

THE RHODOTELLER



This month's rhodo theme is lepidotes. R.calostroturn (Wisley) by Garth Wedemire

President's View

by Dave Godfrey

January is one of the quietest months of the year for gardeners. However, there is always something for us to do during the shortened days – reading gardening books and magazines for new ideas (there are plenty to borrow from our NIRS library), planning for your spring gardens,



and if you didn't get around to doing it in the fall, cleaning, sharpening and oiling tools in preparation for spring. Remember the saying by poet Shelly... "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

Although it was a different format from previous years, our Christmas party this year was another success. We welcomed new member Mary Anne Mayhew of Courtenay to the club and gave a special welcome to NIRS associate members Liz & Al Murray who drove up from Cowichan to join the festivities.

There were the usual choices of drinks and plenty of fruit & sweets to enjoy, along with Christmas music playing in the background. Many of the 33 members who attended participated in guessing the candies in the jars, trivia game sheets and the 'Looney Heads or Tails' game, which Dan Ryan and Noni Godfrey helped to run. Most prizes were in the \$20 range and congratulations to all the winners.



One member who seems to have a system for guessing the correct number of candies in the jar is Don Law. He has won this game for several years now. This year, he was the closest with 175 of the 184 candies in the large jar, while Maureen Denny had the closest guess with 200 of the 212 jelly beans in the small jar. Sue Klapwijk was close second in both games. Congrats to both Don and Maureen. *Photos by Noni Godfrey*



Thanks to all the executive members who helped with the setup and decorate the tables. And a special thank you to Carolyn Chester for organizing the food treats. It was my pleasure, on behalf of the chapter, to present Carolyn with the ARS Bronze medal for her years of service to the club and in particular for her 7 years as the secretary since joining in January 2014.

I would also like to thank those members who dropped off cash or some non-perishable items to Diane Van Oostdam for our Christmas Hamper Project. This year we had a family of 6 to support. So, thank you for your generous donations and special thanks to Diane and Maureen for looking after the hamper again.

Coming up for our January 11th meeting, we have invited Linda Derkach of the MARS chapter to help warm us up a bit by giving her presentation on New Zealand. The presentation was well received by other chapters and we look forward to seeing it. Be sure to mark the date on your 2022 calendars.

In closing, I hope that all our members had an enjoyable Christmas season with family and friends, and we look forward to seeing what the New Year brings. Let's hope we can get back to our normal schedule of activities and events. Take care everyone!

Meetings

Jan 4, 2022 Executive Meeting 10:00 am at Comox United Church

Jan 11, 2022 7:30 pm at Comox United Church. Bring your leftover Christmas baking to share.

January 11th Program: Linda Derkach

“New Zealand: Land of the Long White Cloud”

The Gardens – the Culture – the Plants

From the sub-tropical gardens on the North Island, to the temperate rolling hills and glaciers of the South Island, New Zealand is a gardener’s paradise. This journey through the land of the Kiwis will tempt you to visit amazing heritage gardens, indigenous culture, and the intriguing native plants of this beautiful and diverse country.



Linda Derkach is a long time and very active member of Mount Arrowsmith Rhodo Society and Vancouver Island Master Gardeners. Gardening, writing about gardens and touring gardens all over the world are some of her favourite things to do. An avid alpine garden enthusiast, Linda is currently the MARS Newsletter editor and Secretary for the ARS.

We welcome Linda as our guest speaker for the first meeting of 2022 on January 11th at 7:30pm. Hope many of our members come out to enjoy Linda’s program. It is sure to warm you up in the dead of winter!



R. impeditum by Garth Wedemire

ARS Bronze Medal

Presentation to Carolyn Chester

It was with great pleasure that President Dave Godfrey presented the American Rhododendron Society Bronze Medal to Carolyn Chester on December 14th, 2021. The ARS Bronze Medal is awarded for outstanding contributions to a Chapter and is the highest commendation awarded by a local Chapter in the Society.



Carolyn joined the North Island chapter in January 2014 and in September of that year took on the position of club Secretary. Over the past seven years, Carolyn has been a respected member of the NIRS Board, recording the meeting minutes and maintaining the records of the Society. Carolyn has always taken an active role, and in her positive and friendly manner has participated in the many social activities and work parties throughout the years. Since joining she has been part of the Garden Tour committee each year and has hosted several member events in the beautiful Chester Garden.

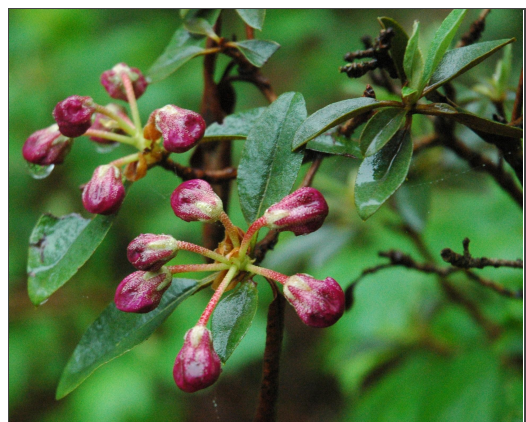
Active in the propagation group, Carolyn has been a regular member at the workshops, work parties and plant sales. She hosted the club's June picnic in 2015 and, in the absence of the public plant sale, has offered her garden/driveway to hold the 'Member's Only' plant sales for the past two years. Carolyn has been supportive of the club and its many activities over the years and is a much-valued member of our Society. We thank Carolyn for her many contributions and congratulate her on being awarded the ARS Bronze Medal by the North Island Rhododendron Society.

The Bronze Medal was presented as part of a framed certificate stating: *"The American Rhododendron Society North Island Chapter Recognizes Carolyn Chester for the Bronze Medal Award for her many years of service and continued dedication to the Society December 2021"*

*The plants and the earth are resting.
Maybe we should too.
The long days will be here
Soon enough.*

By Rebecca Raiden

R. baileyi (flower buds about to open) by Garth Wedemire



Membership

by Dan Ryan

It was nice to see so many members at the Christmas Social. Good treats and fun were had by all. To date we have 61 members including associate members.

The Early Bird draw for those members who renewed by November 30th was made and this year's lucky winners are Valerie and Aubrey Ferris. Congratulations to Valerie and Aubrey, and Thank you to all who renewed early.

HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE!



R. megeratum by Garth Wedemire

Ways & Means

by Aubrey Ferris

The following plants will be raffled at the January meeting.

- 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.

Christmas Hamper Program

by Diane Van Oostdam

Once again our club members have been generous - we truly share the Christmas Spirit. Our members donated \$490 plus some food donations. This year we had a family of 6: two parents, 8 year old twins plus 10 & 13 yr old boys. Maureen and I did the initial big shop and got most items from the suggested list. I then went to Costco, for large food items and some presents. The following day after consulting with Maureen, we agreed on some gift certificates and extra treats resulting in trips to 3 more stores. I got all the presents wrapped and gift cards sealed in Christmas envelopes from Santa.

Finally, we managed to drop off the hampers (4 rubbermaid totes) Friday afternoon during the big snow fall. What a bee hive the warehouse was! Many volunteers, bins and food everywhere, were still packing and sorting, as apparently there are more families needing help this year in the 'Royal LePage Sharing the Christmas Spirit' hamper program.



Happy New Year 2022

Member Profile

By Kathy Haigh

Naomi Chester has loved nature all her life. An early memory of her childhood in Conwy, Wales includes picking and eating raspberries in her Grandmother's garden, although she did not take an interest in gardening until well into adulthood.

Her childhood in this seaside town on the north coast of Wales, which is known for its castle and nearby Bodnant Garden, was filled with school, studying ballet and an earnest desire to become a Marine Biologist ever since she was six. If you've ever noticed that Naomi seems really curious about a variety of things - well she is and you're not the first to notice!



She earned a BSc in Zoology and Marine Zoology at University of Wales, Bangor. She managed to completely avoid Botany, as her focus centred on the animal world. Then she finished a MSc in Wildlife Biology and Conservation, which was done mostly by distance learning through Napier University, Edinburgh. Two notable educational experiences were volunteering in the Canary Islands doing whale and dolphin research, and managing flora and fauna in a South African game reserve for a month.

Unfortunately, when she was ready to pursue a career there were no jobs in zoology to be found near home. Always adaptable, Naomi switched gears to work as a real estate agent in Conwy. She still remembers some of those gardens and pets in the properties she was selling. An undiagnosed hole in her heart made itself known in her late twenties and caused considerable health issues around the time the family was moving to Canada.

Naomi and her parents Carolyn and Harris moved to Vancouver in 2008, where she promptly had a stroke and a long period of rehabilitation to overcome the residual effects. Unfortunately, this meant that she was no longer able to work in the field related to her studies. She credits her parents for their nurturing care, including daily walks in nature during her recovery, which were beneficial in numerous ways. It was during this time that Naomi was introduced to yoga - her natural curiosity and desire to learn was still there and her yoga practice has been integral to her eventual complete recovery.

After 18 months in Vancouver, the family moved to the Comox Valley. In 2012 Carolyn and Naomi went on the NIRS Mother's Day Rhodo Garden Tour, and there's been no turning back on gardening since then. While Carolyn readily admits her only interest is in flowering plants, Naomi loves growing trees and raising vegetables - having been a full-on vegetarian since the age of nine, her curiosity about the best ways of growing food is not surprising. Naomi felt a healing sense of grounding, being slow and reconnecting while gardening. They moved onto their current rural property in 2013 where they all participate in the various aspects of yard care and beautification, and love sharing it when possible.

Naomi found a nice comforting feeling of community within the NIRS, the latin dance group she joined here, as well as in her yoga teacher training. Teaching Yoga since 2014, she recently attained her 500-hour advanced certification, and she continues to enjoy practicing yoga for her health, as well as teaching yoga in a few places. Since the stroke, Naomi has learned much about physiology, anatomy, neuroplasticity and healing modalities. In fact, she co-founded a stroke survivor group and still assists other survivors using yoga and Ayurveda, which is an ancient Eastern holistic healing system that is the basis of Western medicine. Interspersed with teaching yoga, she earned a postgraduate diploma in Business Management from North Island College in 2015.

Naomi enjoys helping out at NIRS plant sales and at the revenue table with Judy during monthly meetings, where her curiosity about companion plants and people's gardens blooms. The Rhodo Club has fostered her passion for plants in its' welcoming, sharing and unpretentious atmosphere. The family gardens are evolving as her curiosity continues into the areas of shade gardening (hostas, ferns, bulbs), permaculture and adapting to climate change. Speak to Carolyn and she'll readily tell you how she has assisted in creating a monster when it comes to Naomi's passion for gardening.

Naomi is still in love with nature and all animals, but especially Taran, her loyal Siberian Husky - you can see that within her photography hobby. "Adapting with love and curiosity" could very well be her motto.



Mary Berg photographs
R. calostrotum (May 2005 - Yunnan,
China)

Hillside of *calostrotum* on the Ziben Shan
(May 2005 - Yunnan, China)

by Garth Wedemire



Rhodo Leaves Curling in the Cold

By Diana Scott

This article originally appeared in the January 2010 issue of the Rhodoteller.

When the temperatures dip below freezing I watch with interest as the garden takes on the frosty hues of winter. The Rhodos in our garden sustained winter damage from time to time, but usually weathered the mild cold that we typically get here on the coast. Some winters, however, have had some pretty 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!

January Morn

Bare branches of each tree
on this chilly January morn
look so cold so forlorn.
Grey skies dip ever so low
left from yesterday's
dusting of snow.
Yet in the heart of each tree
waiting for each who wait
to see new life as warm sun
and breeze will blow,
like magic, unlocks spring
Sap to flow, buds, new leaves,
then blooms will grow.



By Nelda Hartmann



campylogynum var. charoepum (top), R. moupinense (above) by Garth Wedemire

Botanists use the term "**lepidote**" to describe rhododendrons with **scales** and refer to about one-half of well over a thousand species rhododendrons as "**lepidotes**" (plants with scales). Vireya rhododendrons and most small-leaved rhododendrons are lepidotes. The thirteen rhododendron photos supplied by Garth in this newsletter are all "**lepidote species**". The very tiny scales may appear on leaf undersides, stems, petioles and possibly parts of the flowers.



R. campylogynum

R. yunnanense



R. zoelleri (Vireya)

Photos by Garth Wedemire

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R. spinuliferum (top),

R. calostrotum ssp. *keleticum* by Garth Wedemire

