

THE RHODOTELLER



'Ruby Hart' by Garth Wedemire

President's View

by Dave Godfrey

So how did your garden fare with all the bitter cold temperatures and heavy snowfall during the holiday period? During the heavy wet snowfall before Christmas, Noni and I went around the garden and carefully knocked a lot of it off the various plants. We didn't do this with the subsequent lighter snowfalls. This snow actually helped protect the plants from the frigid temperatures during the cold snap. A check around our garden last week found a few small branches broken and some bud damage. Otherwise, it could have been a lot worse. A good spring cleanup should help rectify any problem areas.

Remember last year when the Delta variant of Covid cancelled our meetings in January? This time due to the high rate of cases in the Omicron variant, the executive decided once again to cancel all meetings for January out of an abundance of caution. As numbers are slowly dropping, we hope to get back to our in-person meetings this month. However, to give us some extra time, the executive has decided to delay the meetings by one week.

The Executive meeting would normally be held on Tuesday, February 1st and the General meeting on the 8th. Instead, they will be held on the 8th and 15th. So please note the new General meeting date FEBRUARY 15th. If all goes well, we will welcome associate member John

Deniseger with an updated presentation on the Greig Species Garden at Milner Garden and Woodland in Qualicum.

Even though we did not gather last month, I hope that some of you enjoyed the District 1 Zoom presentation by Seamus O'Brien of Ireland on January 15th. Also, other Zoom presentations were shown that week as various chapters invited our members to join them for their Zoom meetings. For those who missed the O'Brien presentation, the video is available for viewing on the MARS website (click here: <https://marsrhodos.ca/coming-events/zoom-meeting-archives/>)

As I shared in a recent email, it is worth repeating the warning which Jill Gould passed along for our members: *"A couple of times, I have had a spam message (email) from "Diana Scott", although the address was not Diana's. Also last year I got the same from Jake Ellis (but it wasn't Jake). The line starts something about pictures, or "do you know who is in these pictures"? I delete these things unread. But I think the membership should know that these are spoofs and NOT to open them or click on attachments, just in case!"* Thanks Jill, for the good reminder to be careful when opening emails and/or attachments.

In closing, I wanted to mention that the NIRS 2022 Yearbook is at the publishers and I hope to have them available for distribution at the February meeting. Thank you again for your continued support during these uncertain times. We look forward to seeing some of you on February 15th. Please RSVP to me if you plan to attend as we will continue to be limited to 50-person attendance.



Witch Hazel 'Jelena' at Filberg Park photo by Diane Van Oostdam

Meetings

Feb 8, 2022 Executive Meeting
10:00 am at Comox United Church

Feb 15, 2022 Club Meeting 7:00 pm
at Comox United Church.

April 24, 2022 NIRS Spring Plant Sale

May 4-8, 2022 ARS Spring
International Convention, Vancouver
WA www.ars2022.org

Adela Smith

It was with great sadness that we received the news of the passing of our dear friend and fellow NIRS member, Adela Smith. Surrounded by family, she passed away peacefully at her winter home in Santa Monica, California on December 31, 2021.

Adela (nee Marriott) was born and raised here in the Comox Valley. Her family (the Duncan's) was one of the first to arrive and settle in the valley. She attended school in Courtenay and graduated from Courtenay High School in 1947.

Married for 64 years, Roberts (Bob) passed away in January 2018. They had four children (Robert, Eric, James, and Richard (Rich), 9 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren.



May 2019

Adela & Bob had been members for many years and generously shared their lovely estate garden and home with our members over the years. Several times we were fortunate to include Smithhill Gardens on our Mother's Day tours and those turned out to be the most profitable years. The Smith's also hosted our annual June picnics a couple of times. As well, they generously gave permission for us to use the propagation house and garden area to grow our hundreds of potted rhododendrons.

The family hopes to have a small gathering and service here in their beautiful garden sometime this spring. We will certainly miss Adela and Bob at our meetings and events. R.I.P. both of you!

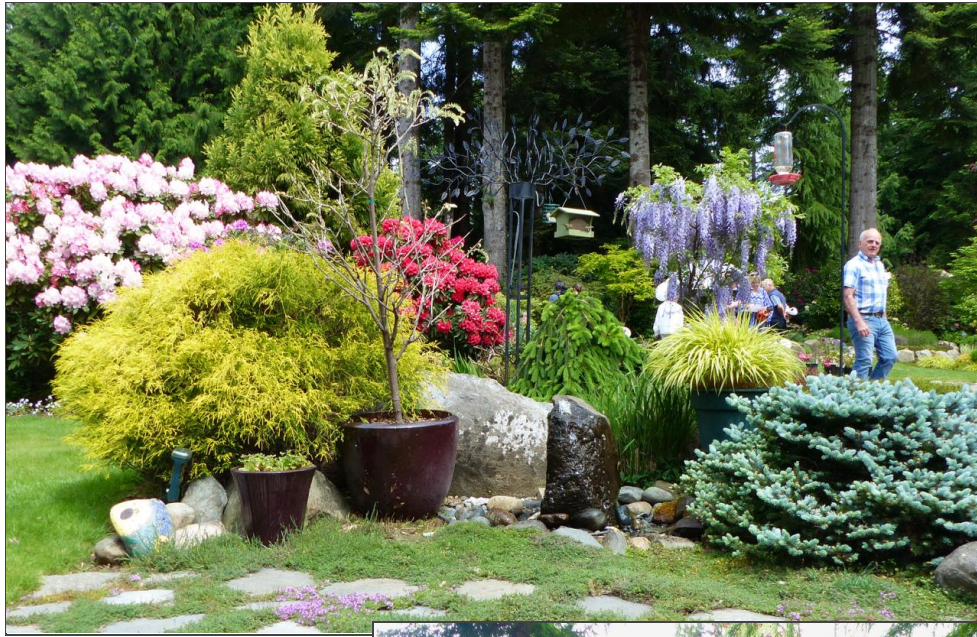


Bob and Adela Smith

Taken in 2008

when the Walk of Fame stone was put in front of Graham Jewellers in Bob's honour.

photos by Diana Scott

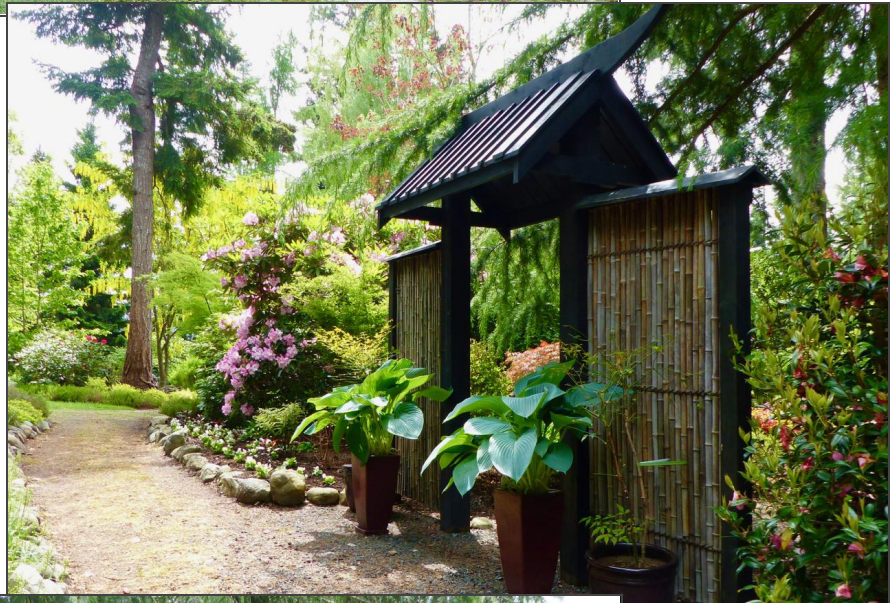


Adela's view, with Charlie.

Entrance to Adela's secret garden.

Toward Adela's spot.

*All photos taken May 2019
NIRS Mother's Day Garden Tour
At Smith's property
by Diana Scott*



February 15th Program: John Deniseger

“Bringing the World to Milner Gardens and Woodland - the story of the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden”

John Deniseger is a retired biologist, an avid gardener, outdoor enthusiast, and past president of the Nanaimo Rhododendron Society. He is the current chair of the Milner Gardens and Woodland Society Board and a member of the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden Advisory Group. John and his wife June received the ARS Silver medal in 2021.



Milner Gardens and Woodland in Qualicum Beach is a 70-acre waterfront estate that was gifted to Vancouver Island University in 1996 and has been open to the public since 2001. In 2014, a partnership was formed between VIU, Milner and the five Vancouver Island chapters of the ARS, with the goal of establishing the first Canadian rhododendron species garden. The intent was to create a garden which would highlight the tremendous diversity within the genus rhododendron, while educating the public about conservation issues and where rhododendrons are found in the wild. The story of the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden is one of perseverance, generosity and teamwork. While the garden officially opened in April 2018, it has become a showpiece which continues to evolve as more species and companion plants are added.

Please note the change of meeting date to **February 15th at 7 PM**. We continue to be under Covid protocols and can only allow 50% (50 person) capacity. Please RSVP to davegod@shaw.ca if you wish to attend.



R. wardii

*photo by Garth
Wedemire*

Elepidotes

Source: www.rhodyman.net

This month's rhodo theme is elepidotes. All of the photos from Garth Wedemire in this issue are elepidotes. Note that people are included in some photos to show the relative size of plants.

The elepidote rhododendrons don't have leaf scales and are generally the large-leaved species. Those rhododendrons which are not elepidotes are lepidotes (have scales). The subgenus *Hymenanthes* contains about 219 species. They occur in southern Europe, the Caucasus Mountains, eastern and western North America, but the greatest diversity by far occurs in the region of rugged mountains and to a lesser extent in central and southeastern China.

The elepidote rhododendrons are very uniform in their essential botanical characteristics. The subgenus *Hymenanthes* species are what most gardeners would think of as 'typical' or 'true' rhododendrons, for they far outnumber the lepidote rhododendrons in cultivation and, because of their greater bulk, they are more conspicuous.

A further distinction, which distinguishes elepidotes from other members of the genus, is that the non-glandular hairs on the leaves and stems are, with few exceptions, branched and often of elaborate structure. In many species these hairs form a dense coating on the underside of the leaf, the nature of which depends on the structure of the hairs and their density. When conspicuous, these hairs are called *indumentum* and *tomentum*.



R. thomsonii photo by Garth Wedemire



R. macabeum and Robin Fischer (PARS Chapter) 2010 photo by Garth Wedemire

Membership

by Dan Ryan

We currently have 65 renewed memberships for 2022. Welcome Robert Billings and Sheree Floyd as our newest members! Hopefully soon we can get back to in person meetings - looking forward to seeing everyone.

Ways & Means

by Aubrey Ferris

The following plants will be raffled at the February meeting - assuming that we actually meet in person. Since that didn't happen in January, these same plants are on offer.

- 1. Carmen x Ken Janeck:** Small compact Rhodo with red flowers.
- 2. Tofino:** Red buds open to dome-shaped trusses of cream and rosy pink markings, lovely bronze new growth.
- 3. Fairweather:** Vigorous and easy to grow with outstanding foliage, heavily indumented. Flowers are a delightful warm yellow tone.

Member Profile

by Kathy Haigh

Dan Ryan has lived on Vancouver Island all of his life but has been to a lot of places.

He was born and raised in Victoria, and felt early on that he wanted to be an automotive design engineer. So much so that he literally went far out of his way every day to attend Vic High, which was the tech/trades school in the city. A slight change of course took him to Camosun College for post secondary education and he became a Civil Engineering Technician.



With a wife and baby girl then, Dan worked with the BC government on water resources projects. He enjoyed working in the field while solving problems. He did surveying and layout for the Jordan River Diversion Dam, which included a new powerhouse and penstock to greatly increase the dam's power output for lower Vancouver Island. Numerous other important projects followed. He loved working in a spirit of cooperation to bring successful end products.

Dan's career involved consulting for several firms, large and small, mostly in BC, all the while with Victoria as the home base. He married Margaret in 1982, and they lived in Victoria until 2011, when they retired and moved to the Comox Valley.

A lifelong hobby of Dan's is classic cars: working on them and racing them. In 1966 he bought a 1956 Ford Meteor and used to race it on tracks near Victoria. In his workshop he also worked on carburetors for high performance vehicles - not just cars, but also race boats and jet boats. He belonged to the 4 Wheel Drive Association of BC and got busy "teching vehicles" with them. Dan was crew chief at the oval race track, as well as on the tech and safety committees. Drag racing was also fun, so he helped with the set-ups and both he and Margaret would race cars. [Margaret deserves her own Member Profile article, which I'll get to!]

Dan once had an award-winning Porsche, which won the Touring Concours class for 944's at the Porsche National Convention, Portland Oregon, 2005. He was also a member of the Vancouver Island Mustang Club with car shows in Vancouver and on the Island. He is currently a member of the Comox Valley Classic Cruisers, where he helps with parking controls and route management for shows and cruises. He still proudly shows his 1956 Meteor every chance he gets.

After retiring, Margaret and Dan spent six winters in Arizona, the first three in Yuma with a 5th wheel trailer, then Mesa in a park model. From there they took numerous side trips to - you guessed it - car shows, as well as other places such as the Grand Canyon.

They love to travel, and especially love cruises. They have twice cruised the Panama Canal: east-bound and west-bound. On a major globe-trotting trip a few years ago, they saw a tremendous number of fascinating places while on a cruise from Singapore to Rome. [Go ahead

and take a break to look at an atlas to get the magnitude of that - I had to!] They had to cancel a couple of cruises in the Baltic Sea and the UK due to COVID, but are not deterred and intend to continue traveling when it is safe to do so.



Another hobby of Dan's is gardening, which started with his mom's lovely rhodos and azaleas in Chinese egg pots. There are several rhodos and azaleas planted in their Courtenay yard, some of which are unique. However, Dan belongs to the "Dick Bonnie school of thought" and just admires them without caring to know their pedigree or latin names.

Together, Dan and Margaret have been the NIRS membership committee for the past two years and enjoy meeting new and old members. Dan is a regular with the CVRG work parties. His education and experience has come in handy several times when calculations were needed for mulch quantities, and for discussing irrigation with the City. He also helps install and take down the club banners for Rhodo Month in May each year. Dan says that when he has a hobby he really likes to dig in and get involved - and we can see that here.



R. calophytum

photo by
Garth
Wedemire

CVRG

by Maureen Denny

Unfortunately, there have been more acts of senseless vandalism at the Comox Valley Rhodo Garden. This time a large plant was cut down almost to the ground, and it looks like a saw or axe was used to cut it down. This Rhodo is located in the BOVI garden bed along the main paved section of the walkway. The vandalism seemed to have occurred in the overnight hours of Wednesday January 26. Antje had walked through the gardens the day before and saw that all was well but noticed the damage the next morning of the 27th on her walk. On Friday morning the 28th, I visited the gardens again and there was another Rhodo that had branches ripped off.

This certainly is sad news as this garden has been lovingly cared for by our club and the Courtenay Parks staff for so many years and is greatly appreciated by the many people who walk through it every day. The solution on how to prevent this vandalism is not clear. It certainly will be a topic at our next Executive meeting on February 8, and I have notified the Courtenay Parks Department regarding this matter.



R. macrophyllum photo by Garth Wedemire



Year of the Garden 2022

The BC Council of Garden Clubs has partnered with the Canadian Garden Council to help celebrate Year of the Garden 2022.

From January 1 to December 31, 2022, here in British Columbia, we will be celebrating a centennial of Canada's rich garden heritage, celebrate our vibrant garden culture, and create important legacies for a sustainable future.

A message from Michel Gauthier, Executive Director, Canadian Garden Council:

The Garden Life is a healthy life, environmentally friendly life, an inclusive life that contributes to quality of life for those living it and for their community. To 'Live the Garden Life' is to include plants in your life at home, at work, at school, in your community and even on holidays.

'Live the Garden Life' Call-to-Action Program The 'Live the Garden Life' call-to-action program will be rolled out on a monthly and weekly basis and invite Canadians to engage with the Year of the Garden 2022. Again, this will be your opportunity to invite your members, your clients, and your social media followers to 'Live the Garden Life'.

Michel Gauthier, Executive Director

The **Year of the Garden 2022** campaign will reach and inspire the public to learn about the connections gardens and gardening have with many important community quality of life benefits. The North Island Rhododendron Society is a member of the BC Council of Garden Clubs and will be supporting this initiative. Please ask your friends and neighbours to lend their support and perhaps become a member.

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.

Rhododendron yakushmanum

By Diana Scott

Ah, the yak and 'yak hybrids' -- well loved and appreciated by Rhodo enthusiasts! *Rhododendron yakushmanum* (*R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushmanum*) is native to and named for a small area on the northern end of Yaku Island or Yakushima off the southern coast of Japan. The island is a treasury of Japanese vegetation and is home to some 1,900 species and subspecies of flora. This rich ecological area was the first site in Japan to be inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1993.



Susan Clark of the American Rhododendron Society Massachusetts Chapter has written an excellent article entitled "Species in Our Midst - *Rhododendron degronianum*" where she explains how this beautiful and well loved Rhodo came from the far reaches of Japan to the attention of the world. Quote: "Yaks were first described by Nakai in 1921 and introduced into Europe by Lionel de Rothschild at Exbury in 1934, to whom 2 plants were sent by the famous Japanese botanist, Koichiro Wada. From Exbury yaks were grown at the Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Wisley. It was a Wisley yak, in full bloom, in the 1947 Chelsea Flower Show, that took a First Class Certificate and started the yak craze. Rhododendron fanatics fell in love with this fabulous plant and they precipitated an exuberant breeding spate that is still producing hundreds of named yak crosses."

One of the more popular yaks is Ken Janeck (*degronianum* ssp *yakushmanum* seedling). The leaves are long, narrow, and roll slightly inward. As the new leaves emerge they are covered with a light fuzzy tomentum. This gradually fades over the summer to reveal the dark green leaves, while the undersides retain their thick cream to tawny-coloured indumentum. A midseason bloomer, Ken Janeck's flowers are pink fading to white with a spotted green upper lobe. It's a compact mounding plant and I think that almost everyone I know has one!

Other popular yak hybrids include the series developed in the 1970's named after Snow White's seven dwarfs. *R. 'Bashful'* has blushing pink blooms that go well with the silvery young leaves. *R. 'Dopey'* has glossy red blooms and *R. 'Grumpy'* has pink buds and pale pink flowers that fade to cream. Other favourites are *R. 'Fantastica'* which has dark pink blooms that shade to white in the throat, with attractive light green spotting. *R. 'Teddy Bear'* has deep orange indumentum and shell pink flowers. 'Yaku Prince', 'Yaku Princess', 'Yaku Queen' and 'Yaku Sunrise' have all been hybridized using *degronianum* ssp *yakushmanum* 'Koichiro Wada'. The two Canadian Rhodo stamps released in March 2009 featured trusses of *R. yakushmanum* 'Mist Maiden' introduced in 1947, and Dr. D.L.Craig's 1979 hybrid of 'Mist Maiden', *R. 'Minas Maid'*. Although many yaks have pink blooms, colours can range from white and peachy yellows to pinks and lavenders through to bright reds.



R. degronianum ssp. *yakushmanum*, despite growing on cool, misty, windswept mountainsides in its native environment, is very sun tolerant in cool climates and is among the hardiest of the large-leaved varieties. The compact form, the wide variety of bloom colours and the great leaf characteristics make the 'yak' and its hybrids a must for every Rhodo garden.



*Brenda Macdonald photographs *R. calophytum* in Bodnant Garden, Wales. April 2018 Photo by Garth Wedemire*

Leslie Cox's New Gardening Newsletter

Intro by Diana Scott

Most folks in the NIRS club know Leslie Cox/Duchess of Dirt who writes in the paper and has been a speaker at the club. She and husband John have a wonderful small garden in Black Creek, sell plants and seeds, and in the past hosted garden tours. This year she decided to put out a Gardening Newsletter called "Toil 'n' Trowel." Folks who might be interested can email Leslie@duchessofdirt.ca to be put on her list for future editions. The following is an excerpt from the first issue, published here with Leslie's permission.

Hosta of the Year 2022

by Leslie Cox

Now to introduce **Hosta of the Year 2022!** Since 1996, the American Hosta Growers Association (AHGA) has been selecting a hosta cultivar they deem is uniquely worthy to be singled out. *Hosta* 'So Sweet' was the first one and since I have it in my own garden, I applaud their choice.

The pick for 2022 is ***Hosta* 'Island Breeze'**.

It is said this hosta is the third in what is called "the Island series". The other two are 'Fire Island' and 'Paradise Island'.

I do adore 'Fire Island' which I have in my garden but I have not come across 'Paradise Island' on any of my plant hunts through local nurseries on Vancouver Island. Neither are on the Hosta of the Year list. Yet.

Thinking of this Island series, I was sure I had seen other Island-named cultivars in my hosta research. Sure enough, I came across 'Island Charm' and 'Fantasy Island'. However, no mention of them being in the "Island" series.

But back to **Hosta of the Year 2022: 'Island Breeze'**. This medium-sized hosta is a sport of 'Fire Island', reflecting its parent's almost solid red petioles and greenish-yellow leaves but adding a medium green margin along the leaf edge.

Omigod! The hunt is on!



Hosta 'Island Breeze' photo source: nhhostas.com

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R. arboreum (top) and 'Blue Peter' (bottom)

Photos by Garth Wedemire