

# THE RHODOTELLER



*Indumentum is this month's theme. R. bureavii 'Lem' by Garth Wedemire 2010-04-22*

## President's View

by Dave Godfrey

Welcome back to another season of meetings, events, and reports for our North Island chapter members. Wow! Wasn't that a summer to emphasise climate change?

Since my last report in the June newsletter, most club activities have focused on the propagation group's efforts to protect the plants (and secure our club's future income) and work parties at our Comox Valley Rhododendron Garden (CVRG). Both were labours of love by many devoted members. Thank you!

With the extremely high temperatures this summer, it was once again necessary to set up a daily watering schedule to give some help to Wolfgang and Antje. Diana Scott contacted several members of the group to assist in a weekly schedule of watering and weeding the many hundred plants growing at the Smith property.

The intense heat dome near the end of June scorched some outdoor plants before there was an opportunity to install the protective shade cloth. Thanks to Dan Ryan, Aubrey Ferris, Doug Williams, Dan Prain, and myself, we were able to install the cloth in less than an hour one evening.



Unfortunately, due to the summer weather conditions and other circumstances, we were unable to hold our summer picnic as hoped. Oh well, there is always next year and (hopefully) our annual Christmas party to look forward to in December.

In early August, it was shocking to learn of the sudden and tragic passing of ARS past president and rhododendron legend, Harold Greer. Even those who had never met him, recognize his name as the author of the Rhododendron bible "Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons." Harold will be greatly missed by his many friends in the rhododendron world and a condolence card was sent to his family on behalf of the North Island members. (See a *separate tribute and obituary to Harold in this issue.*)

At the District 1 President's meeting held at Milner Gardens in Qualicum on August 24<sup>th</sup>, it was agreed to continue with the District Zoom account for another year. As many stated, to share speakers and view presentations from far and wide affords an opportunity not otherwise available to other chapters. The expense of the Zoom Pro account becomes affordable when shared by all 7 chapters of the district.

Also, the idea of holding a special Memorial gathering for members lost to the district in the past year was discussed and dismissed. It was felt that Memorial celebrations are a personal family

occasion and not one that the district should arrange. Most members have already been recognized and acknowledged in their chapter newsletters and the JARS magazine.

For our September meeting, we will return to the church hall for our first in-person meeting in a year and a half. We thought we would keep it casual and hold a “let’s get reacquainted” social gathering. There will be the usual ‘Show & Tell’ for those who have items to share; a short ‘Educational’ and as always, the opportunity to win prizes from several draws.

To comply with current Covid rules, we will be limited to 50 attendees and members should be double vaccinated, as well as required to wear a mask. Those planning to attend please advise me as soon as possible.

Our membership chairs Dan & Margaret Ryan will welcome you and begin to collect 2022 registration dues from those wishing to be entered in the ‘Early Registration Draw’. Of course, there is also the opportunity to pay your \$35 dues by e-transfer to treasurer Noni Godfrey at ‘nonigod@shaw.ca’

Our Revenue Table ladies, Judy Walker and Naomi Chester, encourage attendees to bring along contributions to support the club. Please think of us when dividing your perennials and share some of your favourites with other members. They are always very much appreciated at the table.



In closing, I have some exciting news to report. Remember back in early June I asked our members to nominate a photo from our “What’s Blooming” galleries?

Well, the photo nominated by Aubrey & Valery Ferris, ‘Washington State Centennial’ by Garth Wedemire was chosen by the executive to be submitted to the BC Council of Garden Club’s photo contest. On June 20<sup>th</sup> it was selected as their 2<sup>nd</sup> place winner, and NIRS received a cheque for \$75!

Congratulations to Garth on his colourful photograph, which was also chosen to be featured in the BCCGC fundraising calendar later this year.

That’s all I have for this month. So, take care, stay safe and we look forward to seeing you at the meeting on September 14<sup>th</sup>.



Top & Bottom: *R. yakushimanum* x *R. bureavii* by Garth Wedemire 2020-04-27



## Indumentum – a Feature not a Fault by Garth Wedemire

Have you been on garden tours and noticed that some people ahead of you are turning over the leaves of the plants looking for something? What they are looking for is **indumentum**. It is a characteristic of the leaves of some rhododendrons. Plants with indumentum are much sought after by collectors.

Indumentum (Latin meaning “**garment**”) is a protective covering of fine woolly hairs or bristles on the underside of the leaf. It resembles felt and can be white, tan, reddish brown or dark brown in colour. Indumentum helps to regulate water on the leaves and protects the plant from cold and heat.

There are many types of indumentum including **Hirsute** (hairy, shaggy, long-haired), **Pilose** (long soft hairs), **Villose** (shaggy), **Stellate** (radiating in a star-shape), **Scabrose** (small projections rough to the touch) and **Scruffy** (very rough to the touch).



Pictured are indumenta from eight rhododendrons in my garden – clockwise: *R. falconeri*, 'Cricket', 'Ellie Sather', *R. recurvoides*, 'Teddy Bear', 'Carmen' x 'Ken Janeck', 'Yaku Sunrise', *R. rex*.

On your next garden visit, start ‘flipping leaves’ and when you find indumentum that you like, make a note of the name of the plant and put it on your “must have” list. Then start hunting for it at nurseries and plant sales.

## Membership

by Dan and Margaret Ryan

We will be back in business at our first regular meeting on September 14<sup>th</sup> and will start collecting for renewal of memberships for the 2022 season. The dues for a membership will remain the same - regular \$35.00 and \$10.00 for an associate membership (must hold a regular membership with another ARS chapter.) Our individual dues for the American Rhododendron Society will also remain the same at \$30 US, which we pay out of our memberships. The shortfall in the exchange to American money is covered with all your generous purchases at the revenue table.

Once again, we are offering the "Early Renewal Program." Register before November 30, 2021 and you will be entered into a draw to win your membership fee. We would like to have memberships renewed ASAP, so we can have everyone signed up with the ARS by January 1, 2022 to ensure you receive your Winter edition of the Journal.

Members are fortunate in that your membership entitles you to discounts at several merchants in the area from Campbell River to Qualicum Beach. The back of your membership card will have a listing of these businesses and it will be listed throughout the year in the newsletter. Please patronize these businesses as they have been most generous in the past to our members.

One of these businesses that have supported our club for many years is Art Knapp's Plantland in Courtenay. We have received the following information from them, please read the following very carefully if you wish to continue with their offered discount.

*Subject: Membership Discount at Art Knapp Courtenay*

*I am reaching out today to advise that we will be moving onto a new point of sale system. We hope to be live on this system Sept. 8 and will require all members who would like to have their membership discount to provide proof of membership to be added into our new system. We are taking this as an opportunity to clean up our database of old phone numbers, members who are no longer active, and misuse of the club discount etc.*

*Effective Sept. 8, 2021*

*Gardening related departments will continue at the 10% club discount your members are currently receiving on regular priced items (for sale items the greater discount will apply - discounts cannot be combined.) Unfortunately, we are no longer able to provide this discount for non-garden related departments (fashion, Christmas, home decor, etc.)*

*The North Island Rhodo Society discount is valid for the calendar year and will require proof of yearly renewal (showing cashier new membership card) to remain active. This discount is to be used by the individual named on the card only, and cannot be used by family members, friends etc. Proof of ID may be requested.*

*Mistreatment of staff or our club discount policies may result in the removal of an individual's club discount at Art Knapp Courtenay.*

*Thank-you, Linda & Sylvia Van Hage (Art Knapp – Courtenay)*



Left: 'Silver Skies' photos taken 2021-08-30 at CVRG by Garth Wedemire Right: *R. smirnowii*

## Comox Valley Rhodo Garden Report by Maureen Denny

A small but dedicated group of volunteers has gathered monthly for evening summer work parties to look after the CVRG. The Rhodos were deadheaded, mulch was spread on The BOVI (Born on Vancouver Island) garden bed, and the regular tasks of weeding, sweeping, raking, and filling in holes dug by the big population of rabbits were done. Unfortunately, some of the Rhodos have not escaped the effects of the extended summer drought and intense heat. Some plants along the top main pathway have leaf burn and the leaves are wilting. I have been in regular consultation with Courtenay Parks to address the watering issue and they are doing all they can to try and increase the water flow in the irrigation system. Hopefully we will get a good rain soon.

The next work party will be on the MORNING of September 16 at 10 am. Please bring your tools and a bucket. Goodies are always appreciated. A special thanks to Antje for bringing her fabulous cakes this summer!



Left: *R. yakushimanum* photos taken 2021-08-30 at CVRG by Garth Wedemire Right: 'Golfer'

## A Note from your Newsletter Editor

by Kathy Haigh

It has been my pleasure to work on the NIRS monthly newsletter. Please note that my primary duty has been to assemble the information and photos submitted by members and present them in (I hope you agree) an appealing style. Garth has provided the vast majority of photos but others are also welcome. I am happy to include submissions and suggestions from any member. Remember, this is YOUR newsletter. Please email me by the 25th of each month September to May to be in the following month's newsletter.



*R. argyrophyllum* ssp. *nankingense* 'Chinese Silver' by Garth Wedemire 2011-05-14

## Meetings

September 7, 2021 Executive Meeting 10 am at Kathy Haigh's

September 14, 2021 General Meeting 7 pm at Comox United Church

[2021 Virtual ARS Fall Conference - October 23-24](#) Hosted by the Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society and the Nanaimo Rhododendron Society in partnership with the Vancouver Island Master Gardeners Association. Note that this virtual conference is FREE and just requires NIRS members to register online to attend.



*Top: 'Neato' x R. bureavii 2011-05-14; Bottom: 'Wanna Bee' 2010-04-23 by Garth Wedemire*



## Gardeners Need Tools!

by Judith Walker

Lately I have found new sources of good tools and garden supplies. Since I had my soil tested this year (by Crop Services International in the US), I needed to source some amendments – mostly not available at local garden stores. And since good tools are always needed, the following site provides ideas for great gifts, for oneself of course!

“*Gardener’s Kit*” is a business in Victoria - does have a small storefront for pick up, but the online ordering is reliable and mail order is reasonable. The website is <https://gardenerskit.com/> I found a lovely little Japanese whisk tool which is almost too nice to use! They carry the Niwaki tools which one sees advertised in Gardens Illustrated and other gardening magazines - pricey but probably you will be willing them to the next generation!

Besides “*Integrity*” in Saanich (which is the best old fashioned farm supply place), for garden amendments there is “*The Organic Gardener’s Pantry*” also in Victoria. The site provides so much useful information and hard-to-find amendments such as unrefined fish emulsion, effective microbes, sea minerals fertilizers, “Root Rescue” and much more. The site is [www.gardenerspantry.ca](http://www.gardenerspantry.ca)



The Root Rescue saved a young peach tree of mine this year- the tree put out a nice set of leaves, set a fair number of little peaches and then promptly looked like it was heading for the burn pile. Leaves withered and fell until the tree looked like a Charlie Brown Christmas tree with baubles on it. It was not peach leaf curl but I suspected something terminal like verticillium wilt. With no expectation of success, I followed the Root Rescue instructions and gave the tree two drenchings a week apart. In short time

little green leaves appeared and the tree totally recovered and we are still eating the best Frost peaches ever.

Happy Gardening to all!

*R. yakushimanum* ‘Phetteplace’ by Garth Wedemire 2020-04-21



## Tiny Rhododendrons in Canada's Tundra by Kathy Haigh

A few weeks ago while I was on a vacation north of Churchill, Manitoba I was surprised when the guide pointed out some native species of Rhododendrons there. First off, yes, I went to the tundra by choice - to see Polar Bears and Beluga Whales, though - not Rhodos! Second, these are not like any Rhodos you'll see in our gardens on Vancouver Island. Pretty much all plants that grow in the North are close to the ground due to a very short growing season and harsh weather conditions most of the year.

While walking in the region where the tundra and boreal forest meet with the Hudson Bay, the guide noticed that I was taking photos of interesting rocks, landscape (which is mostly flat, with lots of boulders and water/mud) and plants. He began listing off plant names and explaining their uses and/or what creatures eat them. Most of the wild flowers had already passed their prime by mid August but they retained interesting shapes and muted colours.

Knowing that I live in Courtenay, he said something like, "you might recognize this one as you surely know others in the same genus at home." I didn't. They were so tiny it was hard to believe they were Rhodos! Turns out there are two relatively prolific species of Rhodos in this rather barren part of Canada.

*Rhododendron groenlandicum* - Bog Labrador Tea \*

Leaves are used to make tea and tonics in Labrador and elsewhere in the North - hence the common name "Labrador Tea." It's a resinous evergreen shrub with erect branches that grows 20-60" (50-150 cm) high. Young stems bear orange, curly hairs; older stems are hairless. Leaves are leathery, dull green, alternate, lanceolate elliptical, to 2" (5 cm) long, with inrolled margins and rust-coloured wooly hairs below. Flowers May to June are fragrant, borne in crowded corymbs at stem tips; with 5 white sticky petals. Fruit is an oval, persistent capsule.

*[internet photos]*

\* Source: *The Arctic Guide*, by Sharon Chester, p.476.



*Rhododendron lapponicum* -  
Lapland Rosebay \*

Also known as "Lapland Azalea," it is a dwarf shrub 4-12" (10-30 cm) high, semi-prostrate, matted, with knotty branches. Leaves are thick, leathery, elliptical, to 0.5" (1.5 cm) long; dark green, densely scaled on both sides with rust-coloured resinous glands. Flowers are dark pink to purple, to 1" (2.5 cm) across, bell- to funnel-shaped with 5 to 10 protruding stamens; borne in an umbel-like cluster at top of stems. It is one of the first flowers to bloom in the arctic spring.



In reality, the heights given in the text are very generous - compared to the actual plants I saw, the minimum number is more accurate. Flowers were long gone by the third week of August when I was there, hence the above flowering photos were found on the internet.

The photo below shows Labrador Tea growing amongst other dwarf plants around a gap in the peat. (Looks like tiny spruce saplings.) I reached my bare hand into the watery peat hole and was able to scratch the permafrost ice with my fingernail. Weird, but very meaningful to me.



Seeing Rhodos near the borders of Manitoba and Nunavut was just one of many fascinating highlights of this very special trip. I highly recommend that Canadians should visit unknown parts of Canada to gain a better understanding of our vast country.

*Photo by Kathy Haigh  
2021-08-17*



## Harold Eldon Greer

Harold Eldon Greer, 76, passed away unexpectedly on August 10, 2021, while tending to his landscape and his beloved rhododendrons. Harold was born to Edgar and Esther Peterson Greer on May 21, 1945, in Greeley, Colorado. His family moved to Eugene, Oregon, when Harold was seven years old and shortly thereafter Harold was introduced to the world of plant materials, and specifically, rhododendrons, by his father. What began as a shared hobby between father and son soon became a business, Greer Gardens Nursery, originally located in the River Road area. In 1961, the family purchased a parcel of land on Goodpasture Island Road and moved the nursery to the site which would be home to the business for the next 50 years.

Harold graduated from North Eugene High School and attended the University of Oregon, but his passion from a very young age was plant materials and rhododendrons. As a teenager, he was the youngest person to be accepted into membership of the Eugene Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society and by the age of 22, he was the youngest person to ever be appointed as a Director for the American Rhododendron Society. His involvement with the international organization continued as he served in a progression of officer roles, culminating as President of the American Rhododendron Society, again as the youngest person ever to do so. Additionally, he served on many ARS committees throughout his lifetime.

Along with his love of rhododendrons, Harold possessed a talent for photography, another passion which continued throughout his lifetime. He had a very good eye for composition and color. Over the years, he photographed thousands of plant blooms, trusses, and leaves, which became the illustrations for the many articles and presentations he prepared. In addition, Harold wrote and illustrated several books about rhododendrons, the best known of which is "Greer's Guidebook To Available Rhododendrons". Harold loved to share his wealth of knowledge about the plant world but he was always striving to learn more. In addition to the American Rhododendron Society, he belonged to the Royal Horticultural Society, the Magnolia Society, the Camellia Society and he was a board member for the Rhododendron Species Foundation in Federal Way, Washington. Harold also loved to travel and he incorporated his thirst for knowledge into the many horticultural tours he and his wife, Nancy, led Japan, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, France, England, Scotland, Ireland and the Scandinavian region over the many years of their life together.

In 2015, as Harold looked forward to retirement, he sold the Greer Gardens Nursery property to The Springs Living, a retirement and senior living company based in McMinnville, Oregon. Harold worked with the new owner, Fee Stubblefield, and his team at The Springs Living to envision and bring into existence a multi-level retirement community on the property, surrounded by beautiful gardens containing the rare and unique rhododendrons Harold had collected and nurtured during his lifetime. An additional aspect of the new construction was a new home for Harold and Nancy's comfort and enjoyment in their retirement years. The Springs at Greer Gardens will always remain as a reminder of Harold's passion for rhododendrons and beautiful gardens.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Research Foundation of the American Rhododendron Society or to the Rhododendron Species Foundation of Washington.

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*Top & Bottom: 'Sir Charles Lemon'*

*Photos by Garth Wedemire April 2010*



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