



THE OCTOBER EDITION

# RHODOTELLER

[www.nirsrhodos.ca](http://www.nirsrhodos.ca)

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RHODODENDRON SOCIETY  
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2017-2018**

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**OCTOBER 2017**

**COMING EVENTS**

**3rd October 2017-- Executive meeting**

This month's meeting will be held at the home of member *Ann Chevrier*. Come early for a quick tour of Ann's beautiful garden. The meeting will start promptly at *10 a.m.*



**10th October 2017 -- Regular meeting**

The speaker for our October meeting will be *Al (The Bee Man) Morton*. Al was a guest speaker at our last Rhodo Sale and was invited to speak to our membership about Mason Bees. Please see inside for more details.



**2018 ARS Convention**

Book now for the 2018 ARS Convention in Bremen, Germany in May 2018. A 7 day convention with options for lots of pre and post tours. See back page for details.



*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

Well, Mother Nature seems to be right on track, as the first week of fall included some sunshine and now some rain. We certainly can't complain as we had bumper crops of tomatoes, zucchini, and even cantaloupes in the greenhouse. There were even blooms on some of the rhodos when we did the monthly clean up at the CV garden.

Daniel Mosquin did a great presentation last month, and Al Morton is sure to give us an interesting talk on mason bees this month. I certainly learned a lot when he spoke at the plant sale. Speaking of plant sale, it's one of our major fundraisers, so if you'd like the club to continue, consider helping out. The coordinator's job is to ensure we have enough plants (the propagating group is working hard to ensure we do), vendors for other items (Al will be there), and volunteers (we'll give you sign up sheets to hand out at the meetings). There's a wealth of experience in the room, so many hands make light work.

Special thanks to Judith Walker and her husband for providing a great tour of her vineyard. What a beautiful site, and the grapes were tasty too. As with all agricultural ventures it takes a lot of hard work and dedication to create a great product. So the next time you're drinking wine from Beaufort or Blue Grouse, or cider from Blue Moon, raise your glass in a toast.

Good health everyone. See you in October.

Cheers!

*Judi*

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### MEMBERSHIP

*Jill Gould*

We had an excellent turn out at the September meeting, 52 members and 5 guests. We welcome Valerie and Aubrey Ferris to the fold as new members. 26 renewals of members and associates were received for 2018 that evening, which certainly kept Dave and I busy writing!

If you are attending the October 16 meeting, remember to bring your cheque or cash in the amount of \$35.00 to the meeting. If you cannot make a meeting, please mail your payment to the NIRS box number at the bottom of the newsletter page. We'd like to get as many folks signed up early as we possibly can...our total membership is over 90 so it's a bit of work. Our deadline is Dec. 31. The NIRS Roster booklet (each member receives one) is printed in January.

### WAYS & MEANS

*Paul Matthews*

#### *Our Raffle Rhodos this month are:*

(photos from *hirsutum*, descriptions from Greer's)



" *Janet Blair*" 6', -26c. Frilled, light pink flowers with a distinctive green flare on the upper petal. Vigorous, good-looking plant



" *Ilam Violet*" 4', -15c. Flowers are deep violet blue and additional color provided by bronze winter foliage.

*Our Door Prize is:*



"*Daphnoides*" 4' -26c. Foliage unlike any other rhododendron. Rolled, glossy, deep green leaves are tightly spaced on the stems of this dense mound. Small pom-pom trusses are deep purple.

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

"The Public Gardens of Vancouver Island" by Ian E. Efford. **ON SALE \$20!**

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 3 left!**

Not to forget our truly coveted bumper stickers "I Brake for Rhododendrons". Only 2 left!! \$1 each.

**Hope to see you all at the meeting!**

## PROPAGATION GROUP

*report by Diana Scott*

Wolfgang and Antje continue to look after the stock and our plants are doing very well thanks to their efforts. Considering that the majority of the propagation group are beginners, we have lost very few of our tiny plants from last year's cuttings. We now have almost a full bed of new cuttings, with small groups of pots being added as later maturing stems become available. We are quite excited about the variety of interesting rhodos and azaleas that will be ready for sale in the coming years.

We have had great interest in our plants throughout the summer, and a number of people took advantage of our Members' Sale on Saturday Sept 16. Noni has been carefully organizing and keeping track of the inventory and reports that we have sold 91 really good looking plants! She and a small committee have set aside plants for the Rhodo Sale in the spring, and we will be offering plants to members of other clubs this fall.



We are delighted that a few new members have joined our group and encourage others to 'come on down!' We continue to learn new things and welcome all who wish to join us!

## THE RHODO GARDEN

*Maureen Denny*



The last work party at the CVRG was attended by seven members. We raked the beds and pathways, did a little pruning and weeding and then gathered at the picnic table for coffee and homemade treats.

**Our next work party will be held Thursday October 12th at 10am.**

Please bring your own tools and expect to have a good time!



## Hear Ye, Hear Ye! Something new, just for you!

This is to advise that, thanks to our website designer, Garth Wedemire, we now have a new addition to our website... a new tab for 'Awards'. At present, this page features the Bronze medals presented by our chapter.

Many members have heard about our Bronze medal awards and read the list of recipients in our little yearbooks. So they are not forgotten, you can see these recipients and read the citations given when they were presented. In future, we will also include other member recipients for Silver medals and chapter 'Outstanding Service' awards.

I hope that our members and other visitors are enjoying the new look and features of our website ([www.nirsrhodos.ca](http://www.nirsrhodos.ca)). I thought I should remind many newer members of the information available and how to use the features of the site.

Past and present copies of the club's 'Rhodoteller' can be found on the 'Newsletter' page. Photograph albums of the various NIRS events and activities are available on the 'Photographs' tab and are currently up to date. Annual photo albums can be found on the dropdown list under 'Yearly gallery'; while albums of special events can be found in the 'Special Gallery.'

For those new to the various photo galleries on the website, here are some simple instructions to follow...

To open an album, simply click on the small thumbnail photo. Some albums contain many photos and may take time to load. It is important to let all photos load before opening the viewer. Once the album is loaded, you can either manually view the photos by clicking on the first one, then selecting other photos with the "next" or "previous" buttons; or click on "start slideshow" at the bottom left. You can pause the slideshow at any time by clicking on this same button. BUT, you must remember to click "stop slideshow" and then the "CLOSE" button (lower right) when finished viewing the album.

On our 'Links' page, there are a number of Rhododendron and garden related links to other web pages. One of particular interest to our members would be the link to our 'District One' website. There is a lot of valuable information posted on this site by Garth Wedemire, including links to other chapters.

Also on this page, there is a link to ordering from Amazon and other online retailers thru the 'ARS Store'. This way of ordering provides a percentage back to the ARS organization and helps to fund the operation of our parent organization. Keep this way of ordering in mind if you are planning to do some Christmas shopping on line.

We are also on Facebook and a link to our page can be found on the right sidebar of the home page and several other pages. I hope you enjoy the information provided on our website and Facebook pages.

## SOCIAL COMMITTEE

*by Pres. Judi*

What lovely goodies for our first meeting!

The following people have volunteered to bring in treats for the meeting on October 10th:

Ruth Fowler, Adrienne McNabb, Summer Joy, Claudia Ellis (who will also be making coffee), Dorothy Law and Michelle Spender. Antje will be in Germany, so there will not be any tortes, (as Jake lamented), but we will be just finishing off turkey leftovers.

## THE PROGRAMME

October 2017

### ALL ABOUT MASON BEES



Al was born and raised in Vancouver. He received a education degree from UBC. Not liking the rainy weather in the lower mainland, he chose his first teaching assignment in Fort Nelson. One year became 22. When his wife and 2 children enrolled at Simon Fraser University, Al became a Principal at the Alert Bay Band school. On the weekends he commuted to Simon Fraser. He often stopped at Courtenay Airpark to gas up his airplane. After 2 years he and his wife Nancy moved to the Comox Valley where he taught for another ten years and retired.

Seven years ago he was commenting to his neighbor that something was putting mud in the grounding hole on his outside electrical plug. He was introduced to the Mason Bee. He researched the topic. He bought his first starter house and 10 cocoons from Art Knapps. The Bees became his hobby. He gathered information locally and on-line and now makes his own houses, roll his own tubes, and does numerous presentations and workshops in the Valley.

## **Report to the District 1 Meeting on Species Garden Progress to Date**

**August 10, 2017**

As you are aware, work on the species Garden at Milner was delayed through the winter of 2016/2017, especially after discovery of the midden.

Work resumed in April of this year after conditional approval by the archeology team

Volunteers constructed a temporary deer fence. (The southern portion of the fence is currently under construction) An entry arbour was designed, built and installed and the pathway through the arbour was surfaced.

The site was weeded by regular Milner volunteers. An automatic irrigation system was designed and built.

The Garden is divided into sections which will be used to highlight the geographic regions from which the plants come

Growing medium was delivered and spread in several sections ready for planting. More sections will be prepared in the fall. Planting was done, by volunteers from MARS and Nanaimo, in 4 sections as appropriate, and young tender plants were provided with screens to protect them from the direct sun and from damaging winds

Most of this work was performed in April and May and is now paused to resume in the fall

The plants are checked three time a week by MARS and Nanaimo Volunteers, organized by Marilyn Dawson, for sun and wind damage and any problems are attended to as they happen

Work to begin in the fall includes more section preparation and planting, installation of interpretive signs and benches, completion of walkways and the start of installing companion plants.

Geoff Ball and John Denisegeer are preparing a grant application for the cost of the Garden signage. (Thanks to those of you who prepared a support letter)

An official Grand Opening of the Garden is expected in the Spring of 2018

Of the \$20,000 donated by Island Chapters to get the Garden started, slightly less than half has been spent. As before, approval to spend more will be requested as needed from the Species Garden Advisory Committee.

## Erythronium revolutum

*(Pink Fawn Lily)*

*by Jill Gould*



The Fawn Lilies that are native to North America are so beautiful that they have become a desirable garden plant. Pink Fawn Lily grows from coastal Northern California into British Columbia. We are fortunate to have it growing in our area.

The Fawn Lily flower stalks bend over ("revolutum") so that the flower faces downward. They are hardy plants which disappear in the summer, leaving just a dried stalk with a seed head to mark their location. The bulb is about 1 - 2 inches long, oval shaped and located about 6" deep in the soil. Two mottled leaves surround each flower stalk.

Fawn Lilies grow from seed, but the process may take several years before the plant reaches the flowering stage. They prefer moist soil, such as stream banks, and are endangered in the wild due to encroaching development, soil compaction from machinery, and "raiding" by enthusiastic but misguided gardeners. Seed collection is probably the acceptable method of acquiring the plant, unless you are part of a "plant rescue" group.



Last summer (2016) members of Comox Valley Nature, led by Murray Little, crashed around in the underbrush along the Tsolum River, keeping a eye out for bears, "rescuing" Fawn Lilies from the new bridge approach across the Tsolum River. Bulbs were shovelled into 1-gallon pots. They were transplanted into other suitable areas by several Streamkeeper groups and interested volunteers. I was one of the volunteers, so I brought home a pot, and had a lovely pink Fawn Lily this spring.

Since they are a woodland plant, Fawn Lilies are a wonderful addition to your Rhododendron garden.

*It's a lovely day. Lovely but raining -- a good time to finish off this newsletter. I need a rhodo for the banner of this newsletter but my mind won't focus. It begins to drift from my garden to Sunnydale Golf Course and back again. I need a rhodo! My mind continues to wander -- did you know that Norman Todd died recently? -- on 21st July. Paul Wurz drove south to the memorial service just a few days ago. I wonder where I put Norm's book, "The Complete Wit and Wisdom of Norman Todd", that I borrowed from Paul? I wonder if there's a rhodo named after Norman Todd? I quickly Google -- nope. Well there should have been. But I did run into an essay by Norman Todd written in 2006 which I'll reprint here. I never met Mr. Todd -- I wish I had -- he seemed like a really special guy. And I'd like to thank him for *R. basilicum*, my Rhodo in the Banner. Here's to you Norm. (The attached photo is by Garth Wedemire from [hirsutum.com](http://hirsutum.com))*

## Bounty of Basilicum

by Norman Todd May 2006



Some things are truly worth the wait. I sowed some seed of the big-leaf rhododendron *basilicum* thirty-three years ago. The one remaining plant is now four metres high and is planted, unfortunately, too close to the driveway. The arching branches so annoyed the garbage collector that he would take purposeful aim at these big paddles of leaves, using his truck as a mobile macerator while dervishly screaming unprintable descriptions of the offending owner and the innocent *basilicum*. It had to be pruned and tied back.

I cherished the plant but it never bloomed. Every time I passed it I would coo encouraging words and tell it that I was not going to croak until it showed me a blossom. It has bloomed for the last three years. Now, as I pass it I am somewhat trepidatious and have changed my message to one of praise for its beauty and how it is adding it my longevity.

This year it opened its first bloom at the start of February and two months later it is still resplendent. The first flush of colour is a soft salmon cream. Inside, the corolla is a dark purple blotch. The substance of the flower is of a heavy, waxy, vellum-like texture. As they age the flowers lose the warmer tones and become a cool cream. There are sixteen stamens. The flowers were not harmed by the frost we had in March when it got down to - 3°C. Some of the thinner substance blooms like '*Snow Lady*', '*Airy Fairy*', and *ririei* went brown. The rhododendrons that bloom early do last longer than the later flowering ones but I can't think of another rhododendron where the flowers last for two months. In fairness, I do have to mention '*Lee's Scarlet*' and '*Nobleanum Coccineum*' for length of bloom. The latter opened its first flower in October, the last in March. '*Lee's Scarlet*' had colour for 14 or 15 weeks. However, these plants open their blooms in a succession; each individual truss lasting three or four weeks. Still, the vital question is, dare I take selfish,

ominous comfort from the longevity of the blooms on *basilicum*?

*Basilicum* (meaning ‘royal’) is in the **Falconera Subsection** in the **Subgenus Hymenanthès**. Its closest relatives are *arizelum* and *rothschildii*. I read, fairly recently, that the true *basilicum* is rare in cultivation. I hope, for snobby reasons, that mine is correctly named. No one has contradicted its appellation but not many of the authorities have had a chance to cast judgment. I was ecstatic when about two weeks ago two passing municipal workers who were looking for potholes to fill came into the nursery and one wanted to buy that “tall plant with the pale yellow flowers”. The potential buyer was less than ecstatic when I told him it was not for sale.

In a woodland setting there are no better plants for early season impact than the large-leaf rhododendron. The big drawback is their slowness in reaching the age of puberty. One can rationalize about this characteristic by reminding oneself that one must treat rhododendrons as foliage plants; as a bonus they occasionally have flowers. Now that there are one or two that indulge themselves (and me) in an annual floral extravaganza, I consider the twenty or thirty or more years waiting to see a bloom time to be well spent; yet there can be no denying the obvious truth that, in modern times, when the average person will not buy a green banana, the large-leaf rhododendrons are merely botanical curiosities.

Some authorities claim that a flower lasts for as long as it takes to get the job done, i.e. to effect pollination. I am not expert enough to be able to say if *basilicum* is one of the plants that does not ever self-pollinate. There are other rhododendrons blooming close enough to *basilicum* that would probably have compatible pollen. So this year I will leave the spent flowers on the plant and determine if any seed have formed. I then plan to sow these seed. I may have time to find out if the seed will germinate but....

We are now at the end of the last weeks of April and the first flowers are adorning the driveway. I will not remove them. I will indulge the garbage collector and let him press them with his heavily laden tires. Plants give pleasure in so many ways. *Basilicum* deserves a few bravos and olés. “Large was his bounty and his soul sincere.”

Postscript. Not fifteen minutes after I typed the word ‘sincere’ above, the garbage truck was here and deftly put a gouge in my wife’s car. I must exonerate the driver. This was his first time here (not the usual driver) and he came in the wrong way. He had not seen *basilicum* at that point. He was still able to crush the flowers on the way out.





## North America Meets Europe



The 2018 ARS Convention will be in Bremen, Germany. It will start around May 7, 2018, with optional tours before the convention and after the convention. The schedule may and probably will change slightly in the next couple months.

- 1st Pre-Tour: Optional 5 days visiting Dutch Gardens including Keukenhof Gardens
- 2nd Pre-Tour: Optional 2 days at RHODO 2018 Rhododendron Festival and Bremen
- 3rd Pre-Tour: Optional 6 days public and private garden visits in Denmark & Sweden
- Convention: 7-day convention in Bremen from May 20 to 26 including 3 tour days
- Post-Tour: Optional 4 days visiting gardens in Finland.

Calendar this now! It is a do-not-miss event. You can choose to start in Holland or Germany with one of the 3 pre-tours or start with the convention. Then you can choose to finish in Germany after the convention or in Finland after the post-convention tour. That means there are 8 possible combinations ranging from 7 days & nights for just the convention to 24 days & nights if you do everything which includes the 3 pre-tours to the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and Sweden; the convention; and the post-convention tour to Finland.