

Lest we forget

THE NOVEMBER 2019 EDITION



# THE RHODOTELLER

www.nirsrhodos.ca

PO Box 3183, Courtenay BC V9N 5N4

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## NOVEMBER 2019 Coming Events

### November 5<sup>th</sup> -- Executive meeting

This month's meeting will be held at the home of **Val & Aubrey Ferris, 1922 Greenwood Cres., Comox**. The meeting will begin at **10 a.m.**

### November 12<sup>th</sup> -- Regular meeting

Special presentation by Steve Hootman, Executive Director & Curator of the Rhododendron Species Foundation and the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, in Federal Way WA.



Meeting begins at 7:30 pm.  
United Church,  
250 Beach Drive. Corner of Comox Rd & Beach.

### November 30<sup>th</sup>--Membership Draw Deadline

Renew your membership by Nov. 30 to have a chance to win back your membership fees for the year.

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# NOVEMBER PROGRAMME

## STEVE HOOTMAN

For those who missed the Rhododendron conference in Parksville last month, you have an opportunity to attend this month's presentation by Steve Hootman. Steve has been the Executive Director of the Rhododendron Species Foundation & Botanical Garden in Federal Way since 1992. Steve is in town assessing our CVRG, making recommendations for a management plan. We don't have an actual topic for the evening's presentation, but be assured, it will be an inspiring, informative evening.



Rhododendron Species Foundation & Botanical  
Garden



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# PRESIDENT'S

## NOTES

MAUREEN DENNY

What absolutely glorious fall gardening weather. It so nice to be able to rake leaves that are dry and crunchy. Reminds me of fall in Ontario, when as a kid, we would rake up piles of leaves and jump in them. I really do enjoy all the fall garden chores, raking leaves, cutting back perennials, and planting bulbs.



I was able to attend the fall ARS Conference in Parksville on Sept 27, 28, and 29<sup>th</sup>. This being a first conference for me, I was certainly impressed with the line up of speakers, the plants sales and the overall efficient and smooth running of this wonderful event. It was such a treat to hang out with so many like minded rhodo folks and plant lovers. The food was fabulous. The walls of the convention room were decorated with high quality photographic prints of Rhodos, donated by various club members. Beautiful flower arrangements decorated each table, crafted and donated by a local Parksville Flower Arranging Club.

The speaker who impressed me most was Dr. Juliana Medeiros. Dr Medeiros is a Research Scientist at the Holden Arboretum in Kirtland, Ohio. Her work is focused on the genus *Rhododendron*, as a plant model, to study how plants evolve in response to their environments. Her talk, "Drinking the Ocean Through a Straw: *Rhododendron* Strategies for Rapid Growth Under Water Limitation" presented a comparison between two Subgenus of *Rhododendron*, *Pontica* and *Pentanthera*. An example of *Pontica* is the well know *Rhodo cawtabiense* and of *Pentanthera*, *Deciduos Azaleas*. She stated that *Rhododendrons* are not considered to be drought tolerant: and that the bigger threat to their survival is not dry soil but low atmospheric humidity. She then elaborated on this idea, talking about how plant parts in these two Subgenus differ, specifically mentioning different traits in their xylem (water conduits in the stem between roots and leaves), and leaf structure (stomata).

Another highlight of the conference was the presentation of two Silver Medals from the ARS. Ian Efford, of the Cowichan Valley Chapter and Marilyn Dawson of the Mt. Arrowsmith Chapter, were recipients of this prestigious honour.

Garden Tours were offered on Saturday afternoon. One could choose to see some outstanding local gardens in Parksville or a tour of Milner Gardens with Steve Hootman. I chose the Milner Tour and was very impressed with Steve's commentary as we walked around the new and thriving Species Garden.

After all this excitement, more seems to be on the horizon. Steve Hootman will be the speaker at our next meeting on November 12. Meanwhile I hope everyone is getting outside in the sunshine to work or play.

See you at the next Meeting.

Maureen

## SOCIAL COMMITTEE

Antje Guertler, Chair

For the November meeting, we look forward to the tasty treats from Annie Sollberger, Diane Van Oostdam, Adrienne McNabb, Janet Campbell and Helen Stefiuk. The sign-up sheet for the Christmas party will be passed around at the general meeting, Thanks for the goodies!

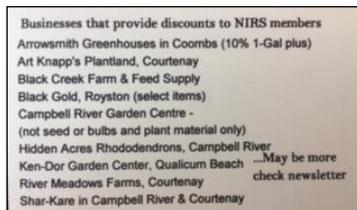
## MEMBERSHIP

Nadine Boudreau and Cathie Arnold, Chair



## IT'S TIME TO RENEW!

Register before November 30, 2019 and be entered in a draw to win your membership fee back. We like to have as many memberships renewed so we can have everyone signed up with the ARS by January 1, 2020. The cost for a membership has remained the same, regular \$35.00 and \$10.00 for an associate membership (has a regular membership with another ARS chapter).



*Don't forget to use your membership card to receive a discount at the businesses listed on the back of card*

## COMOX VALLEY RHODODENDRON GARDEN

Maureen Denny, Chair

The next CVRG work party will be held a week early this month on November 7 at 10am, in order to have a clean up before Steve Hootman tours and assesses the garden the following week. There will be leaves to rake and weeding to do so bring your tools and a bucket. Wheelbarrows and goodies are appreciated. Hopefully the sun will be out!



Maureen

## WAYS AND MEANS

Don't forget to check out the items on the table for sale. The Mary Palmer Fundamentals booklet is a great guide to having success with Rhododendrons. Plant tags for labeling your plants, and there is a few Greer Books available, still the go-to book for Rhododendron info.



*You know a good book when it is showing wear and tear from use, mine even has sticky notes flagging plants. Nadine*

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# STUMPERY

JILL GOULD

In case you haven't heard, this is not your average debris pile waiting for slash-burning season. Wikipedia describes a stumpery as "a garden feature similar to a rockery but made from parts of dead trees", notably the roots and stumps, which provide an excellent habitat for ferns and other woodland plants, small animals and insects, and certainly birds. The first stumpery was created in Victorian England as a solution to disposal of land-clearing debris and created a rage for stumperies around Britain and the world. The Rhododendron Species Garden in Federal Way, Wash. boasts "The world's largest public stumpery". Check out their website: [rhodygarden.org](http://rhodygarden.org).



*Stumpery at the Rhododendron Species Foundation*

My husband and I went into gales of laughter when we first heard the term "stumpery". On our rural property, the adjacent land (formerly cleared for a forestry company's Poplar plantation) boasted the most God-awful mounds of stumps, rocks and soil, pushed by machine into huge windrows along our property line – about 400 feet long! It has been in place for decades. Buried in the mess was a barbed-wire fence (this was an old farm). Over the years we have with difficulty removed the wire, being as it was a hazard to deer and our dogs. The Poplars were logged by the landowner 5 years ago. We have not touched the "stumpery". We don't have to; it's fine as it is.

Trees and shrubs have grown out of it. Big-leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*), Alder (*Alnus rubra*), Ocean Spray (*Holodiscus discolor*), Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*), and Cascara Buckthorn (*Rhamnus purshiana*) form the larger framework. Red-osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) and Pacific Crabapple (*Malus fusca*) are in there too. Ferns abound: Sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*) and Deer fern (*Blechnum spicant*) crowd the adjacent ditch. We haven't planted rhododendrons on the stumpery; the competition is too fierce. The main joy is the bird population.

A stumpery is certainly a way of recycling and can be utilised even on small properties. Any tree stump or woody debris (Pallets? Old firewood? Waste wood?) with the addition of fallen leaves and garden trash, a bit of soil and even a rock or two, can make a haven for ferns.... even if it is only one stump. And if you can keep the deer out, Rhodos will love it too.



## PAUL'S FAVOURITES

### My Five Favourite Purple & Blue Rhododendrons

When walking through the garden, I seldom refer to my purple and blue rhododendrons as some of my favourite rhodos in the garden. When looking at my criteria for exceptional rhododendrons, blue and purple rhodos often fall short in plant form. Many of my beautiful purples and blues tend to be very large growers and often 'leggy' and very upright. There is no shortage of big, beautiful, and striking trusses. When choosing this month's favourites, I selected those that have attractive plant forms. Another shortcoming that many of these rhodos possess is their tendency to attract weevils - one of the worst is Blue Peter. I tend to plant these rhodos away from big trees and in as much sun as possible to discourage weevils and also keep the plants from reaching for the sun.



#### Jonathan Shaw:

Is one of the few purple rhodos that have a very compact and dense bush and grows very well in our garden. It is consistently covered with vivid violet purple flowers and is probably one of my best purples.

#### Jim's Blueberry Jam

One of Frank Fujioka's hybrids that tends to attract the most attention when seen in the garden. After emphasizing the importance of plant form, I must confess it falls a bit short, but the truss is exceptional.



#### Burgundy Lace:

Is another one of Frank Fujioka's hybrids which grows exceptionally well in our garden. We have two, one in partial shade and the other in full sun - both are doing very well.

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## Blue Boy:

Is a well shaped plant for a blue rhodo, with dark green leaves and tends to grow upright. This plant is an easy grower and blooms profusely with a very beautiful truss! Not often seen at nurseries, but I recommend purchasing it if you have the chance.



## Am I Blue:

Is a relatively new rhodo, hybridized by Bill Stipes on Whidbey Island and it is certainly blue. It has a truss that is very large, the plant is very robust, and the leaves are excellent. In spite of its vigorous growth the plant is very attractive – one of the nicer plants in the garden.

## Honorable Mentions:

1. **Polarnacht**
2. **Peter Allen**
3. **Colonel Cohen**
4. **Arthur Bedford**
5. **Black Eye**
6. **Tall Timbers**

## Popular “blues & purples” that were left out.

I intentionally left out some beautiful blue and purple **species** rhododendrons and their hybrids. Many of the nicest are the **lepidote** rhododendrons that have small scales on the leaves and generally have small leaves, as opposed to the **elepidotes** which have much larger leaves and lack scales.

The most striking of these hybrids are the many forms of *R. augustinii* and *R. concinnum*. Some of the *augustinii* hybrids in our garden that put on exceptional displays are: Blaney’s Blue, Crater Lake, Bob’s Blue, and California Blue. I could very easily come up with 5 more favourites from the **lepidote** group.

Doing this article for the Rhodoteller is an opportunity to do an evaluation of rhodos in our garden.

Paul Wurz



## WEBSITE UPDATE

by Dave Godfrey, Webmaster

For the benefit of our newer members, I will recap some of the information about our NIRS website. Members can access the site at [nirsrhodos.ca](http://nirsrhodos.ca)

The site is a 'responsive' Wordpress website. This means it automatically adjusts its appearance depending on the device being used (PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone, Android tablet, etc.)

We have an *Events* page to keep you informed about upcoming activities. There are also *Library*, *CVRG* and *Membership* pages. A *Contact Us* page lets you send an email to Executive Members, Committee Chairs and the Webmaster.

The *Membership* page explains the various types of NIRS memberships available and includes a link to download a membership application form. In addition, there is a link to recent issues of the ARS Online Journal. There are instructions for accessing the online JARS in our little member's booklet. You will need your ARS number to be able to access.

Banner photos at the top of each page change when new pages are accessed. A *Sidebar* has been added to many of the pages. The *Sidebar* has links that allows viewers to access the latest 'Rhodoteller' - our monthly newsletter. Our Facebook page and links to other ARS sites on the Internet are easy to find in the sidebar.

Photograph albums of NIRS events and activities are added to the *Photographs* page and are currently up to date. The hundreds of photos taken at the tour in May to the Pilchuck chapter and RSBG can be found under the "Special Galleries" tab; whereas all our annual events can be found under the "Yearly Galleries" tab.

Be sure to visit the site often to view the many new features. ENJOY!



*Fall colours in my garden*  
*Nadine*

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## OUR RAFFLE RHODOS AND DOOR PRIZE THIS MONTH ARE:



**R. Linda:** Grows to 3 feet in 10 years. This Rhododendron flowers midseason. The flower colour is red, the leaves are broadly ovate 2-3inches long. The plant is a compact and rounded. Parentage - Britannia x williamsianum. It is an elepidote hybridized by Boskoop

*Photo by Kenneth Cox*

**R. Princess Ann:** Is a early midseason yellow plant, yellow funnel shaped flowers 1 inch across with a pale green throat. The plant reaches 1 foot in 10 years. The one inch long mid-green leaves are bronze when young and may also turn bronze in winter. This is a tight compact plant. Parentage is keiskei x hanceanum. A Lepidote hybridized by Reuthe.



*Photo by Roland Kersten*



*Glendoick photo*

### **R. Red Wood**

Pale pink flowers fading to creamy white. Named for its handsome red stems. Young leaves are bronzy. Plant reaches to 6 feet in 10 years, flowers in late May. It is an insigne hybrid introduced by Hobbie between 1965-1970

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## GUESS THE PLANT GROWING IN THE VALLEY

Thanks to 19-year-old Trevor, youngest guest at the September meeting and now a member, here's a photo of a very unusual fruit-bearing deciduous shrub in Courtenay. Can you guess:

- a) what it is; and,
- b) where it is.

I was very surprised as I've walked by this and never noticed it before. I will reveal the answers at the November meeting,

Judi Murakami



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## RHODODENDRONS 101 SERIES

Jake has asked Pauline if we could reprint this article from February 2016, it continues with the species article from October.

### ENCOUNTERS WITH THE SPECIES RHODODENDRONS OF VANCOUVER ISLAND

*By Pauline Thompson*

Many years ago, I was planning a trip to Victoria and a co-worker suggested that as I was interested in plants, I should visit her dad who had a nursery near Victoria. Her dad turned out to be Norman Todd and having no idea of his rhodo reputation, I went merrily off to his nursery, introduced myself as a friend of his daughter's and exclaimed at the number and diversity of rhodos and that the flowers were lovely. That was my first (and probably last) experience of 'the look' that one gets when noting how pretty the flowers are and completely failing to notice the varying size and shape and sometimes fragrance of the leaves, the tomentum and indumentum, the buds, calyxes, stature, compactness or legginess of the plants. Thankfully Mr. Todd took the time to tour me around the nursery and bring these features to my attention. At the end of the visit though, I surprised him by asking why Labrador Tea was not considered a rhododendron when in my humble opinion it seemed to exhibit very similar characteristics. He beamed and said that it had recently been included as one of the species rhodos of BC, bringing the total to six. And thus, began my quest to track down these lovely species rhodos.

#### *Rhododendron groenlandicum* - Bog Labrador tea

Alert Bay on Cormorant Island, formerly a thriving fishing village on the BC coast, is the oldest community in the northern Vancouver Island area. Heritage buildings and old village houses are adjacent to the thriving culture of the 'Namgis First Nation of the Kwakwaka'wakw.

While on a kayak trip in the region I hiked up to the nearby Alert Bay Ecological Park, a natural wetland fed by an underground spring. Originally, this site provided a water source for the Spenser and Huson's fish saltery (1870), that later became a cannery. This wetland area has an abundance of *R. groenlandicum*.



*photo: Pauline Thompson,  
Alert Bay Ecological Park*

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Groenland is the Danish name for Greenland and as the name suggests this plant is found in Greenland and in northern latitudes around the world including every territory and province in Canada. It was originally classified as *Ledum groenlandicum*, however recent genetic evidence has shown that the species are correctly placed in the genus *Rhododendron*, where they are now treated as *Rhododendron* subsect. *Ledum*.

Labrador tea is a common name for three closely related plant species: 1.) *R. tomentosum* - Northern Labrador tea, previously *Ledum palustre*, 2.) *R. neoglandulosum* - Western Labrador tea or trappers tea - collected along the Skagit River Dewdney Trail in 1915 previously called *Ledum glandulosum* and 3.) *R. groenlandicum*, - Bog Labrador tea, previously *Ledum groenlandicum*.

This herbal tea has been a favourite beverage among Athabaskan and Inuit people. The tea is described as having an “interesting forest-like flavor, a little bitter, a little astringent, a little spicy, a little camphor-like”. It is sometimes used as a spice for wild game or as a replacement for bay leaves in soups. During the 18th century, German brewers used *R. tomentosum* while brewing beer to make it more intoxicating, but it became forbidden because it apparently led to increased aggression.

The plant is a small erect shrub up to 1.5 metres tall with leathery aromatic evergreen leaves that roll under and have a yellowish soft hairy underneath when young or rusty brown when mature. The white flowers are in umbrella-like clusters and are very fragrant.

### *Rhododendron albiflorum*

At Mt Washington, on the walk around Paradise Meadows, I spotted *R. albiflorum* with its delicate pinkish buds and creamy white flowers. This is a deciduous rhodo growing about 1 metre in height. It is found at elevations from 6 to 2800 metres, averaging about 1500 metres. There were patches of this in bloom in July. This plant was identified in Forbidden Plateau in 1936 and added to the UBC botanical collection.



*photo: Pauline Thompson  
Paradise Meadows*

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*Rhododendron macrophyllum* - Pacific Rhododendron

There was quite a bit of excitement at an NIRS meeting a few years ago when Harry Wright revealed that he and Don Law had found what Harry believed to be *R. macrophyllum* at an undisclosed location in the Lazo Marsh. I chatted with Don recently and he said that he checked on it a couple of years ago and it was still fine. He has promised to check it again this spring and bring a leaf and flower to an NIRS meeting so that other experts might perhaps confirm the identification. If this is *R. macrophyllum* it would be one of the most northerly naturally occurring plants found on the Island. This rhodo is an erect spreading shrub up to about 8 metres tall with leathery oblong-elliptic leaves measuring 8 - 20 cm. The flowers vary from a pale pink to a deep rose-purplish, spotted red-brown. They are tubular bell-shaped, 2.5-4 cm long, up to 5 cm across, deeply 5-lobed, with lobes spreading and edges wavy. This species was first recorded on the Island at Rhododendron Lake near Parksville in 1970 and added to the Royal BC Museum botanical collection. It was first collected in the Hope-Princeton area in 1938 and added to the UBC botanical collection.



There are six species rhodos in BC. In addition to the three mentioned above there are the two other Labrador teas and also the bright pink Lapland rosebay *Rhododendron lapponicum* which has been located in areas including Mt Edziza, Stikine River, Pink Mountain, and one hundred miles north of Fort Nelson, where it was collected and added to the UBC botanical record in 1943.



Photo: John Weagle

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## The guru of rhododendrons, Alleyne Cook dies at age 94.

Alleyne Cook took his magic touch with plants from New Zealand to Britain and Canada.

*(Borrowed from the Vancouver Sun, October 22, 2019 – written by **JOHN MACKIE**)*



**Alleyne Cook with his wife Barbara in 1997.**

*Some people come to Vancouver for the weather, others for the scenery or the nightlife. Alleyne Cook came for the rhododendrons.*

“He knew rhododendrons and azaleas would thrive here,” said his son Nigel. “He’d be able to grow them as well as anywhere in the world.” And he did.

“He was credited with being the main designer and planter of the Ted and Mary Greig Rhododendron Garden in Stanley Park, which is possibly the best formal-designed and laid-out planted gardens in the park,” said former Vancouver Sun

gardening writer Steve Whysall. “He was a gardener for many years at the (Vancouver) park board, but more than that, he became a rhododendron expert. He was given the top award for the American Rhododendron Society, and honoured as a world expert. He was very significant, and much-loved.” Cook died Sunday at his North Vancouver home after a battle with chronic lymphocytic leukemia. He was just shy of his 95th birthday, which is amazing, given that he had survived three heart operations over the years. “He had two triple (bypasses) and a quadruple, so 10 bypasses in total,” said Nigel Cook. “He outlived two cardiologists.” “No three!” corrected Alleyne’s wife, Barbara.

Alleyne Cook had quite a life. He was born in Kapona, New Zealand, on Nov. 8, 1924, and was turned on to plants by his aunt. He apprenticed at a top nursery, Duncan and Davies, before deciding to move to Britain in 1950.

“The most experienced plantsman in New Zealand is inferior to one who has travelled and gone beyond his horticultural comfort level,” he explained in a profile by Terri Clark, former head of communications at the park board.

On-board the ship Rangitata for 28 days, he met his future wife. In England, he went to work for the legendary Sunningdale Nursery and planted the rhododendrons and azaleas at Castle Howard, the setting for the TV series and film Brideshead Revisited.

In 1954 he moved to Vancouver, where he installed gardens for a contractor before becoming a gardener at the school board. He lived frugally — he told Clark he lived at the Salvation Army until he finally married Barbara in 1961, 11 years after they met.

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In 1966 Ted Greig had some health issues and he and Mary decided to close their nursery in Royston on Vancouver Island.

“They had probably the best rhododendron collection in North America, certainly on the West Coast,” said Cook’s friend and fellow gardening enthusiast Charlie Sale.

The Greigs offered the plants from the nursery to the park board, which bought them. But there was a catch.

“The Greigs said you can’t have them if you don’t get Alleyne Cook,” said Barbara Cook.

So, park board supervisor Bill Livingstone phoned Cook, telling him, “We just bought an entire collection of rhodos and I know nothing about them. Come work for me and you’ll be able to do whatever you want with these plants.’

Cook accepted the offer and worked at the park board for 23 years until his retirement. Besides overseeing the Ted and Mary Greig Garden by the Stanley Park Pitch and Putt, he installed the first rhododendrons at VanDusen Botanical Garden.

His love of plants combined with his love of family — he identified and registered a variety of magnolia “dawsoniana Barbara Cook” after his wife. It’s in Stanley Park, as is another magnolia called Briar Cook, after his daughter, and a rhododendron called Sir Nigel after his son.

In gardening circles, he was a legend. His citation for the gold medal of the American Rhododendron Society said Cook had “essentially created three of the four heritage rhododendron collections in British Columbia and contributed significantly to the fourth. You are a mentor, a guru even, to many serious gardeners.”

Post retirement, Alleyne and Barbara became world travelers.



“We never had a bean, but Alleyne took out a line of credit, and off we went,” said Barbara. “The big trip was the Oxiana Trip, from London to Moscow to Tashkent down through Asabad to Iran. That was a good one.”

The couple also “did the Pacific and Tunisia and Morocco and Spain.” Oh, and they went to Tibet and China, twice.

“(One day) he looked up and said, ‘Do you want to go to Tibet?’” Barbara recalled. “I nearly fell off my chair — I’d been reading about Tibet since 1948! So, in ’88 we went to China and Tibet. Two years later he said, ‘Do you want another trip to Tibet?’ You can’t go to Tibet once, even Alleyne couldn’t. So, we went back in ’90.”

*Alleyne and Barbara Cook in their North Vancouver garden - Oct. 16, 2013*  
(Photo by Wayne Leidenfrost. Vancouver Sun)



## A MESSAGE FROM MISS PIGGY

### *Miss Piggy's Summer Retreat*

Miss piggy has had a wonderful summer hanging out in the garden of Diane Van Oostdam. She really enjoyed watching Diane weeding and toiling away in her garden. This Pig has often asked herself why do these obsessed gardeners get down on their hands and knees and carefully pull up weeds? I would just get my very pink snout in the ground and root up the whole \*\*\*\*\* yard and find lots of worms, grubs and Dahlia tubers to eat in the process. Diane didn't feed me one scrap of food since I came to live at her house last Christmas! And I haven't lost weight!

Right now, I am wondering who my next owner might be. I have been moving around to all these gardens with way too many Rhododendrons in them since 1995. I prefer Dahlias. I hope when I get to the Christmas Party in December, they might be nice to me and feed me some of those jellybeans; there are way too many in that jar to count properly.

PS... If you are a new member and don't know about Miss Piggy, you too can have the chance to have her live in your yard. Every year at the Christmas Party one lucky NIRS member is given a surprise gift, and you know who, is inside! Something to look forward to!!!