

# THE RHODOTELLER



*Theme: "Flowering Before the Spring"      'Snow Lady' photo by Sean Rafferty*

## President's View

by Dave Godfrey

"Spring has sprung, the grass has ris!" Or at least it is rising and lawn cutting chores will soon be added back on the 'to do' list. With warmer temperatures, longer days, and hopefully sunnier skies ahead, our gardening season is back in full swing. As Ann Chevrier once told us, "When the forsythia is in bloom, your roses you prune!" Well, our forsythia is beginning to bloom, so I guess I know what else is on my list.

In recognition and support of the Canadian Garden Council proclaiming 2022 as the "Year of the Garden", our chapter partnered with the Comox Valley Horticultural Society (CVHS) to petition the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) to proclaim 2022 as the "Year of the Garden" and "June 18, 2022, as National Garden Day." I am pleased to report that Jesse Ketler, CVRD Board Chair, made the proclamation official on March 25, 2022.

As we have done for the past several years, we have also petitioned the Mayor for the City of Courtenay to proclaim, "May as Rhododendron Month." We have received permission to hang our banner once again on the south end of the Historic Train Building on Cliffe Avenue to

announce such. This is an ideal vantage point for those walking along the pathway or driving by on Cliffe Avenue.

On behalf of our chapter, Maureen Denny and Judy Walker met with city staff on March 7<sup>th</sup> to discuss plans for the Comox Valley Rhododendron Garden (CVRG). It seems the Canoe Club in the parking lot area adjacent to the garden will be expanding their compound. This will require changes to the walking paths through and around the garden. Details are still being finalised and work will likely be undertaken over the summer months. I wish to thank Maureen and Judy for protecting our interests in our valuable showcase garden.



*'Seta' by Garth Wedemire*

We have been informed that the family of Roberts & Adela Smith intend to sell the property. Nothing has been directly confirmed as yet, but any change of ownership might have an impact on our future propagation efforts. As such, we are planning a 'Members Only' rhododendron sale on Sunday, April 10<sup>th</sup> (11 AM to 1 PM) prior to the public 'Rhodo Sale & Show' on Sunday, April 24<sup>th</sup> at the KFN Hall. There will be no list of varieties available; so, it will be a first come, first served sale – much like other garden centres.

I wish to thank Nadine Boudreau for taking the lead in organising our annual fundraising sale this year. It has been a number of years since we have held the sale, but Nadine has everything well in hand. Most key volunteer positions are filled, but we will always accept more help from



any members wishing to step forward. As with most projects, many hands make light work, and this is one of those times where we always need lots of helpers.

At the District 1 Presidents' meeting (via Zoom) on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, most chapters are reportedly resuming their pre-pandemic activities. While some are still conducting business and meetings virtually via Zoom, others, like ourselves, are back to meeting in person. Due to the success of presentations by various chapters and District 1, the chapters unanimously agreed to continue the Zoom account and extend it for another year until October 2023. We have been fortunate to join some interesting Zoom presentations from other ARS chapters.



*R. leucaspis* by Sean Rafferty

Speaking of interesting presentations, plans are coming together for hosting Lionel de Rothschild from Exbury Gardens in England. He will be arriving on April 19<sup>th</sup> and providing us with an interesting presentation on "The First 100 Years of Exbury." This special presentation will be held at the K'omoks First Nations Hall (where we hold our plant sales) on Comox Road. Although space is limited, we will be inviting and allowing guests to join us. Admission will be free for NIRS members, but guests will be asked to pay \$5 to attend this special presentation.

For those who may be travelling to the ARS Conference in Portland/Washington in May, or just visiting the Seattle area in general, the chapter has renewed its associate membership with the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden (RSBG) in Federal Way, WA for another year. Our members can receive free admission to view the gardens and shop in the nursery/gift shop by presenting their NIRS membership card and mentioning our chapter's associate membership. We hope that some of you will take the opportunity to visit the gardens in the near future.

This is all I have to report for now. We have a busy month of April coming up. So please keep your calendar of events handy or check out our 'Events' page on our website. Take care and happy gardening!

## Meetings & Events

April 5 Executive Meeting 10:00 am  
@ Comox United Church

April 9 Tour Robert Argall's Garden  
1 -3 pm

April 10 Members' Rhodo  
Propagation Sale 11 am -  
1pm @ Smith's Garden

April 14 CVRG Work Party 10 am

April 20 L. de Rothschild Special  
Program 7:30 pm @  
K'omoks First Nation Hall



*R. fulvum* photo by Sean Rafferty

April 24 NIRS Spring Plant Sale (public) 10 am - 1 pm @ K'omoks First Nation Hall

April 26 Milner Garden & Woodland Tour 1- 3 pm

April 28 Chester and Argall Gardens on Tour for MARS & NRS

May 4-8 [ARS Spring Intern'l Convention](#) Click [HERE](#) for the **revised convention video**.





## Rhododendron praevernium

by Garth Wedemire

The rhododendron species, *praevernium* blooms earlier than most species and hybrid rhododendrons. The name chosen for these plants native to Sichuan and Hubei (South-Western provinces of China) perfectly describes this very desirable rhodo. The *vernium* part refers to the Latin word for “spring” which is *vernus*, while *prae* is Latin for “before”. So, the species name *praevernium* means “**Before Spring.**”



An attractive feature of *R. praevernium* became apparent to us on a visit to the [Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden \(RSBG\)](#), Washington during May of 2007. We visited the garden specifically to see late-blooming species rhododendrons, along with other interesting plants. We saw the seed pods of one of their *praevernium* plants (see picture) and became aware that removing spent flowers (deadheading) may not be the best gardening practice for some

plants. By deadheading the flowers of this species, we forego an interesting and appealing feature of the plant.



(photos of “*R.praevernium* (RSBG 1966-563)” - courtesy of RSBG)

*R. praevernium*'s growth habit is shrub to tree-like. It should perform well in the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island since it is cold hardy to **-23°C** (-10°F).

Now the question is: Where can we find one for our gardens?

## April 20th Special Program: Lionel de Rothschild

### "Exbury Gardens: The First Hundred Years"

On Wednesday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Lionel de Rothschild, grandson and namesake of the creator of Exbury Gardens, will give an illustrated talk about its creation and history in this, its 103<sup>rd</sup> year.

Lionel has written and lectured internationally on Exbury and on rhododendrons. He lives at Exbury and takes an active interest in the gardens. Exbury Gardens are located in the Hampshire village of Exbury and belong to a branch of the Rothschild family.

Now celebrating more than 100 years, Exbury Gardens is a 200-acre collection of woodland, herbaceous, contemporary, formal and wildflower gardens. Seasonal highlights include rhododendrons and azaleas in spring, herbaceous borders and hydrangeas in summer and acers (maples) and Nyssa (tupelo) in autumn.

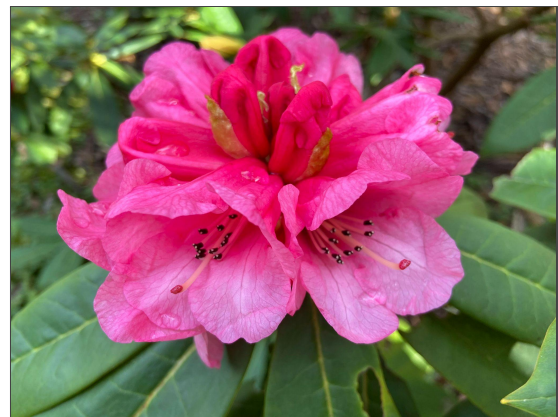


Lionel de Rothschild Sr., who described himself as “a banker by hobby, a gardener by profession”, purchased the Exbury Estate in 1919 and began the task of creating the beautiful gardens. The war in 1939 brought the work to a standstill. Lionel died in 1942 and when his son Edmund de Rothschild returned from the war, the task of restoring the gardens to their former glory resumed. Today Edmund’s sons, Lionel and Nicholas continue the family passion for gardening.

For this special meeting on **Wednesday April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022**, the NIRS has changed the location to the **K’omoks First Nation Hall**, at 3330 Comox Rd, Comox, BC.

Doors will open at 6:45 pm. Come early and take part in pre-meeting activities: purchase some tickets for our many raffle prizes and enjoy coffee, tea, and goodies with fellow gardeners. Non-member guests of the NIRS will be asked to pay an entry fee of \$5.00 to help with expenses.

All attendees **must be double vaccinated**, show their vaccine passport and wear a mask. All are eligible for our door prizes. Lionel’s presentation will start at 7:30 pm.



*R. calophyllum* by Jean Looy



# NIRS Rhododendron Sale & Show

by Nadine Boudreau

The plant sale is rapidly approaching! It will be our main fundraiser this year, so please come help out, and bring any plants you have to donate to the NIRS Companion Plant table. If you have plants but are unable to attend, contact Nadine or Noni, and we will arrange a pick-up.



Now is the time to divide and pot up any donation plants. This gives the plants time to perk up and be easier to sell. Please label the plant if known. If you have a plant that you don't know the name of, but you have divisions, bring them, a member may know the name.



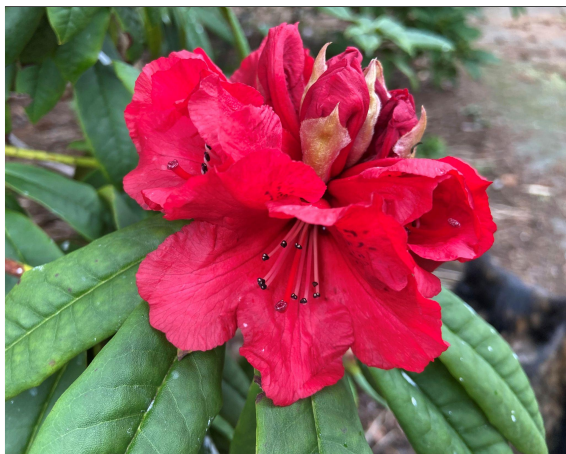
We still need some volunteers, please contact Nadine or Noni if you are able to join the fun. We each bring a plate of goodies to share amongst the volunteers. Coffee and tea are provided.

An email update will be sent out soon.

*2015 Show & Sale photos by Noni Godfrey*

## MEMBERS ONLY SALE

Remember we will be having a members only sale of the Propagation Rhododendrons on April 10<sup>th</sup>, from 11 am to 1 pm. The location is the Propagation area at the Smiths. There are no pre-orders or an inventory list available. Prices: 1 gallon \$15, 2 gallon \$20, 3 gallon \$25.



*'Peter Faulk' by Jean Looy*



*'Lucy Lou' by Sean Rafferty*

## Ways & Means

by Aubrey Ferris

### Raffle and door prizes for the April 20th Meeting:



#### 'Augustine Hobbie'

This 'Augustine Hobbie' picture was taken in one of our member's gardens.

An attractive upright rhododendron with light blue flowers that bloom in early May. Use this popular evergreen in your garden borders for bold evergreen texture & showy spring flower displays.

6 feet high x 6 feet wide



#### *R. pseudochrysanthum*

This plant was a favourite at a recent raffle. Low shrub, 3 feet high in 10 years. Thick silvery leaves with interesting fawn indumentum. Flowers: dark pink in the buds opening to pale pink or white. Predominately white. Truss holds 5-10 flowers. Bloom time is early midseason. Dwarf, low growing. Bell-shaped flowers dark pink to light pink and crimson spots inside.

[no photo available]

#### *R. bureavii* x Yak (Maybrit, Norway)

The plant should have pink flowers, fading to white flushed pink colour as the flowers age, and grows to about 4 feet in 10 years. Leaves are elliptic, up to 5" long, salmon-pink indumentum turning deep rusty red.

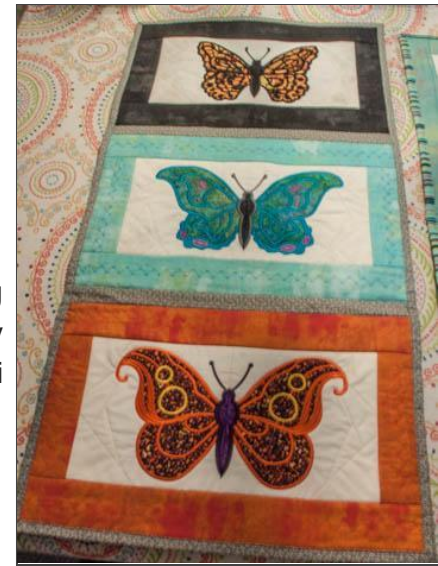


## Treats and Coffee at Meetings

by Antje Guertler

Please remember to bring your own coffee or tea mug if you wish to buy a beverage.

Also a reminder that the following people signed up to bring treats to the April meeting at K'omoks First Nation Hall: Mary Anne Mayhew, Lois Clyde, Bette Hopwood, Dan Ryan, Aji Fliss, Antje Guertler.



## Spring Donation Prize Draw

Donate \$5 to enter your name into the draw for a chance to win one of Margaret Ryan's Quilted Appliques.

The two donations from Margaret feature one of "Butterflies" (34" x 18") and the other of "Flowers" (32" x 11").

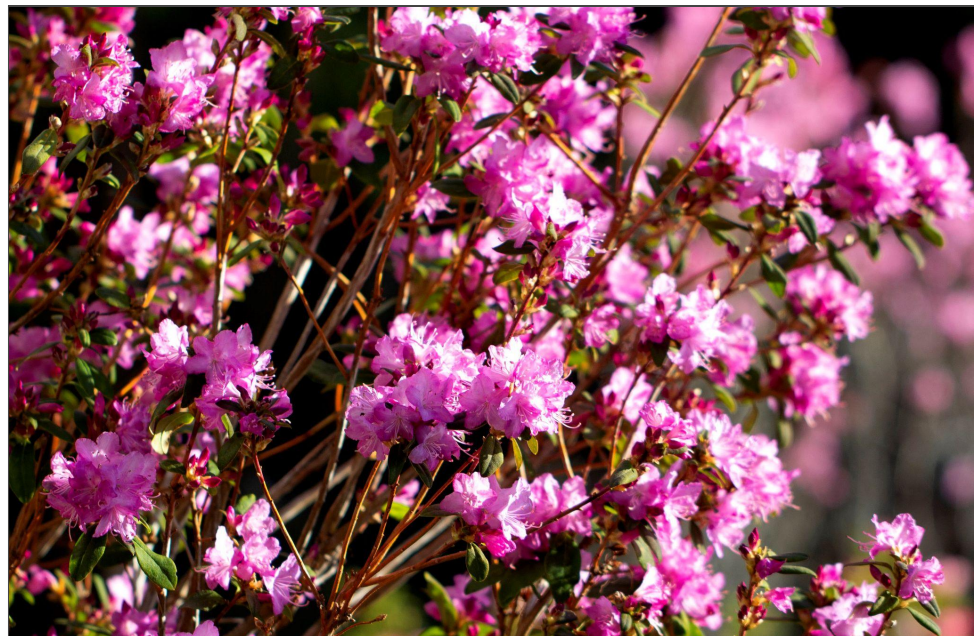
Tickets will be available at the April 20th Members meeting and at the NIRS spring plant sale on April 24th. Tickets will be drawn at the end of the plant sale.



Special thanks to Margaret for donating these beautiful pieces of art.

## 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.



'Conemaugh' by Sean Rafferty



# A Special Event at the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden

Rhododendron season is back and heating up. Milner Gardens and Woodlands is inviting all members of District One chapters to a celebration of the Greig Species Garden on **Tuesday, April 26th**, from 1 to 3 pm. Milner will be open only to ARS members at that time (free admission). There will be a few brief speeches, giving everyone a chance to wander the paths while recognizing and appreciating how it has progressed.



*Photos by John Deniseger*



The Greig garden opened four years ago. Since then, many more rhododendrons and trees have been planted with bulbs and drifts of companion plants added; totally transforming the area. In all, there are more than 220 species rhodos here with a few more to come.



*'Rosamundi' by Garth Wedemire*



## Member Profile

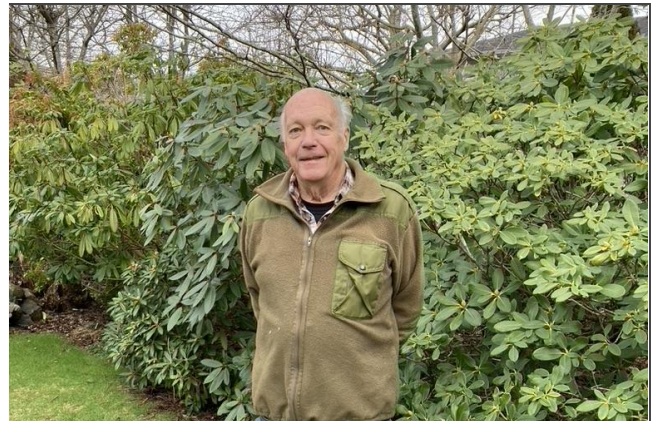
by Kathy Haigh

**Don Law** spent the first six years of his life in Windsor, Ontario. Then his family moved to Royston and he has mostly been a west coaster since then.

He had a solid career in the forestry industry on Vancouver Island, beginning with a stint at a logging camp at Port McNeil as a teenager, then at the Crown Zellerbach pulp mill in Campbell River. His hard work, ambition and on-the-job training led him to become a millwright, which served him well over the years in Tahsis, Port Hardy, Campbell River and Courtenay. In 1995 he retired as a millwright from the Field Sawmill, located along the Courtenay River.

Don had some adventures interspersed in his working years. Notably, he spent one winter moving sailboats in the Caribbean - between Panama and various islands. Another time he hitch-hiked from here to Tijuana, Mexico, and carried on to Panama, British Honduras, and ended up in Ottawa for a shocking winter after being in the tropics.

Don married Dorothy the same year he retired, and they moved to Comox in 1996, to the same house they live in now. Their yard was mostly grass with a thin, straight strip of flower beds at the perimeter. Over the years they have enhanced the property with a greenhouse, fruit trees, a vegetable garden, plenty of roses and numerous rhodos.



The pair of them have loved taking holidays with their 5th wheel trailer in Canada and the USA throughout their time together. Don has always had a boat of some kind since he was 15 years old, and was a member of the Comox Sailing Club for years. He enjoyed salmon fishing and crabbing for many years, but lately, it's mostly prawning with his 14' aluminium boat.

Don also enjoys moose hunting. Where does one find a moose around here, you ask? He and his buddies have gone on annual tenting expeditions in northern BC near Fort St. James to find their moose.

Don has been a NIRS member since 1990 - for 32 years. In 2004 he was awarded the Bronze Medal thanks to his years as club Treasurer and consistently supporting the club wherever needed. Don served as NIRS treasurer for two stints: from 1994 to 1997 and from 2001 to 2009. Since that time, he has continued to assist the club by performing the annual financial review every year. He was involved in creating the CVRG, plus he collected *R. macrophyllum* seeds (native to the Pacific Northwest) which he gave to Harry Wright for propagation. Don was part of the NIRS crew (Harry Wright, Bernie Guyader, Paul Wurz and Don) that delivered donated rhododendrons from the Comox Valley to the George Fraser Project in Ucluelet in 1999. In 2010,

Don was also presented with a NIRS Outstanding Service Award for his continued service to the club.

Don and Dorothy are content to stay where they are in Comox with their beautiful gardens. Although, Don admits that this may have been his last year to prune his fruit trees - now that he is in his eighties.

## CVRG

By Maureen Denny



There was a large turnout of volunteers for last month's work party on March 10. Thanks to everyone who participated! The weather was even on our side, which is a real bonus for March.

Just prior to the work party the Courtenay Parks gardeners removed the stump of the Rhodo that had been chopped down by vandals. Antje brought a "Royston Peach" Rhodo from the Propagation Group and planted it in the hole, thus keeping up the planting theme of this bed as BOVI (Born on Vancouver Island). For those folks new to the club,

one garden bed at the CVRG is solely planted with Rhodos hybridised by Island Growers, including the late Harry Wright, a founding member of our club.

The next work party will be Thursday, April 14 at 10 am. We will be spreading mulch on one of the garden beds at the east side of the Gardens. Please let me know if you can bring a wheelbarrow, [mdenny@shaw.ca](mailto:mdenny@shaw.ca).

For those volunteers not loading mulch into wheelbarrows, please bring rakes to spread the mulch or other regular garden tools. Coffee and goodies will be served after the work is done.

Looking forward to seeing you then.



*Photos by Noni Godfrey*



## Membership

by Dan Ryan

Thirty-nine members and one guest attended the March meeting.

We currently have 73 members, including 5 associate members. The 2022 Membership Yearbooks have been distributed. If you have not received your copy, please let us know.

Spring has arrived and work parties at the CV Rhodo Garden have started, giving another opportunity for members to get together. Also as the gardening season rolls out, it's a good opportunity to support the local businesses listed on the back of your membership card.

## Greig Rhododendron Species Garden at Milner

By Jill Gould



As one who got “volunteered” to be the NIRS representative for the Greig Species Garden, I am now on the Advisory Board. As such, I attended a Zoom meeting on February 24, 2022, the first in two years. Milner Gardens and Woodland, which has not been open to the public much in the

last two years, will reopen in April. Their volunteer base had decreased drastically during the pandemic and needs to be built back up. Also affected is the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden.

With regards to the Greig Species Garden, the Advisory Board would like to invite all District One (Vancouver Island) chapter members to a special afternoon at the Species Garden, on **April 26 (Tuesday) from 1 to 3 pm**. Many Rhododendrons should be in bloom. You can then see what has been accomplished in the last 4 or 5 years.

The Greig Rhododendron Species Garden, which was featured in John Deniseger's presentation at our February meeting, is unique to Canada, and an important conservation and heritage resource. It was built up from scratch with the help of ARS grants, donations, and a lot of hard labour. We are fortunate to have it more or less in our own backyard. Carpooling would be a great idea. If you can't make it to the April 26 special opening, do consider attending at another time. Bring your NIRS membership card!



**WHEREAS** the Canadian Garden Council has proclaimed 2022 as the Year of the Garden, to recognize the fact that over 83 percent of Canadian households turned to some sort of gardening as a healthy diversion to the COVID-19 pandemic and to recognize the 100 year anniversary of the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association; AND

**WHEREAS** the Comox Valley Horticultural Society and the North Island Rhododendron Society are committed to celebrating the contribution of gardens and gardening for the development of our communities and the lives of Canadians; AND

**WHEREAS** gardens and gardening contribute to the quality of life in our communities, our climate, ecosystems and habitats, and create safe and healthy places where people can come together in the spirit of inclusivity and reconciliation; AND

**WHEREAS** the Comox Valley is home to a vibrant horticulture and farming community that supports and contributes to the health and wellbeing of our communities and society;

**THEREFORE** as Chair of the Board of Directors, I do hereby proclaim **2022 as Year of the Garden and June 18, 2022 as National Garden Day** within the Comox Valley Regional District.

*J. Ketler*

Jesse Ketler, Chair

Dated this 25<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2022



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*R. lutescens* by Jean Looy (top)

'Olive' by Garth Wedemire (bottom)



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