

THE RHODOTELLER



'Jean Marie de Montague' by Garth Wedemire

President's View

by Dave Godfrey

With all the fires in the interior this past summer, and now the recent torrential “Atmospheric River” of rain that swept just to the south of us, we feel so blessed to be living in the Comox Valley.

At the time of writing, there are several more “rain events” lined up to hit BC. The cost of the damage, so far, and the enormous time and effort to repair all the infrastructure will likely take months, if not years, and billions of dollars. Let's hope the intensity of the rain will ease in the next few weeks and we can get back to normal. We definitely have to consider the global climate change and the effects it is having on our lives, our gardens, and in particular, our rhododendrons.

On a lighter note, we are now into the final month of this horrific year. Soon it will be 2022 and a hope for a brighter future. The days will gradually become longer and we can begin to start planning for another season of gardening activities. Your executive board is already planning for

the club's spring activities which we hope will not be delayed by further Covid restrictions. If all goes well, our annual Rhododendron Sale & Show will take place on Sunday, April 24th and the Mother's Day Garden Tour on Sunday, May 8th. Let's keep our fingers crossed.

With the rescheduling of the ARS 75th Anniversary Convention planned for early May in Portland, Oregon, Judi Murakami has been contacted by Lionel de Rothchild to see if we still wish to have him give his presentation on the Exbury Gardens. Some of you may recall, we had planned two years ago to hold the meeting at the Filberg Center and open it to the public. It is our hope that this may still be a possibility.

In the meantime, we are approaching the holiday season and plans for our December Christmas party are coming together. Instead of the usual potluck dinner, this year we are holding an afternoon social gathering. There will be goodies provided by the club, along with the usual tea/coffee/cider available. Games and prizes will provide the entertainment. Double vaccinated members and guests are welcome, but please **RSVP to me by December 5th** so that we know how many are planning to attend in order to have enough supplies on hand.

Speaking of supplies, there is still time to drop off any non-perishable items to Diane Van Oostdam for our Christmas Hamper Project. Please note, for safety reasons we are unable to take any homemade canned items. This year we have a large family to support (2 adults and 4 children) so please be generous with your donations. If you prefer to provide some financial support, you can e-transfer directly to Diane at dianevano@yahoo.ca. and the 'team' will make the necessary and much needed purchases. Thank you.

As we close out the year, Garth and I would like to thank all those members who submitted the many wonderful photographs for our website's galleries. They certainly did make our days a lot brighter. And to note, all archived galleries have now been restored and available for viewing. Enjoy a look down memory lane at activities in years past.

On behalf of your executive board, we thank you for your continued support and wish you all the very best for a safe holiday season and a Happy New Year!



'Lem's Stormcloud' by Garth Wedemire

Meetings

Dec 7, 2021 Executive Meeting 10:00 am at Comox United Church

Dec 14, 2021 Christmas Social 2:00-4:00 pm at Comox United Church. RSVP to Dave Godfrey

Membership

Our "Early Renewal Program" has come to a close. As of the end of November we have 52 membership renewals, and 2 new members: welcome Linda Deneer and Rick & Donna Leche, both from Black Creek. The draw for those members whose dues were received by November 30th will be made and the winner announced at the Christmas Social.

It is easy to renew by e-transfer to club treasurer nonigod@shaw.ca or send your \$35 cheque, payable to N.I.R.S. to the club's address (P.O. Box 3183, Courtenay B.C. V9N 5N4).



'Elizabeth' by Garth Wedemire

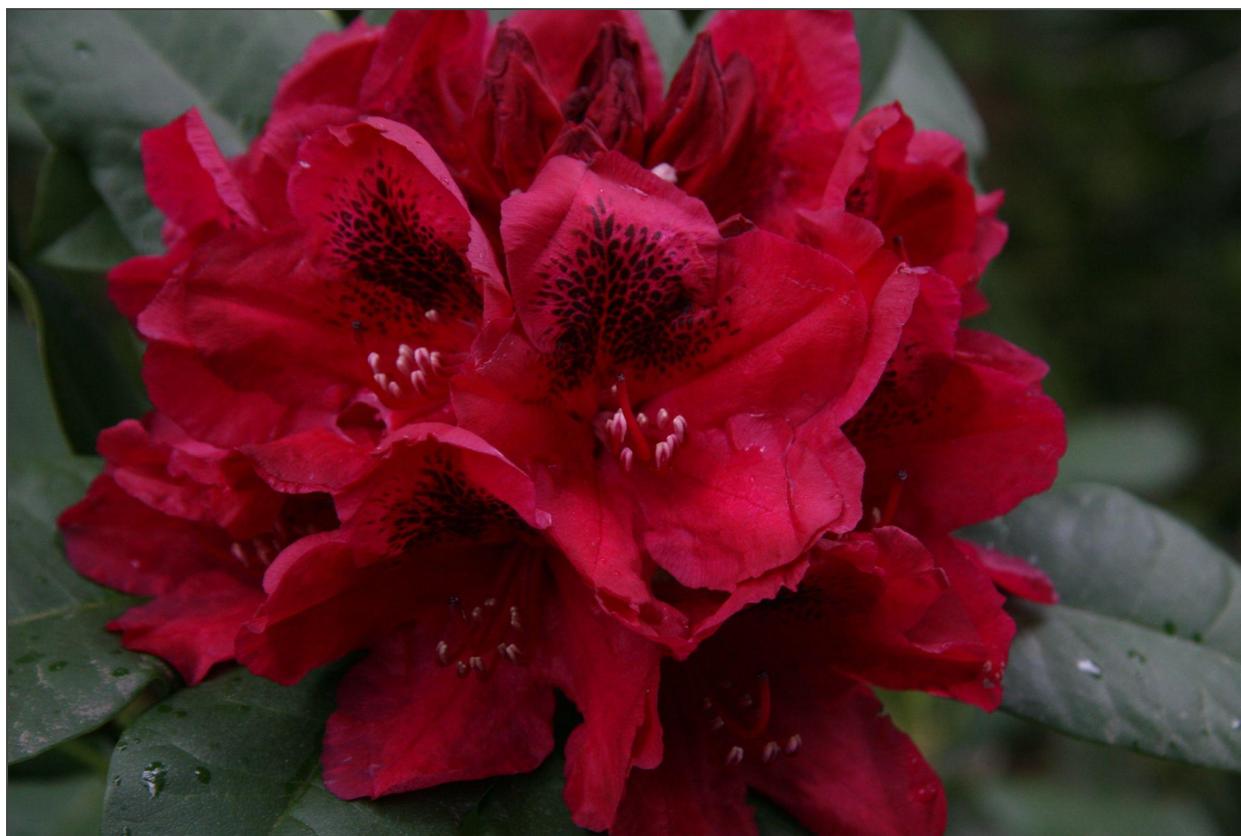
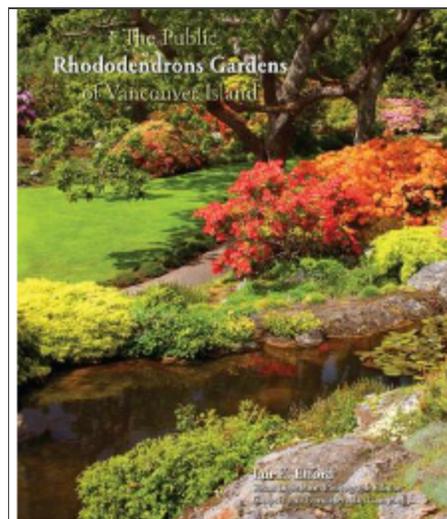
Ways & Means

by Aubrey Ferris

Have a supply chain problem in your Christmas gift-giving? A reminder that we will have our two special books on sale at the Christmas party on the 14th.

1. **The Public Rhododendrons Gardens of Vancouver Island.** Is available at 25% off at \$15. (Book store price is \$29.95)
2. **Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons.** The Members Christmas sale price is \$19. (Amazon price is \$39.00)

We will also have a beautiful plant as a door prize.



'Lord Roberts' by Garth Wedemire

Christmas Hamper Program

by Diane Van Oostdam

Thank you to those who have already contributed to the NIRS Christmas Hamper for a local family of six. There is still time to donate: you may bring either a non-perishable item or a cash or cheque donation in any amount to my house (1740 Linden Ave., Comox); e-transfers to dianevano@yahoo.ca will also be an acceptable donation. However, if you wish to contribute, please do so before December 10th. If you have any questions please call Diane Van Oostdam 250-650-0437. My small committee will purchase gifts and/or gift cards for each of the four children so that their family may have a very Merry Christmas.

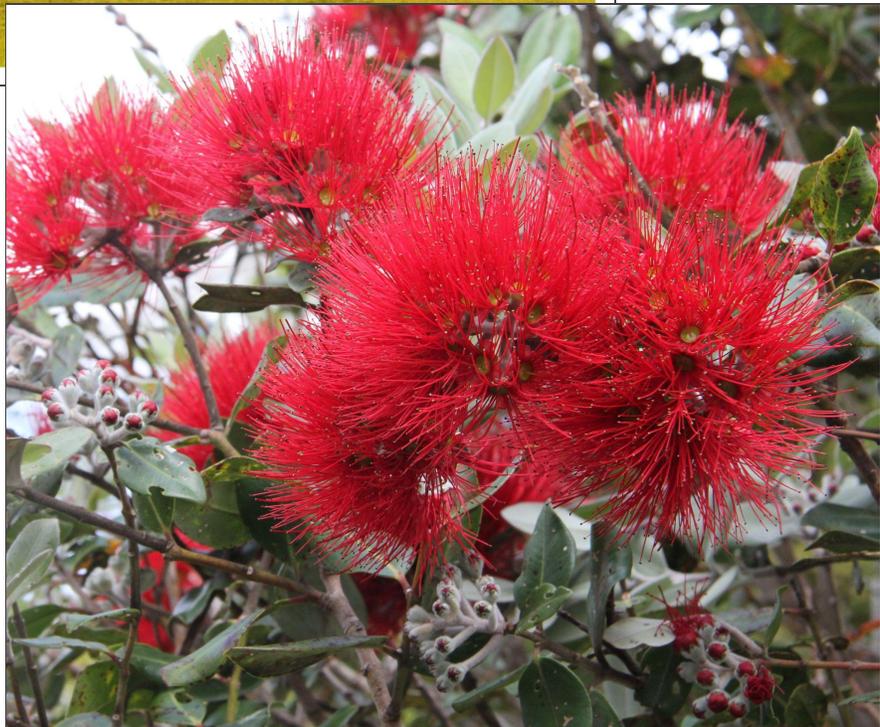
Metrosideros excelsa (New Zealand Christmas Tree)

New Zealand Fire Tree, New Zealand Christmas Tree, Pohutukawa, Metrosideros tomentosa



Leathery foliage with big clusters of showy flowers with prominent crimson stamens. Blooming in late spring to early summer, they cover branch tips like Christmas ornaments. Tolerant of drought, wind and salt spray, this evergreen wide-spreading tree attracts birds into the garden and can live for up to 1,000 years.

Metrosideros excelsa
(New Zealand Christmas Tree)
photo taken by Garth Wedemire
in New Zealand Oct 2014



Member Profile

By Sue Grant

Garth Wedemire has a heart for people and a head for facts. He is a man of faith whose happy places run the gamut from gardens to hockey rinks to classrooms to visits with grandchildren and any setting where he is helping others. When he was nine years old, Garth emigrated to Canada with his family from Jamaica and brought with him a connection to nature that has flourished in his adopted country.

He left Toronto for Vancouver in the late 60s—swapping his post-graduate work in Astronomy for a degree in Honours Math from UBC. At the same time, he married Avril and soon began his teaching career in Coquitlam. Garth was inspired by Avril's father, well-known nurseryman, Lloyd Smith, to join the Vancouver Rhododendron Society in 1975. He held numerous positions in that club including that of President, and subsequently co-founded the Fraser Valley Rhododendron Society. In 2014, when he and his wife, Sue, moved to the Comox Valley, they joined the North Island Rhododendron Society.

Over the years, Garth has stayed true to his commitment to promote the genus Rhododendron. His own gardens have always featured rhododendrons. Friends who visited his Maple Ridge home constantly commented on its beautiful park-like setting—one that featured a wide array of mature rhododendrons. A walk around the garden with Garth was always a highlight of any visit—no matter the season.

Garth has enjoyed plant-hunting trips with Steve Hootman (Executive Director of the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, Federal Way, Washington) in Nepal and China. As well, camera in hand, he has spent hours exploring gardens (both public and private), in New Zealand, Korea, South Africa, England, Scotland, Wales, and multiple states south of the border. His photographs can be seen in the Journals of the American Rhododendron Society and the Royal Horticultural Society, as well as in various Rhododendron Club newsletters.



Snowdrops breaking through Nov 30 - Naomi Chester

Garth was instrumental in creating a web-based platform for District One of the American Rhododendron Society and its several chapters. He still shares his expertise in this area whenever consulted. He is currently on the Board of Directors of the Rhododendron Species Foundation. Rhododendron clubs have awarded him three bronze medals, a silver medal and an award of distinction. He is a gifted conference speaker and organizer and is skilled at growing rhododendrons from cuttings in his backyard greenhouse.

So many achievements in his life—too many to list. And yet Garth would tell you unequivocally that what he values most are his roles as husband, father, grandfather, uncle, brother, and friend.



Poinsettias

by Nadine Boudreau

[this article first appeared in the December 2008 NIRS Rhodoteller]

As December arrives and the holiday season is upon us, we start to see the most popular Christmas plant - the Poinsettia. The botanical name is 'Euphorbia pulcherrima', meaning "very beautiful". As with many plants of the Euphorbiaceae family, it has a milky sap.

Poinsettias are native to Mexico; the Aztec people called them 'Cuetlaxochitl'. During the 14th to 16th centuries the sap was used to control fevers, while the bracts (colored modified leaves) were used to make a reddish dye.

In the 1820's, Joel Roberts Poinsett was the first United States Ambassador to Mexico. He had a keen interest in botany and wandered the countryside looking for new plant species. In 1828 he found a beautiful shrub with large red flowers growing next to the road. He took cuttings from the plant and brought them back to his greenhouse in South Carolina; thus introducing the Euphorbia to the USA.

As the Euphorbia pulcherrima became more popular, William Prescott a historian/horticulturist was asked to give the plant a new name, so he named it Poinsettia in honor of Joel Poinsett's discovery.

John Bartram is credited with being the first nurseryman to sell Poinsettias. The Ecke family from Southern California started growing Poinsettias in the early 1900's, at first as outdoor landscape plants and cut flowers. Later they started greenhouse production. Today, they are the largest producers of the plant and are credited with having 90% of the world's Poinsettias getting their start at the Ecke Family Ranch.



Creamy Poinsettia photo by Naomi Chester

Now that we know some history of the plant, we come to the practical - Selection and Care. This year, I plan on really focusing on these aspects, as many years my plants barely make it to Christmas before dropping half their leaves! There are many types and colors available, from traditional reds to whites, pinks and corals. Large leaf, curly leaf and spotted leaf varieties, etc. Whichever one catches your interest, here's some pointers to look for:

- A plant with dark green foliage down to the soil line.
- Check the plant's maturity, true flowers at the centre of the colored bracts. These should be green or red tipped tight little buttons and fresh looking. They will last longer than if yellow pollen is covering the flower.
- Bracts (the modified coloured leaf) should be completely coloured- no green on the edges.
- Plant should be full, good on all sides, balanced and approx. ½ times taller than container.
- No wilting, drooping or yellowing of leaves.
- Check that soil is not soggy, as this could lead to root rot.
- Do not purchase plants that are displayed in paper or plastic sleeves. These plants will deteriorate quickly.
- Do not purchase plants displayed or crowded close together, this can cause premature bract loss.
- Do not purchase plants displayed near entranceways where they are exposed to drafts.
- Do have your plant sleeved, or even better placed in a large paper bag, to protect it from sudden temperature fluctuations or drafts when transporting it home.

Now that you have your Poinsettia home, treat it well Here are some guidelines to remember:

- Remove the plastic sleeve.
- Pick a spot away from door drafts, vents, fireplace, or TV.
- They would like about 6 hours of indirect sunlight a day, but don't let them touch cold windows.
- Temperature should range from 20 to 22 degrees C during the day, and between 16 to 18 degrees C at night.
- Allow your Poinsettia to dry out slightly between watering; soil feels dry to touch. Water just enough for water to come through the drainage holes. Don't overwater or let it sit in water. If in foil or decorative container make sure you remove plant when watering.
- No fertilizer is needed when in bloom.

Following these guidelines, your Poinsettia can reward you with its beauty for many months, often from November until March. The milky sap can cause skin irritation, but there is a misunderstanding that they are poisonous. There have been many studies. However, the Ohio State University showed that a 50 pound child would have to eat more than 1¼ pounds of Poinsettia bracts (500-600 leaves) to exceed the doses that found toxicity. Of course, we all discourage the eating of ornamental plants!!

What to do at the season's end? I must admit that my Poinsettias have always ended in the compost soon after the holidays. With patience and time, you can however, have your Poinsettia for following years.

The leaves will fall in March or April, at which time cut your plant back to 8" in height. Continue watering as above, and fertilize with 20-20-20. By May, you should have vigorous new growth.

Continue with the watering and fertilize every 2 to 3 weeks during the growing period. You can place your Poinsettia outdoors when the overnight lows are above 13 degrees C. You can pinch your plant to keep it bushy, but stop pruning by September.

Now the hard part starts. LIGHT CONTROL – from October 1st, the plants needs to be in complete darkness for 14 hours at night. You have to cover it with a box, black bag, or place in a closet. Ensure no light is provided. During the day provide 6 to 8 hours of bright sunlight. Night temperatures need to be between 15°C and 21°C. Following this regime for eight to ten weeks should provide a flowering Poinsettia for the Christmas season!

Well, now I'm off to the local nurseries to look for a quality grown plant. I may choose a pink or coral plant in hopes that it will last past the holiday season and become my early spring plant!



'Carmen' by Garth Wedemire

Sunshine Lady

If you know of a member of our club who is experiencing an illness, surgery or bereavement please contact Joanne Williams to pass on a message on behalf of our Club.

I Heard a Bird Sing

I heard a bird sing
In the dark of December
A magical thing
And sweet to remember.

“We are nearer to Spring
Than we were in September”
I heard a bird sing
In the dark of December.



By Oliver Herford

'GraceSeabrook' by Garth Wedemire



R. cerasinum 'Cherry Brandy' by Garth Wedemire



[ARS 2022 event preview - YouTube](#)

The 2022 ARS Spring International Convention—*Return to the Northwest*—will feature a renowned group of international speakers, tours to notable gardens in the area, a plant sale, photo contest, 2-day pre-tour, 3-day post-tour, and more. Invited speakers include Kenneth Cox from Glendoick in Scotland, Lionel de Rothschild from Exbury in England, Jens Nielsen from Denmark, Steve Krebs and Juliana Medeiros from the Holden Arboretum, and Steve Hootman from the Rhododendron Species Foundation and Botanical Garden and many others. Garden tours will include visits to Crystal Springs Rhododendron Garden, Cecil & Molly Smith Garden, Portland Japanese Garden, Lan Su Chinese Garden, Iseli Nursery, Sebright Gardens, Woodburn Nursery, and the Stewart Garden (formerly Dover Nursery).

The American Rhododendron Society is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to encourage interest in, and disseminate information about, the genus *Rhododendron*. The organization was incorporated in Portland, Oregon, in January of 1945 and has a membership of some 2,500 members worldwide. The first international rhododendron show was held on Park Avenue in front of the art museum in downtown Portland. 77 years later the 2022 convention, originally planned for 2020, returns for a delayed 75th Anniversary. Rhododendrons have long been landscape favorites for their diverse forms, foliage and flowers. Hybridizers continue to create new crosses and plant explorers continue to locate and identify new species.

Registration for the 2022 convention will open on **December 1, 2021** and will be available online at www.ars2022.org. ARS membership is not required to attend. [NIRS members are ARS members.] Information on the ARS is available at <https://www.rhododendron.org>.

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'President Roosevelt' (top) and *Crinodendron hookerianum* (Lantern Tree) by Garth Wedemire



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