". If you haven't yet seen this hilarious sketch by Rick Mercer, you can find it on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkDvqQKGgDA>

Our latest snowfall did hold off till after our first Rhodo cleanup of the year, and our band of intrepid gardeners were pleased to see that the garden is looking fine, although the evergreens at the back lost a lot of branches. This will give the City of Courtenay more mulching material and provide more sunlight for that area. The Park Cafe let our group enjoy coffee inside with our goodies.

Chris Hodgson will be providing an overview/update on the ARS at the March 14th meeting for our Education Spot. Chris currently wears 2 hats, as the President of the Vancouver Rhododendron Society and District 1 Director for the ARS. His alternate Chris Southwick, will also be at the meeting, so if you have any questions about the ARS, bring them on. Other Chapter presidents may also be in attendance, as they will be meeting earlier that day for a District 1 Presidents Meeting and touring the Rhodo Garden.

Hats off to Maureen Denny for offering to help with the garden tour. The Horticultural Society will not have a garden tour this year for lack of volunteers, and we were down to the wire as to ours. Although we have the gardens, we look forward to having you step forward to volunteer as garden sitters, and sign markers. Many hands make light work my parents used to say, and they were right.

Fingers crossed we've seen the last of the white stuff, and we can get out into the gardens.

Judi

COMMITTEE REPORTS

MEMBERSHIP

by Jill Gould

We now have 84 members, with one being signed up in February. Welcome to Diana Colnett.

Dave Godfrey distributed our NIRS Roster booklets at the Feb. meeting, and will do the same at the March meeting. The rest will be mailed. If you did not receive your booklet, please see Dave at the meeting.

Attendance at the last meeting was 50 members, 5 guests.

WAYS & MEANS

by Lois Clyde

Our Raffle Rhodos this month are:

"Everest" an evergreen Japanese Azalea. Grows to 2.5'. Flowers May- June. Flowers are white funnel shaped with chartreuse blotch in small trusses.

"Fireman Jeff" Cross between Jean Marie de Montague & Grosclaude.

3' in 10 years, good to 0 deg. F. Blooms mid May. Very bright blood red. Huge calyx, foliage medium green, with a slight amount of tomentum when new.

Our Door Prize is:

"White Water" 2-3' in 10 years. Good to -10 to -15 degrees. Blooms mid season. Broadly funnel shaped flowers. Blooms white with pink tinge on edges.

We also have our "Greer's Guidebooks" for sale @ \$25

"The Public Gardens of Vancouver Island" by Ian E. Efford. \$25

Plant tags @ \$12 a box

Fundamentals for Growing Rhododendrons @ \$3, great for beginners.

Lovely bags @ \$14 in a variety of colours, very handy for shopping, meetings & travel. **Only 5 left!**

Not to forget our truly coveted bumper stickers "I Brake for Rhododendrons". Only 2 left!! \$2 each.

We now have an additional to our table, "*Cards by Dick*". Sets of 6 for \$10 & individual for \$2 each.

These cards are pictures of Dick Bonney's garden. ***A must have!!***

SOCIAL COMMITTEE

by Lynn Gray and Patty Matthews

Thank you very much to the members who provided those delicious goodies at our February meeting. This month we're looking forward to goodies from **Connie Prain, Cathy Storey, Helen Stefiuk, Aji Fliss, and Michelle Spender**. It was clarified at our last Executive Meeting that there is actually a "charge" of \$1.00 for a coffee/tea and/or a goodie. Not a donation. This money goes a long way in keeping our Membership Fees at the existing rate. Of course, if you are providing a goodie that night you need not pay. Thanks everyone.

THE RHODO GARDEN

by Wolfgang Hoefgen



What a lucky bunch of gardeners we are -- we must have picked the only good day possible for our work party. There was some frost still in the ground so we had to leave some planting for the next work party but with 11 members helping we had the rhodo bed cleaned up in short order. With all the snow the garden has come through in remarkably good condition.

As always, the work party concluded with a party complete with cake and cookies, hot coffee and lots of stimulating conversation. Thanks very much to all those who attended. So productive and so much fun!

I recently spoke to Tyler and ordered 8 yards of mulch for the next work party and I will have the fertilizer ready to go also. As you can tell by that we will not only need a good turnout of volunteers but, of course, wheelbarrows, shovels, rakes, etc.

Next CVRG work party will be Thursday, March 16th at 10 a.m.

PROPAGATION GROUP

by Diana Scott



It must be Spring!! Fifteen members of our propagation group met at the Wedemire's on February 18th as Wolfgang gathered us together to start planning for the coming season. Sue welcomed us with beverages and cookies while Garth prepared a short 'Educational' using examples of propagation methods done last year. Some very healthy specimens of side and cleft grafts were admired, and dozens of baby seedlings had germinated in 2 different planting mediums - sphagnum moss and the special mix from Dennis Bottemiller's seeding workshop. Garth also had streptocarpus (AKA Cape Primrose) leaf cuttings which were forming small plants in their respective pots. Rhododendron 'Seta' and *R. spinuliferum* in bloom were brought to our February General Meeting

and Garth used the internet to show how the 'Images' tab in a Google search can bring up not only fabulous photos/images, but lead to lots of interesting information. After Googling Rhododendron 'Seta', Garth selected the 'Images' tab, clicked on a nice photo, and then clicked on the 'Visit Page' button which took us, for that image, to the Hirsutum website. As those familiar with the Hirsutum database know – there's lots of information and related links to browse from there!

After our 'Educational', Wolfgang reviewed what has been happening over the winter at the propagation greenhouse, and led the discussion of our next steps. Since our October meeting, Wolfgang, Peter, and Antje have been monitoring the inside propagation bed, checking the heat and humidity, and adjusting as required. The bed provides bottom heat, with misting and lights regulated on a timer. The routine established was for Guertlers to check the plants and put the plastic cover over the bed on Friday, and on Monday Wolfgang would raise the cover for the remainder of the week. With some extra watering of the plants at the edges of the bed this seemed to work well. Cuttings that died were replaced with new cuttings through November, and all dead plant material was removed from the beds throughout the winter to reduce any chance of contamination. Cuttings were checked for root development and some had rooted well while others still need to develop. Wolfgang has been moving and grouping together those cuttings that have already rooted. A pleasant surprise is that many of our large leaf rhodo cuttings have taken and are looking pretty good. Most of the Evergreen Azaleas are rooted and have been transferred to the second propagation table which has less bottom heat and no misting. These plants are being watered by hand.



Nadine had been working on sales of the 1-3 gallon rhodos housed in the outside beds and that went very well in the Fall. To find the stock more easily, the outside beds were reorganized with plants grouped

alphabetically. Some of the older hard plastic labels are cracking so will need to be replaced. Labels made from cut vinyl venetian blinds printed using a China marker seem to be working well and lasting longer.

In March, we will assess any damage to our rhodos housed outside and begin fertilizing, de-budding, and pruning for shape. The older cuttings that are currently in the cool greenhouse will be repotted into 1 gallon pots incorporating new soil and adding fertilizer. In late March we will pot up the new cuttings that have rooted and by the end of April some of these might be ready to move to the other greenhouse. Smiths have graciously allowed us to use half of their cool greenhouse to shelter our tender cuttings until old enough to hold in the outside beds. After dealing with the older cuttings and our new ones that have rooted, we will continue to check the remaining cuttings for root development and pot them up as they are ready, likely from March through to June. We will monitor the cuttings that have not rooted by then and determine how to care for them over the summer.



We had a lengthy discussion about what to use as potting medium for our 1 gallon plants and decided on a composted bark product that has fine and medium chunks in it which we will combine with a slow release fertilizer. Kailey and Nico will get up to 4 yards of the bark to the Smiths, ready for our work party mid to late March. Wolfgang bagged the larger perlite pieces sifted out from the cuttings' medium and this will be added to the bark for the ½ gallon potted azaleas and dwarf rhodos.

We will start our next batch of propagation cuttings in the late summer and early fall. Part of the fun will be deciding which rhodos to use and how many of each to pot up. As we go along we

may try to grow more rhodos from seed. Noni has been doing some air layering and will show us the results in the months to come, and we might try our hand at that as well. Wolfgang has a number of Cunningham's White that he is growing for root stock and by next year they may be big enough for us to try some grafting again. Lots of experiences await!

Lessons learned from this year include realizing that we may need to break into smaller groups when doing the cuttings, with closer supervision and instruction from our more experienced members. We will continue to hone our skills! It would be helpful to better understand how long certain plants take to root so that we could group them together on the propagating bed. We also found that using those nifty taller straight-sided rooting pots makes it more challenging to check for root development, so perhaps regular 4 inch pots would work better for us!

Our ongoing thanks goes out to Roberts and Adela Smith and Charlie Sallis who not only allow us to use their facility and materials, but have been donating our rhodo raffle prizes over this last year. A big 'Thank You' indeed!

MEMBER REQUEST: Please save 2 gallon black pots for the club. We have lots of 1 gallon pots, but most plants are sold in the 2 gallon size. That means they go 'out' with each sale and – then we have none! If/when you have some pots to donate – let Wolfgang know. Thanks!!
Once again we invite members who are interested in propagating to join us at any point. We are all learning together!

AN EDUCATIONAL FOLLOWUP

MAKE YOUR OWN ORGANIC FERTILIZER MIX

by Maureen Denny

For any members who missed last month's educational talk, the recipe is as follows:

4 parts Fish, Canola, or Cottonseed Meal

1part Dolomite Lime

1Part Rock Phosphate or 1 half part Bone Meal

1half part Kelp Meal

Measurements are by quantity. For acid loving plants delete the Dolomite Lime.

There are 3 main ingredients in any fertilizer mix:

N is nitrogen

P is phosphorus

K is potash

Canola Meal is 5.5% N

Cottonseed Meal is 5%N, 2%P, 1% K

Bone Meal is 3% N, 15% P

Rock Phosphate is 15% P

Kelp Meal is 5% P plus 62 trace minerals

Dolomite contains Calcium and Magnesium, and raises soil PH

Organic Fertilizers are derived from animal, plant, or mineral substances. They feed the soil and the plants and release slowly into the soil. Plants take up the nutrients as they need them. Organic fertilizers also feed soil micro organisms, (bacteria and fungi), earthworms and improve soil structure. Alfalfa Meal remedies soil compaction and contains 2.5% nitrogen.

MYCORRHIZA

by Jill Gould

The word is derived from Myco = fungus, Rhize = root. Therefore, root fungus. (Abbreviated here as **M/R**).

The **M/R** relationship is *symbiotic*—which means "mutual benefit", two things working together.

- Fungi get nutrients (i.e. sugar) from the host plant.
- The host gets water and nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus from fungi.

If you look at the Fall ARS 2016 journal, Bent Ernebjerg is lying on a mat of *Rhododendron prunum* at an elevation of 4,000M in Yunnan, China. This is rock. Did you ever wonder how Rhododendrons grow on rock or poor soil? The answer is probably **Ericoid M/R**. The relationship is ancient (millions of years). Rhodos, blueberries, heathers etc. would not have survived without it.

M/R surround root hairs on host plant's root system. Rhodos do not have root hairs; they have *hair roots*. Think of the fine root system of Rhodos, very close to the surface. **M/R** colonize the surface cells of the *hair roots* and provide nutrients for the shrub.

The latest information on plant nutrition is "Feed the soil, not the Plant". Too much nitrogen can disturb the balance of the **M/R** relationship and harm the plant, which is why we don't use high-nitrogen fertilizer on Rhododendrons. **M/R** may be purchased, but you don't have to buy it if you mulch. Fungi grow on decomposing wood.

Using **M/R** when planting Rhodos makes sense. You can definitely create the right climate by mulching with wood chips or shredded bark, which provides a medium for the growth of **M/R**. Your compost heap is also a good source. So take it from the experts: mulch.

IMPORTANT STUFF

Our Annual Plant Sale will be held this year on April 30th. To make this sale work we will need "all hands on deck". Please take a second right now and mark this date on your calendar. Not only will our Sale Co-ordinator, Nadine Boudreau, need your help but she wants to remind you that we will need plants of all shapes and sizes to sell at our NIRS Table. When you get out into the garden and start dividing perennials, maybe pot up a few for the sale. We're a little short of

vendors this year -- do you know anyone who would like to sell garden related items at our sale? Give Nadine a call.

After lots of hard work, I'm sure, Dave Godfrey has the Members' Booklets ready to hand out at the next meeting. These booklets are so handy -- make sure you get your hands on one.

Thinking about heading down to Victoria? On March 17 and 18 the Vancouver Island Rock and Alpine Garden Society is having their Annual Spring Show. It's being held at the Cadboro Bay United Church, 2625 Arbutus Road. For further details go to www.virags.ca.

As you may have noticed at the end of the Propagation Group report, this group needs 2 gal pots. If you are going to purchase plants in 2 gal pots this spring and maybe you already have some -- give Wolfgang a call and he'll arrange for someone to pick them up.

THE RHODO IN THE BANNER

The Rhododendron in the banner this month is "Snow Lady". Just seems appropriate as this long snowy winter winds down and the beautiful 'Snow Lady' gets ready to bloom. (Photos from Hirsutum)

