



THE FEBRUARY EDITION

RHODOTELLER

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FEBRUARY 2018

COMING EVENTS

6th February 2018-- Executive meeting

This month's meeting will be held at the home of our secretary, Carolyn Chester. Come early (or stay late) if you'd care to "fuss over the boys". The meeting will start promptly at **10 a.m.**

13th February 2018 -- Regular meeting

The speaker for our February meeting will be Geoffrey Ball the Executive Director of Milner Gardens and Woodland. Geoff will concentrate his presentation on Milner Gardens and the development of the Rhododendron Species Garden. Please see inside for more details.

APRIL 6TH and 7th 2018

RSBG Annual Symposium

Rhododendron enthusiasts, serious gardeners and horticulturists will discover up-to-the-minute information on species from Europe, Russia and beyond. See back page for more 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

As I sit here watching the trees blowing in the wind, it reminds me how weather, like life, can be unpredictable, but with cycles. Mt. Washington has been dumped with record snow which hasn't been seen since 1997 and 2010. Even though the early snowdrops and crocus were covered with snow last weekend, the rains quickly washed it away. February will see cold and sunny, and rainy and mild.

On January 25th we lost one of our dear members, Bob Smith. Those of you who were lucky to have had a garden tour on his golf cart, consider yourself lucky, as that was the end of an era. Bob and Adela graciously opened their home and garden to the NIRS, where we enjoyed a wonderful pot luck dinner with the Whidbey Island chapter, and a fun quiz taking us through the different areas. Bob was so creative, and humbly said about his furniture that he had to make it so his family would have something to sit on. Bob and Adela spent the winter months in California, enjoying the best of both worlds with the warmer weather and family there, and their garden here in the summer.

For those of you who celebrate the birth of Robert Burns on January 25th, this day now marks the passing of another great man. We raise a toast to Bob Smith, a scholar and a gentleman. You will be missed.

Cheers!

Judi

In Memoriam



Dr. Roberts A. Smith

Members of the North Island Rhododendron Society lost a fellow member and a dear friend on Thursday, January 25, 2018 with the sudden passing of Dr. Roberts (Bob) Smith.

Not many knew the history of Bob Smith and the fact that he moved to the Comox Valley with his family when he was just eight years old in 1937. It was the education he received at Courtenay Elementary and Courtenay High schools that provided the foundation for his future success as a chemist.

As noted at the ceremony when he was inducted into the Comox Valley Walk of Achievement back in October 2008, *“The work of Dr Roberts A. Smith has helped to save thousands of lives over the years. He was a pioneer in the anti-viral field and came up with the idea to limit the search for anti-viral compounds after the structure of DNA and RNA was discovered in the 1950s.”*

Bob’s idea to limit anti-viral compounds led to the selection of a broad spectrum anti-viral that is now widely used throughout the world in various life-saving drugs. Through his company in California, he went on to study AIDS and other diseases; eventually working on a drug that, when combined with interferon A, is used to treat Hepatitis C. *“Today it is quite widely used in other parts of the world for certain diseases,”* he said. *“It’s an important drug and I am very happy to have had the opportunity to be associated with its development.”*

At their home in Courtenay, Roberts and Adela developed a tremendous estate garden which includes hundreds of rhododendron varieties. They have welcomed many garden enthusiasts on tours of their property. Bob was always willing to chauffeur, in his always handy golf cart, those who had difficulty managing the inclines and winding pathways on the hillside property.

Through the friendship and encouragement of NIRS founder Harry Wright, Bob eventually became a member of the North Island chapter in November of 2005. During the following years, the Smiths hosted many garden tours for our club, as well as others in the District. The Smiths also hosted several of our annual June picnics including the club’s 25th anniversary celebration in 2009 and 30th celebration in 2014. Bob has enthusiastically supported the ongoing work of our propagation group, by providing his propagating shed, greenhouse and outdoor potting and growing areas.

Bob is going to be dearly missed by all who knew him. Our sympathies and support go out to Adela and family. He had a big heart, which after 88 years just decided it had given enough. R.I.P. Roberts.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

MEMBERSHIP

Jill Gould

Here we are in the New Year, with 76 members signed up, 7 of them Associates. We welcome Cathie Arnold and Sheila Borman as new members. Dave and Noni Godfrey have prepared the NIRS Roster Book for the 2018 year, which will be distributed to the membership once it is back from the printers.

Of course, if you have not yet renewed, we would like to hear from you. Our membership of course will fluctuate from year to year, but we are still a happy, vibrant club—numbers are only part of it!

WAYS & MEANS

Our Raffle Rhodos this month are:

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



" *Cunningham's Blush*" 4', -26c. Consistently a good grower and bloomer. Habit tight and rounded. Very light pink flowers kissed with a yellow-pink blotch on upper lobe.



"*PJM*" 4', -31c. Not only cold hardy but also tolerant of heat and sun. Small rounded leaves are green in summer and mahogany in winter. Bright lavender pink flowers.

Our Door Prize is:



"*Vuyk's Scarlet*" Azalea. Low spreading, compact with small glossy leaves. Bright crimson funnel shaped flowers.

We also have our "Greener'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

We had a wonderful turnout to our first Propagation Meeting of 2018 and we thank Sue and Garth for hosting us once again. We welcomed Murray Erickson to the group and invite other interested members to join us!



We can always count on Garth to have an unusual plant in bloom or to share an aspect of technology that we might use to our advantage. The meeting started off with a brief video of the cuttings in Garth's greenhouse, with the focus on how well a video can show things that a simple walk-through might miss: the tiny hairs on some foliage, buds swelling, or scales on a new leaf. Adding to that idea, with a link to something like Apple TV we might even be able to live-video a demonstration at our General

Meeting, projecting it on the screen to allow even those in the back a 'bird's-eye view'. Garth wrapped up with pictures of an unusual plant with red fringe blossoms hanging from its branches, and then dazzled us with one of the early blooming rhodos from his greenhouse.

Wolfgang reported that the cuttings are doing well and gave an overview of what he and Antje have been doing with regard to maintenance over the winter. Water and temperature have been monitored and dead leaves and blossoms removed from the pots to reduce possible rot contamination. Some flats of rooted plants have been taken off the heating bench and next week they will start fertilizing with a weak 20/20/20 solution. By the end of February we will put together small work party teams to start shifting plants around and move some of the seedlings to the cool greenhouse. Some of the plants in the cool greenhouse will be repotted and moved outside, and many of the evergreen azaleas will be taken outside and allowed a first flush of growth before repotting in early June.

The 2019 ARS Fall Conference will be held in Parksville and attendants typically are given a small rhodo as a gift. The propagation groups across our District have been invited to take on this production task, and we have 100 4-inch pots started with the hopes of producing 100 lovely plants for the conference!

Our group has come together to learn about propagation and the art and techniques of growing rhododendrons and other related plants. Although we are currently quite involved in a somewhat larger-scale production project, we know that the focus will likely shift back to smaller projects in the years to come. This year we are hoping for at least one field trip and look forward to the meetings and work parties, and of course the chat that happens over coffee and goodies! Once again we invite interested members to come and learn with us.

THE RHODO GARDEN

Maureen Denny

Our first work party of 2018 at the CVRG will be held Thursday February 15th at 10am.



Please bring your tools and enthusiasm for the beginning of another round of work parties, they are lots of fun and a good way to get to know members of our club. We will have general clean up to do after winter storms in preparation for spreading the yearly application of bark mulch in March.

UPCOMING SPEAKERS

Dave Godfrey

February 13 -- Geoff Ball -- Milner Gardens and Development of our new Rhodo Species Garden

March 13th -- Bill McMillan from the Victoria Chapter

April 10th -- Bernie Dinter from Dinter's Nursery in Duncan

SOCIAL COMMITTEE

Antje Guertler

Thanks very much to everyone involved in bringing such delicious goodies to our meetings. This meeting will see gourmet delights from Lynn Gray, Lois Clyde, Shane Tillapaugh, Michele Spender, Cathy Storey and Antje.

And one reminder to our members to please bring any utensils you might need -- cutlery, mugs, etc.

THE PROGRAMME

February 2018

MILNER GARDENS AND THE RHODO SPECIES GARDEN



Our February guest speaker will be Mr. Geoffrey Ball, Executive Director of Milner Gardens & Woodland.

Geoff Ball earned his horticultural training in the program at VIU, and has been associated with Milner Gardens for 18 years. For the past 11 years, he has been the Executive Director and has guided the Garden, and surrounding Woodland, through many changes and improvements without ever losing sight of the original vision.

Geoff's presentation will give an overview of Milner Gardens & Woodland and an update on the new species garden.



by Dave Godfrey

New Year, New Photos!

Once again, we have entered a new year and with it, some new photos of our club's activities. So far the year has been quiet. But the Propagation Group is already planning ahead for its growing season. As Diana Scott reports in her separate article, members of the group met at the home of Garth Wedemire and Sue Grant to discuss the future of the group. You will find a few photos of this meeting posted to our website's "Photographs" under the 'Special Gallery' tab. Other activities have been moved to the 'Archives' galleries. Watch for other new albums of our club' activities throughout the year.

Our 2018 Members' Yearbook has gone to the printers and should be available for distribution at our February meetings. A copy will be mailed to those out of town members and any who are unable to make the regular meetings for various reasons. Get your copy soon!

Winter Gardening Chores

by Dave Godfrey

If you are sitting inside on cool but dry days wishing you were out working in your garden, then don't despair, there are a number of things to do during the winter months. If you haven't already done so, now is an ideal time to spend a few hours cleaning and sharpening your garden tools.

Cutting tools, such as secateurs and pruners, can be sharpened on a high quality sharpening stone, and then lightly oiled with penetrating oil which cleans and prevents rust. Many digging tools (shovels, trowels and hoes) also work more efficiently after being cleaned, sharpened and oiled. To sharpen these large tools, it is best to use a bench vice or use a flat surface; then holding a mill file at about a 30 degree angle, draw the file across the beveled surface of the blade, pushing the file away from your body. Once the cutting edge is sharp, turn the tool over and use the file to remove any burrs along the back edge. Clean with a light coating of penetrating oil and they are ready to go when time and weather permits.

As early spring approaches, it is time to put down the catalogues and gardening magazines, put on your gloves and get started with some pruning and planting. Early spring is an ideal time to transplant your rhodos and other shrubs.

It is an ideal time to divide clumping perennials, such as Shasta daisies, hostas and daylilies, once they begin to show signs of growth with new shoots or leaves poking about an inch or two above the ground. Using a shovel or fork, loosen the soil around the edge of the clump and then pry the clump free from the ground. Although it is possible to divide large clumps with the sharp blade of a shovel, the preferred method, which is less damaging to the plant's roots, is to take two forks back-to-back and drive them into the center of the clump. Pushing the handles apart usually separates the plant into two clumps, and these clumps can then be divided the same way. Smaller clumps can be divided by hand or with a gardening knife.

It is best to replant these separated clumps as soon as possible, either back in the garden or into pots large enough to hold the smaller clumps and addition soil. This helps ensure continued growth and hasten the reestablishment in the garden. While dividing any unusual perennials, please consider setting aside one or two for our plant sale at the end of April. Hostas or bulbs, but NOT daisies or daylilies, are always appreciated as donations to our companion plant table.

You can prune late-flowering shrubs, such as Butterfly bushes, Smoke bushes, Elderberries and Spireas, once the threat of frost has past. These shrubs form their flower buds on the current year's growth, so prune them any time before the growth begins in the spring.

Although it is possible to prune early-flowering shrubs and trees before they bloom, this will mean that you will be removing potential blossoms and flowers as well. However, some plants such as well established hydrangeas may need to be thinned. Removing the old thick branches, allows room and nourishment for the promotion of the remaining younger stems.

Regular selective pruning, or maintenance pruning, helps keep woody plants healthy and productive. This type of pruning helps protect against pests and disease which can gain entry through dead wood , broken branches and wounds caused by branches rubbing together.

Whatever type of pruning or dividing you are prepared to tackle, always be assured that clean sharp tools are the key to success in doing the job properly. So if you haven't already done so in the late fall, refer back to the beginning when we suggested... there's no time like the present to start preparing for the garden season ahead.

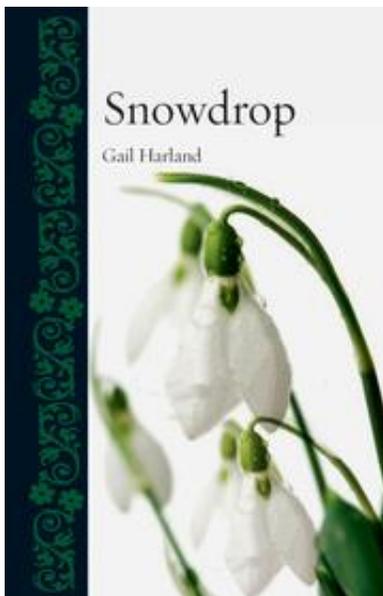
BOOK REVIEW

by Noni Godfrey

Snowdrop,

by Gail Harland. Pub. Reaktion Books, Botanical series.

(NIRS Library #20-29)



Elegant flowers dressed in simple white and green, snowdrops look too fragile to cope with wintry weather. They are however very resilient and are treasured by gardeners for their ability to flower early in the horticultural year. Snowdrops have played an important role in gardens and popular culture alike, as a treasured genus for enthusiast growers and a symbol of hope and consolation.

The gentle beauty of the snowdrop has attracted the attention of poets and artists for centuries. They are commonly found in flower paintings from the sixteenth century onwards and frequently appear in poetry and prose. In Victorian Britain 'snowdrop bands' encouraged chastity among young women; today snowdrops are used as the symbol of several charities. Medicinally they are a source of galantamine, used in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease.

Today snowdrops are more popular than ever before, with record-breaking sums reached for individual bulbs. Snowdrop is an ideal companion for any plant-lover who has ever eagerly awaited this treasured sign of spring.

Helena Stewart Zukowski

by Diana Scott

We have so many interesting people in our club and it is a special treat when they allow us get to know them better. Our most recent ARS Bronze Medal recipient is Helena Stewart Zukowski. Soon after joining the NIRS in 2010 Helena agreed to become our Publicity Chair. With an extensive background in media, Helena has been our liaison with the public, enticing new members to club meetings and events through her informative articles in the local papers. Helena writes for our newsletter, participates in our fundraisers and work parties, and is active in our propagation group; a valued and well respected member of our Society.



Helena came into the world in 1939 during the some of the coldest February weather Edmonton has ever recorded, and she admits that she has been trying to stay warm and out of the cold ever since. She grew up on a farm in the Frazer Valley and went to school in Abbotsford. Medicine was thought to be her goal until she got connected to the school newspaper and caught the writing bug. A summer job as a copy runner with the Vancouver Sun developed into a 5 year stint at the Sun Tower in Vancouver from Grade 11 through her time at UBC. She worked as a copy runner, wrote for different departments, and became the secretary to some of the newspaper celebrities of the day.

Thinking of a future in the diplomatic corps or as a foreign correspondent, Helena took courses in political science, history, and even Russian. After graduating she got a job in Toronto with the Wool Bureau of Canada writing advertising copy. While taking a magazine writing course she attended a meeting where Keith Spicer, a young graduate student, was heading up a group looking for volunteers to do overseas work 'to serve and to learn'. This was the inaugural meeting of Canadian Overseas Volunteers which would eventually become the development organization known as CUSO (Canadian University Students Overseas). In the summer of 1961, Helena was one of the first 15 COV participants who left Canada for postings in India, Ceylon, and Sarawak (now part of Malaysia). Helena met a fellow COV participant, fell in love and got married just before heading off to Sarawak on the island of Borneo. While teaching in their second year they found themselves in the middle of the Borneo Rebellion as Indonesia attempted to take over the Island. Once Gurkha troops were sent in, schools were closed and Helena and husband Glen found themselves out of a job and highly encouraged to leave the island for their own safety.

Rather than fly directly home they decided to travel overland to Russia and headed through Saigon, Cambodia, Burma and Eastern Pakistan into India. They stayed with friends in Bombay for several months before making their way by train to Quetta along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Travels took them on to Iran, through Turkey into Greece, and over to Naples Italy where they bought a motor scooter to make their way through the rest of Europe. Heading to Poland to connect with relatives, they managed to get a one-day Visa to cross the socialist republic of Czechoslovakia. Adding to the adventure, when they finally arrived in Poland Helena realized that she was pregnant with their son-to-be, Cal. They made their way back to Canada via ship from England, and arrived in Montreal with no money and no place to stay. With the resiliency and good luck of the young they managed to settle in, continue their education, and as part of Glen's master's thesis in Environmental Design, do work on the Caribbean Island of Montserrat.

After taking television and film courses at Ryerson, Helena became a director/producer at York University's professional TV studio. Through the years she was part of an independent media production company, wrote science programs for Global, and was a comedy writer for David Steinberg. Just before moving to Los Angeles to continue with the David Steinberg Show, her father passed away and Helena chose to remain in Canada to care for her mother. Once her son Cal was settled in school and her mother was more stable, Helena accepted a position with 'Palm Springs Life' and for six years lived in Palm Springs as Editor of the magazine. Helena directed a large staff while meeting and interviewing people in the film and fashion industry as well politicians such as Henry Kissinger, and other newsworthy people of the time. Unfortunately her mother took a turn for the worse and Helena once again went home to care for her. From a home base on the Mainland, Helena travelled to exotic locales to produce promotional material, wrote for newspapers and magazines, and worked for CBC Radio writing radio dramas and producing material for shows like *Morningside*.

In 1990 Helena was hired as one of the Commissioners for the Citizen's Forum on National Unity (Spicer Commission) to cross the country meeting with Canadians to determine "the values and characteristics fundamental to the well-being of Canada". The report was submitted, and while caring for her ailing mother, Helena continued with travel writing and taught ESL at the University College of the Fraser Valley. Sadly, her mother passed away in 2000.

Helena was writing for *Westworld* and various travel magazines while teaching a few courses at the College when she met Roy Stewart. Having both been single for many years, they appreciated their shared interests and soon became a couple. Helena and Roy had a special spot in their hearts for their 'dream car', a British Morgan, and they spent many happy times touring around the country with their fellow Car Club enthusiasts. While Helena was working on a story about the Comox Valley for *Food and Wine* magazine, they both saw that this place had much to offer them. In 2008 they sold their property in West Van and moved to the Valley, settling onto a large semi-urban property just outside of Seal Bay Park. Roy was retired, but Helena continued to write for magazines and spend time in her new garden. Through their Morgan car, they connected with the Comox Valley branch of the Old English Car Club, meeting and becoming fast friends with people in the Valley. Over the years a series of health issues eventually took their toll, and Roy passed away in 2012.

Son Cal and family live in the Czech Republic, but this year Helena's grandson Max is attending high school in Canada. Cal and Max are staying with Helena while Cal's wife Carolyn continues to manage their properties in Cesky Krumlov and older grandson Aiden attends university in Prague. At some point, they may all move back to Canada which would be a special gift for Helena.

Life is certainly an adventure. I thank Helena for sharing some of her story with us, and look forward to chatting as we stand in line for tea and goodies at our next meeting!

THE RHODO IN THE BANNER

Roberts Smith is gone but it will surely be a long, long, time before he is forgotten by the members of the NIRS or any other chapter whose members have had the opportunity to meet him and Adela and tour their wonderful garden. I'm sure we all have so many happy memories of Bob but I will always remember him as I last saw him -- cheerfully sitting with Adela near the front door and talking with all the Propagation Members as they passed by. And I will remember his rhodos -- oh so beautiful! Almost impossible to pick one for the Banner but last spring I know I was awestruck by one of his gorgeous reds called "Lord Roberts" -- This Month's Rhodo in the Banner".



Lord Roberts

photo by Garth Wedemire

Rhododendron Species Botanical *G*ARDEN

Annual Symposium

April 6 & 7th

, 2018

Everyone Welcome!

**Location: Best Western Plus, Federal Way,
WA and Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden**

**Featured Speaker: William McNamara,
Executive Director of Quarryhill Botanical Garden**

Information & Registration: www.rhodygarden.org

**Early bird registration is now
through March 9th (\$125.00)**

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