

# THE RHODOTELLER



*R. 'Hotei' by Garth Wedemire*

## President's View

by Dave Godfrey

It is hard to believe that the first quarter of this year has already passed. Here we are now in Spring and entering what would typically be our busiest calendar of events for the year. Once again, due to continued Covid-19 restrictions, we are unable to host our usual major fundraisers - the annual public plant sale, and Mother's Day Garden Tour. Hopefully, we will be able to get back to these next year.

On a brighter note, Wolfgang, Antje, Noni and Nadine, from our propagation group conducted a sale of rhododendrons for our members. As we did last year, a list of available plants was sent out and orders on a first-come, first-served basis were received by email. Pickup was arranged on a drive-through basis on Saturday, March 20<sup>th</sup> at the Smith's garden. The sale was once again a tremendous success thanks to these hard-working members. Our total sales were 108 plants, for a total of \$1,218.00

Thank you again to Carolyn and Naomi for offering to host another 'Members Only' plant sale on Saturday, May 29<sup>th</sup>. In the meantime, remember our sale when digging and dividing plants in the coming weeks.

On Tuesday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, District Director Glen Jaimeson held the semi-annual Presidents' meeting via Zoom. These meetings, typically held in March and late August, allow the chapters to report their events and activities to the Director, who in turn reports to the ARS board meeting. In addition to the chapter presidents, other executive members were invited to attend. I was pleased that Vice President Robert Argall, Past President Maureen Denny, and a few other NIRS executive members were able to join us.

On behalf of our club, I was happy to report that we have 77 memberships, which includes 5 associate members and two local 'honorary' life members. Most chapters agree that we are missing the social gatherings at our clubs. In-person meetings allow us to converse more freely and enjoy each other's company. Fortunately, modern technology has allowed us to stay connected and conduct the normal club business through emails, newsletters, websites, and Facebook pages.



In February, we started holding our NIRS executive meetings via Zoom and this has worked well. On March 9<sup>th</sup>, we held our first general meeting since March of last year. We featured a 'Show & Tell', and a recording of the presentation of "Pruning Rhododendrons" with Don Wallace from the Eureka chapter. We are also planning this month's general meeting on Tuesday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, and our AGM in May, to be conducted by Zoom.

All District 1 chapters are pleased to share a District Zoom account. This shared account keeps the costs reasonable for each chapter and allows us to stay connected with each other. We are also appreciative of the opportunity to attend meetings and presentations hosted by other chapters, especially those from the American chapters. The variety of presentation topics has made for an interesting and enjoyable season. All chapter presidents agreed that the District should maintain this account for the next year when it comes due this fall.

In closing, District Director Glen noted that we have lost some long-standing and valuable members over the past year. He is proposing a District-wide 'Memorial' meeting sometime this Summer or Fall, possibly at Milner Gardens, to honour and remember these members. I will pass along additional details as they become available.

For now, it is time to get back to our garden and do some spring chores - pruning, fertilizing and general Spring clean-up. Take care, stay safe and get your vaccinations when available, so we can all get back to socializing.

*'Top Banana' photo by Garth Wedemire ed note: seemed an appropriately named photo for this page :)*

## Regular General Meeting April 13th @ 7:00 pm via Zoom



### “Lu Zhu – A Plant Collector’s Passion”

For our April meeting via Zoom, **Garth Wedemire** will provide a slide presentation entitled “**Lu Zhu – A Plant Collector’s Passion**”. Garth Wedemire and his wife, Sue Grant live in Comox, BC.

They are members of NIRS and associate members of most of the ARS District 1 chapters. Garth is on the board of the Rhododendron Species Foundation and is a member of the Rhododendron, Camellia & Rhododendron Group of the Royal Horticultural Society. He has recently joined the Atlantic Rhododendron & Horticultural Society located in Nova Scotia.

Using his photography skills, Garth has accumulated an extensive collection of rhododendron photographs taken in Canada, England, Wales, New Zealand, China, Nepal and the USA. He is a frequent contributor to NIRS photo galleries and the NIRS website. His pictures appear with regularity in the ARS Journal and can be found on many websites throughout the Internet. During the years when the *Hirsutum* website was active, Garth provided over a thousand annotated photographs of species and hybrids.



For his service of providing photographs, his leadership and presentation of programs, Garth has received 3 ARS Bronze Medal Awards (Vancouver, Fraser Valley and the North Island chapters of the ARS). He was awarded an ARS Silver Medal at the 2013 ARS Conference in SeaTac, Washington.



Garth made at least ten visits with his camera from 2005 to 2008 to ‘*Lu Zhu*’, a remarkable 20-acre rhododendron garden. Located on the eastern side of Mount Woodside near the town of Agassiz, on the northern bank of the Fraser River in the upper Fraser Valley, British Columbia, ‘*Lu Zhu*’ was the major gardening accomplishment for the late Dr. Mike Bale of Abbotsford, BC.

Garth’s presentation will include a section called “**The Early Years**” - an historical record of ‘*Lu Zhu*’ during its initial development years – with photographs by Mary Berg, a long-time ARS member and friend of Mike’s.

## “April showers bring May flowers” ...and the NIRS Plant Sale!

Are you missing plant sales? Then mark down the date for the NIRS *Members Only* Plant Sale: **Saturday, May 29<sup>th</sup> 10 am - 2 pm, at the Chester’s home: 2636 Parker Road, Courtenay.**

Start now to pot up and divide plants for the sale - and remember to label each plant. If not in a pot, such as iris roots, bulbs etc., please put in plastic bags and label - include colour too if known!

Other garden related items are welcome. All plants and garden accessories can be delivered to Carolyn’s driveway Wednesday May 26 to Friday May 28th, so that the sales team can get items priced and organized before the sale. Please consider lending a folding table, if available.

All funds raised will help us continue with activities over the year. Thank you...and see you at the sale, cash, cheques or credit for payment, and masks on please!



*‘Loch Awe’ by Garth Wedemire*

## Meetings

The April 6th executive meeting will be on Zoom.

April 13th monthly meeting will be on Zoom at 7:00 pm. **Garth Wedemire** will provide a slide presentation entitled “**Lu Zhu – A Plant Collector’s Passion.**” Members are welcome to participate in virtual “Show and Tell” as well.



*'Karen Triplet' photo by Garth Wedemire*

## Another Privilege of Membership in NIRS

Our chapter has an Associate Membership with the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, which is located between Seattle and Tacoma, Washington. Associate membership benefits include free year-round garden admission, two copies of the RSBG yearbook, *Rhododendron Species*, online newsletter, online plant, pollen and seed catalogues, and use of the Lawrence J. Pierce Library during business hours. Current NIRS members are eligible for all of these benefits - just quote membership #116 - which is another good reason to maintain your membership with the ARS and NIRS.

They have a Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/RhodyGarden> and a member's only section of their website we can access <https://rhodygarden.org/login/>.

So when we are able to travel for pleasure once again, be sure to include a free visit to the RSBG in Washington.

## Comox Valley Rhodo Garden Report

By Maureen Denny



The weather was on our side for the first work party of the year held on March 11<sup>th</sup>. We had a crew of seven volunteers to clean up the winter debris, and when that was done the gardens were looking great. All went well with keeping the Covid Protocols as we wore our masks and stayed 2M apart. Thanks to Judi Murakami for bringing a delicious cake.



If you want to attend the next work party please email me. The number of attendees will be restricted due to Covid. The next work party will be held April 8<sup>th</sup> at 10 am.



## Edgeworthii chrysantha

by Garth Wedemire

Residents and visitors of Comox on Vancouver Island are fortunate to have some rather diverse and interesting plants growing in smaller spaces and larger spaces within the town. The choice of plant material and annual maintenance of their public spaces is an example for other towns and cities to follow in creating an environment of interest for its population.



Even though Spring has been late in arriving this year, there are a number of remarkable plants blooming within Comox. One such plant is *Edgeworthia chrysantha* which can be seen in full bloom at the end of March in several places. Check out these three locations: Filberg Park, Comox Town Hall and Comox Community Centre

One of *Edgeworthii chrysantha's* common names is "Oriental paperbush". The genus

*Edgeworthii* was named in honour of Michael Edgeworth (1812-1881), an Irish-born Victorian-era amateur botanist, who worked for the East India Company. The species name 'chrysantha' derives from the Greek **chrysos** meaning 'golden' and **anthos** meaning 'flower', due to its golden coloured flowers.

*Edgeworthia chrysantha* is a deciduous shrub with dark green, leathery leaves which appear after the flowering cycle has completed. The flowers are yellow and fragrant, held in clusters at the branch tips. In the normal year, the flowering period extends from February to April. Its branches are quite flexible. It is drought tolerant, deer resistant and grows well in hardiness zones 7-9. It may survive in protected areas of zone 6. [continued...]







*Edgeworthia chrysantha 'Akebono' collage*

While searching on Google for information on Edgeworthii chrysantha, I came across the following entry in the **Entwined Life** blog:

<https://entwinedlife.com/2014/02/03/lust-and-envy-in-the-garden-edgeworthia/>.

This blog is a good read with ten pictures and discussions on several forms of the plant. Perhaps, Jayme B. (the bogger) may be able to persuade you to go on a plant hunting expedition to nurseries in your area to find one of these gems to plant by the entry to your home. The fragrance and colour of the early flowers and the lovely green foliage during the Summer will make it worth any effort you expend to find a plant. In addition, deer do not forage on its branches.

One of the best forms of Edgeworthii chrysantha 'Akebono' (Red Paper Bush) has orange flowers. I recommend you put this form on your plant hunting list. Art's Nursery has it on their website at <https://www.artsnursery.com/product/edgeworthia-chrysantha-5436>

*[ed note: Thank you Garth for your submissions of interesting articles and beautiful photos!]*

## On the Web ...

by Dave Godfrey, NIRS Webmaster

If you haven't visited the NIRS website recently, you should be aware of some changes. The 'Home' page may look familiar, but the top menu has been changed slightly. Information that was elsewhere on the web has been condensed under "About Us" which now has a drop-down menu. Next to this is a new "What's Blooming" tab.

As we did last year, Garth and I are starting a new gallery for "What's Blooming". Members contributed some lovely photos last year, and I would like to encourage you to send us some photos for this year. They don't have to be necessarily Rhodos... any plants in bloom (with names) would be appreciated.

Please continue to email your photographs with the name of the rhodo or plant (garden shots and companion plants are also welcome) to me ([davegod@shaw.ca](mailto:davegod@shaw.ca)) and we will share with all.

For your convenience, here is a direct link to the current page...

<http://www.nirsrhodos.ca/ws/whats-blooming-this-week-in-2021/>

Other changes are being developed and made available as we go. So, until we can once again get together as members and friends, stay safe and healthy, and please share your beautiful garden photos for all of us to enjoy!



*'Crest' photo by Garth Wedemire*

### Royal Horticultural Society Website for Rhodo Info

By Aubrey Ferris

Some of our members have been missing the Hirsutum website. It was a valuable database of information and photographs of rhododendrons. However, as Garth Wedemire discovered and Aubrey Ferris shared with us at the March 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Royal Horticultural Society has produced a similar website for all Rhodo enthusiasts from beginner to expert.

It is a site that leads to a super directory for Rhododendrons (also includes a directory for Camellias and Magnolias). <https://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org>

1. Open the site.
2. Click on "Rhododendron Directory".
3. Select from "Groups" if you know the information, just check any of the boxes.
4. On the drop-down menu, the plants will be listed in forward or reverse alphabetical order.
5. If you know the name of the plant type it in the "search description" box and click search.
6. The plant you are looking for will open up with all the identifying information and in most cases more than one picture.

## Rhododendron 'Waxbill'

by Garth Wedemire



Two-toned pink/white flowers cover this compact, dwarf lepidote rhododendron hybrid in the early Spring. Rhododendron 'Waxbill' will grow to about two feet tall in 10 years, so it is a good choice for the smaller garden. R. 'Waxbill' is one of the best of "Cox's Birds" – a group of dwarf hybrid rhododendrons created by the Cox family from Glendoick, Scotland.

The great plant hunters **Ludlow and Sherriff** returned to Britain in the 1950's. George Sherriff and his wife started a garden only 50 km from Glendoick and they became great friends of the Coxes. On an early visit to their home, Ascreavie, Peter Cox spotted a yellow-flowered rhododendron species with enormous bowl-shaped flowers on a dwarf plant. This was R. *ludlowii* discovered by Frank Ludlow on an expedition with George Sherriff to southeastern Tibet in 1936. The Sherriffs allowed Peter to take some pollen home, which he applied to R. *chryseum*.

The hybrid R. 'Chikor' was selected and named from this cross and was given an Award of Merit (AM) and later a First Class Certificate (FCC) by the Royal Horticultural Society. Visit Glendoick website for more information on "Cox's Birds" (also called The Glendoick Bird Hybrids) by using the following link: <https://www.glendoick.com/Hybridising-Rhododendrons-and-Azaleas-at-Glendoick>

At Glendoick, Peter Cox started the theme of naming his dwarf hybrids after birds (one of Peter's other interests). Kenneth (his son) continued the theme by making his own crosses in the early 1980s. There are now at least 30 "Cox's Birds" which are popular with gardeners and rhododendron collectors everywhere.

Rhododendron gardeners are already quite familiar with some of the "Bird Series" such as 'Curlew' (bright yellow flowers), 'Razorbill' (rose-pink), 'Ptarmigan' (white). Other well known hybrids in the Cox's Bird Series are: 'Chikor', 'Eider', 'Goosander', 'Merganser', 'Pintail', 'Widgeon', 'Wren' and our featured plant, 'Waxbill'. Most of the "Cox's Birds" plants grow less than 45 cm (18 inches) and are worthy of having a place in your garden.



(Top photo from Singing Tree Gardens Nursery. Lower photo taken in our garden in Comox this March)

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*Photos by Garth Wedemire R. lacteum (top), 'Lemon  
Dream', 'Horizon Monarch' (bottom)*

