

# THE RHODOTELLER



*Holly (Ilex aquifolium) photo by Garth Wedemire*

## Theme: Fall & Winter Berries

Besides standing out in the winter landscape, berries are an important food source for resident birds over the fall and winter, as well as migrating birds in early spring. As a bonus, many of the berry plants produce flowers that pollinators depend on in the spring - for example the native Snowberry (*Symphoricarpus albus*). Whether used as companion plants to rhododendrons, a feature tree or shrub, or an interesting border, these berry-bearing plants serve many purposes year round.

Thank you to all members who submitted photos taken in November 2022 in the Comox Valley.

## Meetings & Events

Dec 7 Executive Meeting

**Dec 13 Christmas dinner/party**

at Comox United Church 5:00 pm

Jan 10 General Meeting



*Snowberry (Symphoricarpus albus) photo by Judy Walker*

## President's View

by Dave Godfrey

It is hard to believe that another calendar year is quickly coming to an end with the Christmas holiday season just around the corner. For gardeners, the quiet indoors offers a time to reflect on all that we have accomplished over another growing season. For the most part, our rhododendrons continue to grow and thrive; although some are still showing the effects of sunburns brought on by the long, hot summers we have been experiencing lately. Hopefully they will fully recover to their glorious selves.



*Coralberry (Symphoricarpos orbiculatus) photo by Dave Godfrey*

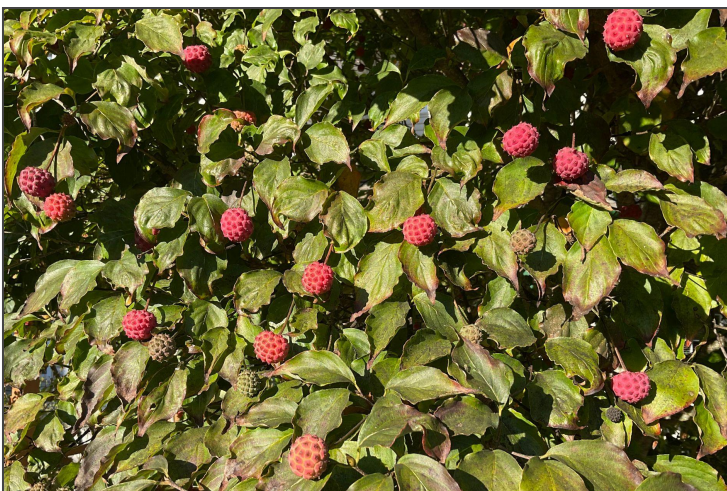
having lots of time to enjoy each garden. Further details on the tour will be coming in the new year.

Your executive team is preparing to return to our normal activities this coming year, including the return of our ever-popular Mother's Day Garden Tour. Carolyn Chester is seeking suitable gardens (members or friends) to showcase in the North Courtenay/Black Creek area. If you would like to have your garden featured on the tour, please contact Carolyn in the near future. We typically have 6 gardens on the tour to allow plenty of time for visitors to travel from one to another, while still

More immediately, we are preparing for the return of our traditional Christmas Party and potluck dinner on **Tuesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>**. Your executive will arrive at the hall at 4 PM to begin the set up and decorating. Then at 5 PM, music and hot cider will greet our many members and guests for the festivities. As in previous years, there will be jellybean jars to guess and word games to challenge your minds - all while socializing with other members.

The potluck dinner should be ready to be served around 6 PM and our traditional Trivia Game will begin as soon as the desserts have been consumed. Most members enjoy the "Heads or Tails" games which are interspersed during the Trivia game. So, for those who wish to participate, don't forget to bring your \$5 worth of loonies.

continued...



*Dogwood (Cornus kousa) photo by Dave Godfrey*

As announced last month, we won't be collecting items for a Christmas hamper this year; rather we will accept cash donations which will go to support the CV Food Bank and the Care-A-Van programs. For those who may not be attending the party, but would still like to support our program, you can e-transfer your donation to our Treasurer Noni Godfrey at [nonigod@shaw.ca](mailto:nonigod@shaw.ca). Thank you to those members who help us support the less fortunate in our communities at this special time of year.

Thirty members responded to our recent online survey regarding our meetings and activities. This represents over 30% of our membership, which compared to previous surveys is a very good response. Thank you to VP Naomi Chester for conducting the survey and to all our members who took the time to complete it. Your executive will examine your input to determine how best we can improve our club.

In closing, I'd like to thank all of you for your continued support and wish each and every one of you a very Merry Christmas and a safe Happy New Year!



*Cotoneaster horizontalis*

photos by Jill Gould

*Cotoneaster dammeri*



## Member Profile: Trevor Strother-Stewart

by Kathy Haigh

**Trevor Strother-Stewart** is so glad that his cousin Judi Murakami encouraged him to join the NIRS. One of the first club meetings that he attended featured an excellent presentation by Steve Hootman. It answered some of his burning questions, including “What’s the big deal with rhodos?” and “Why are folks here obsessed with rhodos?”



Trevor and his twin brother lived with their parents in Calgary until they finished high school. Then in 2019 they all moved to Courtenay with several pets in tow. Their large property came with existing raised vegetable beds, some large trees and miscellaneous shrubs, including a few rhodos, ... and it is conveniently located a few doors down from Gwen Wright’s. Trevor has learned a great deal about growing rhodos from Gwen while helping in her garden.

Sheryl Murakami, Trevor’s mom, has been a big influence on his fascination with plants. The family always had vegetable gardens and house plants. When he was about 16 years old he started to be interested in house plants and aquarium plants. Some friends and he enjoyed taking cuttings of outdoor plants in nature, as well as tropical plants, then placing them in vivariums to watch them grow.



*Iris foetidissima* photo by Lois Clyde

Trevor has always enjoyed being outdoors and loves animals. He currently has an aquarium with tropical fish, plants and a turtle, and a vivarium for his sleepy gecko, as well as a lively cat and dog. As a youngster he was fascinated by insects, reptiles and amphibians too. He worked for Island Waterscape in Courtenay doing pond installations, sales, and office work until it permanently closed this summer. He currently works at the Puntledge Fish Hatchery rearing salmon - basically tending eggs and fish in mega-aquariums until they are released to the wild.

Since moving to Courtenay, Trevor has had an integral hand in redesigning landscape elements in the family yard. Front and centre is the 6' baby Mimosa Tree he planted. He established a succulent garden along the driveway that includes a Prickly Pear Cactus he brought from Calgary. Alongside the house is a protected section with a Chilean Potato Vine and a young Olive tree - both currently wrapped in old Christmas lights for warmth.

Throughout the yard are various garden beds that have berries (current, goose, blue, straw, rasp and mul). Taking advantage of microclimates and sun exposure, there is a banana tree, a young fig tree, a 5-in-1 apple tree, 2 kinds of kiwis and an unknown established grape vine that produces red seedless fruit. A veritable fruit salad to be had!

Several unique plants are happily growing under Trevor's watch including a Yuzu Citrus, Gardenia, Nicotiana, Blue Passion Flower Vine, Chinese Orchids, Calla and Canna Lilies. In the smallish food forest he has Chayote squash, Jerusalem Artichoke and Korean perennial celery that stand out as unique additions to the more common foods.

Trevor enjoys experimenting with plants, and has tried some new veg in the old established raised beds too. He was given a stock tank pond as a parting gift from Island Waterscape, which is placed at the back side of the house and includes some water lilies and various aquarium plants that have proven hardy over the years including Vallisneria, Sagittaria and a couple others. Next spring he'll be adding some Japanese Ricefish into the tank. Nearby is a carnivorous bog garden in a large container complete with an attached clear hose that rises from the base so that the water level can be easily monitored for the benefit of the pitcher plants



*Skimmia photo by Sheila Borman*

(*Sarracenia purpurea* and *S. 'Yellow Jacket'*), Butterworts and Sundews.

There are now several new rhodos planted on the property, thanks to the member-only sales and Trevors' luck in the NIRS draws. Plus, rarely does he leave a meeting empty-handed thanks to the unique plants he finds at the revenue table. Bonus: Trevor has been casually learning Latin on the fly, as it pertains to his interests, and can be overheard sounding like a pro - whether at NIRS meetings, at home or in gardens.

Trevor has taken a variety of classes at NIC and is trying to sort out a career path, but he has found that he loves learning about every subject he takes ... so many choices. Although Trevor has not yet decided where his path in life will take him, it almost certainly will involve working with plants.

## Membership

by Dan Ryan

Thirty-eight members attended our November meeting. Two of our three guests signed up for a membership, and there were eight renewals. We currently have 85 members including 7 Associate Members.

It was great to have so many members attend our November General meeting and presentation, where we welcomed new members Susie Evans and Jack Ensign of Comox. We welcomed the return of members Rose Webber, Becci & Keith Russell from Courtenay, as well as the return of associate members Ron & Rea Sutton of Fanny Bay. Ron is currently the President/Treasurer of the Nanaimo chapter.

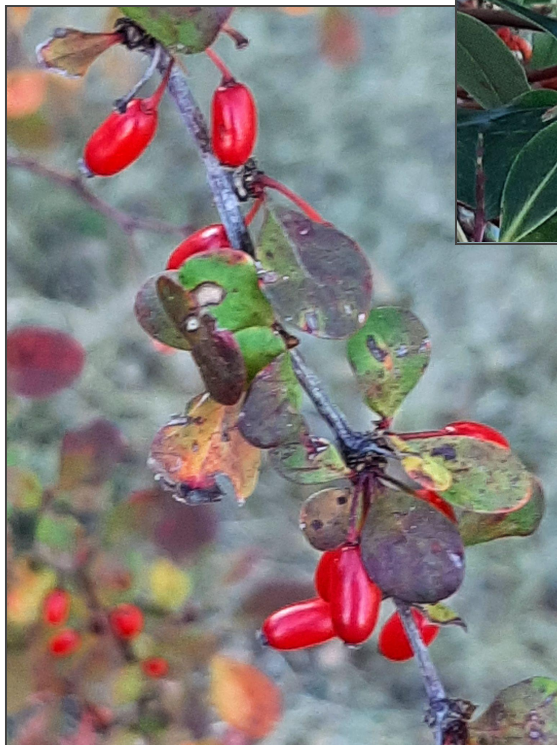
It's time to renew! The dues for membership are; regular \$40.00 and \$10.00 for an Associate membership (must hold a regular membership with another ARS Chapter). We would like to thank all those who took advantage of the "Early Renewal Program". We will announce the lucky member on December 13 at the Christmas dinner party.

You can mail your cheque, payable to NIRS, to P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay B.C. V9N 5N4 or e-transfer \$40.00 to the Club Treasurer Noni Godfrey ([nonigod@shaw.ca](mailto:nonigod@shaw.ca)).

*Arbutus menziesii (madrone)*

*Berberis 'Rose Glow'*

*photos by Sheila Borman*



## In Search of Fraser Hybrids

by Dave Godfrey

At our November 8th general meeting Dave McIntosh of Ucluelet mentioned that members of the George Fraser Project are attempting to locate some rare Fraser hybrids which they hope to propagate.

Here is a list of the rhododendrons and azaleas being sought:

Albert Close	George Fraser
Camich	John Blair
Fiona Christie	Maxie
Fraseri Group	Mrs. Jamie Fraser

If you have one or more of these plants, or know the whereabouts of any, please contact fellow NIRS member Dave McIntosh at 250-726-4308 or [dmcintosh099@gmail.com](mailto:dmcintosh099@gmail.com).

## Ways and Means December door prize by Aubrey Ferris

R. 'Daphnoides' will be the door prize at the Dec 13 Christmas Party.



Few hybrids can compare with this mass of purple bloom.

Great as an accent for a single-colour focal point or with other shrubs that blossom in less striking colors. Liven otherwise dark shaded realms of the garden. Dense growth is ideal for cover-ups, along fences, footings and the edges of outdoor steps. Perfect for filling in beds and for under edges of large conifer drip lines and attracts butterflies.

Height 4' in 10 years.



*Poinsettia photo by Diana Scott*



*Winterberry (Ilex verticillata)*

*Shrubby Hare's Ear (Bupleurum fruticosum)*

*Skimmia japonica*

*photos by Judy Walker*



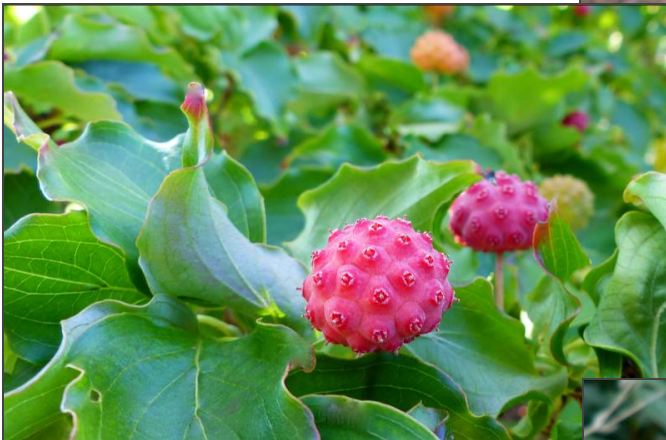




*Firethorns (Pyracantha)*

*Rosa rugosa*

*photos by Jill Gould*



*Dogwood fruit*

*Daphne tangutica*

*photos by Diana Scott*



## Members Travel Pics

Christchurch Botanical Gardens in New Zealand is the location of this colourful spring photo taken in November. Adrienne & Robert McNabb recently took a two month cruise to Hawaii, New Zealand and Australia - enjoying gardens in the southern hemisphere.



*Mahonia 'Charity' photo by Diana Scott*



*Callicarpa bodinieri 'Profusion'  
photo by Garth Wedemire*

## Rhodo Leaves Curling in the Cold

by Diana Scott

When temperatures dip below freezing I watch with interest as the garden takes on the frosty hues of winter. The Rhodos in our garden sustain winter damage from time to time, but usually 'weather' the mild cold that we get here on the coast. Some winters, however, have some VERY COLD spells, and we can usually tell how cold it is by the curl and droop of the Rhodo leaves! Folks new to Rhodo growing may not be aware that the sight of droopy, shriveled-looking leaves on their favourite Rhodo is an appropriate protective response to the drop in temperature. Rhodos that are cold-hardy seem to show more leaf movement than those that are not.



Biologist Erik Tallak Nilsen in his research paper "Why Do Rhododendron Leaves Curl?"

<http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/796.pdf>

helps to explain his view of this interesting phenomenon.

Nilsen begins by crediting Charles Darwin for first categorizing leaf movements in his book "The Power of Movement in Plants" published in 1880. Darwin reported that many plant parts, particularly leaves, move in response to both environmental and physiological factors. The key factors are light intensity, light direction, water content, and temperature. The leaves of plants in hot, dry environments respond to temperature by moving upward to avoid excess light absorption. In contrast, many Rhodo leaves droop downward and curl inward in response to cold temperatures.

According to the research described in Nilsen's article, the droop and the curl are two distinct phenomena, both serving to protect the leaf from cold damage. Thermotropic (temperature related) leaf movements have been commonly thought to be a mechanism to prevent leaf desiccation or loss of water during cold periods or a way for the plant to shed snow, but Nilsen's research does not support these theories. The droop and curl seem to be more related to the protection of the cell membranes from the effects of freezing. The leaf drooping is controlled by hydration of the leaf stalk or petiole, and the downward angle this produces may serve to protect the leaf from membrane damage due to strong sunlight and cold temperatures. The inward curl appears to be a response to leaf temperature (as opposed to air temperature) which reduces the amount of leaf area exposed to light, preventing cell damage by slowing the rate of thaw. Most damage caused by leaf freezing is a result of ice crystals piercing the cellular membranes, followed by too rapid a rate of rewarming. Drooping and curling may both reduce the area exposed to sunlight thus slowing the rate of rewarming after a period of cold. Leaf movement seems to be a significant factor in determining cold hardiness in rhododendrons.

Despite what it looks like in your garden, the Rhodos that appear the most shriveled may very well be the ones that are taking the cold weather in stride! I hope that over the upcoming months you will be taking our cold winter temperatures in stride along with your Rhodos!

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*Mountain Ash (Sorbus) photo by Sheila Borman*

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