

THE RHODOTELLER



Hydrangea macrophylla 'Star Gazer'. Photo by Diana Scott

Theme: Fall Colours in our Members' Gardens (part 2)

Thank you to members who submitted photos taken during October 2022 in the Comox Valley.

Meetings & Events

Nov 2 Executive Meeting

Nov 8 General Meeting 7:30 pm at
Comox United Church [reminder to Sheela
Borman, Connie Prain, Lyn Sakiyama, Heike
Schnoor, Arnie Sollberger & Kathy Gordon
to bring goodies]

Dec 13 Christmas dinner/party



*R. 'Seashells'
one lonely fall bloom.
Photo by Kathy Haigh*

President's View

by Dave Godfrey

Well, here we are in the middle of the “.....ber” months, and the rains have finally returned. The much-needed moisture is good for the gardens and lawns, but the rain can be damaging to trees and plants if it comes too fast and with accompanying strong winds.

This issue and others relating to climate change were discussed by several speakers at the one-day “Fall into Gardening” conference in Qualicum Beach on October 23rd. It was great to have a large contingent of NIRS members (23) in attendance. Des Kennedy was definitely the highlight of the day with his humorous recital of life as a gardener. For those who weren't able to attend the conference, his musings on ["Weather or Not"](#) are now posted to the Nanaimo chapter's website with his gracious permission.

For our November 8th general meeting, David McIntosh from Ucluelet will be our guest speaker featuring his presentation on the history of Rhododendron Pioneer George Fraser and his legacy.

As with our own gardens, the Comox Valley Rhododendron Garden is going dormant for the season. On behalf of the club, I wish to thank Maureen Denny and her many helpers for maintaining this “Jewel of the Valley” throughout the past summer season.



'Burning Bush' (Euonymus alatus) behind R. 'Virginia Richards'. Photo by Dave Godfrey

As we approach the holiday season, it is time once again to think about helping others less fortunate. For the past several years Diane Van Oostdam has chaired our Christmas Hamper

Project and we thank her for doing this. Diane has indicated that she would like to hand over the project to another member and one of our newest members, Lyn Sakiyama, has shown some interest in becoming the new chairperson. If you would like to support our efforts this year, please consider bringing an item of non-perishable goods to our next meeting, or if you prefer, a cash donation. Also, as with your membership dues for 2023, you can also send an e-transfer to club treasurer Noni Godfrey at nonigod@shaw.ca. We thank you for your continued support!

In order to gain input from our members, we have developed and will be distributing a questionnaire (by email) and would like as many members as possible to respond. IT IS YOUR CLUB, and we'd love to hear your ideas as to how we might make it better for you! We will also have some printed copies of the survey available at our next meeting.

I'll close for now with the hope of seeing many of you on November 8th. Doors open at 7 PM and the presentation begins at 7:30 PM.

Take care and stay safe.



Fall Colour in Antje's garden. Photo by Antje Guertler

Member Profile: Gwen Wright

by Kathy Haigh

Gwen Wright is still happily living at “Haida Gold Gardens,” which she and Harry developed as a rhododendron display garden in the 1980s.

While Harry received many accolades for his rhodo propagation, gardening, and landscaping prior to his death in 2011, Gwen is the focus of this member profile. Although ever since they met in Cold Lake, AB in 1957, while both serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force, Gwen played an integral part in Harry’s horticultural work and hobbies.



Gwen attended business college after high school and her first 18 years in Vancouver, where she learned office procedures and short-hand, among other secretarial duties. She joined the Air Force in 1953, did basic training in St. Jean, PQ, took a course in Alymer, ON to become a clerk administrator, which was mostly a typing position. During her Air Force career, she worked in St. Margaret’s, NB radar base, Beaver Bank radar base (near Halifax, NS), Cold Lake, AB and Namao, AB (Edmonton). Gwen left her employment in 1958 when her service term ended.



Gwen and Harry were married in 1958 and promptly started their family from 1959 to 1965 when Gwen’s role became that of a mother. She related that “raising a family was my life,” and she put her best efforts into it. Over the years Gwen’s hobbies and interests included swimming (both in the ocean and pools), cross-country skiing, dancing, hiking, bowling, visiting Glacier View senior’s home, following the British Royal Family, and obviously... gardening.

Gwen and Harry moved to the Comox Valley in the early 1970s, first living at Tye Park in Comox, then on Nikoliason Road at the first house Harry built, which was the next street up from their permanent home on Chaster Road. Harry and Gwen developed the gardens at the Chaster Road property beginning in 1979 and called it “Haida Gold Gardens”; he built the shop in 1980 and completed the house in 1987,

which was the first house on the street. At that time Ryan Road and East 10th Street development did not exist, so their home was at the North end of Back Road. The Comox Valley was a much less populated place then, and Gwen has been witness to endless changes here.

They planted a cedar hedge on the perimeter of the property, which still nicely defines the 1.5-acre space filled with hundreds of rhodos and other statement trees and companion plantings. The pleasantly natural Glen Urquart Creek flows under the wooden bridge at the street entrance. Prior to the surrounding urban development, lots of wildlife found their way into and enjoyed eating the gardens, including deer, rabbits, quail and pheasants.

In 1984 NIRS was founded with Harry Wright as President and Gwen participated in various support duties.

When the CV Rhodo Garden was formed in 1997 (Harry established the main garden) Gwen worked with other members in hauling soils, mulch and planting. For several years Gwen was hostess to out-of-town guest speakers at the club meetings, bus tours from other Island rhodo clubs, and plant buyers. Several NIRS plant sales were held on their property and it was a popular spot for club garden tours - all of which involved Gwen's physical effort and commitment. Gwen received the ARS Bronze medal award in 1997 for her service. The Wrights were also instrumental in the formation of the CV Horticultural Society and its activities.

Gwen and Harry would travel to ARS conventions, and she has many happy memories of places including Australia, New Zealand, Seattle, Portland, and Hawaii. They also travelled far afield to see various rhodos and purchase cuttings for their plant sale business, which was also known as "Haida Gold Gardens."

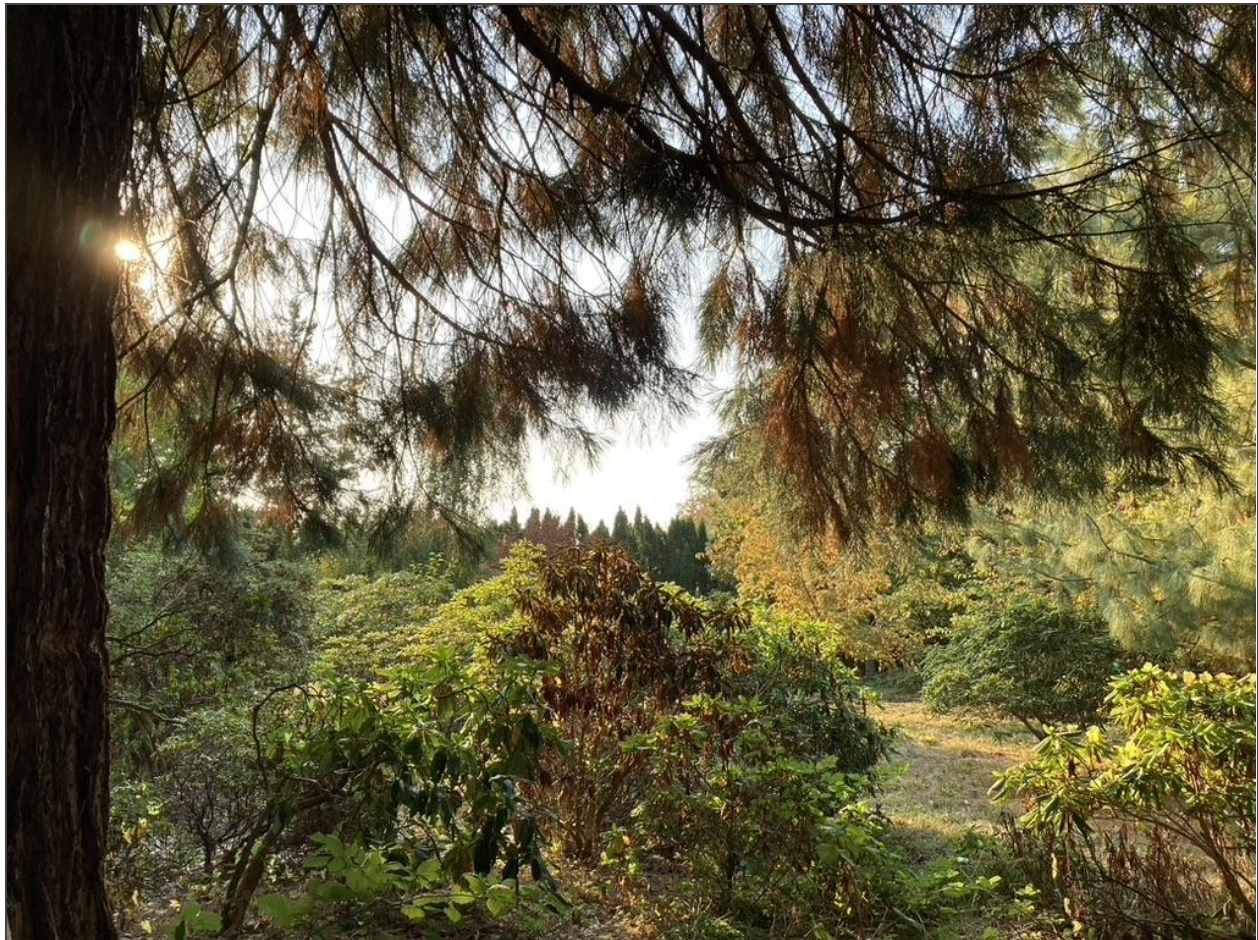
Some of Gwen's fondest memories of visitors at their property involved Christmas. The Wrights lit up their yard, displayed Christmas decorations and had music playing for visitors to enjoy. Cookies and hot apple cider were offered as well. This tradition began at their previous property on Nikoliason Road and was the genesis for the still popular "Candy Cane Lane" in the Farqueson Ave neighbourhood. The Wrights opened "Haida Gold Gardens" to the public for free, but took donations for the "Sonshine Lunch Club Soup Kitchen," raising over \$10,000 for the charitable organization during a ten-year span.



In 2017, Gwen was awarded an “Honorary Lifetime Membership” by NIRS. She is still happy to attend meetings and events when she is able to. She’s had meaningful long-term connections with club members since its inception especially including Judy Walker, Bernie and Gloria Guyader, Don and Dorothy Law to this day, and several others who are now deceased.



At 88 years of age, Gwen still lives for her family. She has 4 children, 5 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. Some of her kids assist with the garden periodically, and she enjoys having them gather for meals around the classic dining table. Being a dedicated fan of the British Royal Family, the current centrepiece on the table is a fine china statuette of Queen Elizabeth II. Time will tell if she remains a fan.



Ways and Means Nov. draw & door prizes by Aubrey Ferris



R. 'Elizabeth'

Low-growing, large red trumpet flowers.



Azalea 'Pleasant White'

White flower, openly funnel-shaped, 2½ "across. Bloom in midseason.

Grows 3 feet in 10 years and is hardy to -23° C



R. 'Hotei'

Yellow flower, blooms in midseason, leaves are narrowly elliptic up to 4 inches. Compact and tight growing. Avoid full sun.

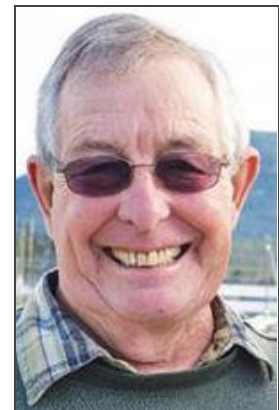
Grows 3 feet in 10 years. Cold hardy to -15° C.

November Program: The George Fraser Project

David McIntosh will be our guest speaker on Tuesday, November 8th.

David has been a long-time member of the ARS and NIRS even though he is seldom able to make the journey across island to attend our meetings. He and Wanda McAvoy, also a NIRS member, have been helping to maintain the many rhododendrons planted in various town parks and along the highway leading into the District of Ucluelet.

David is a retired schoolteacher and a member of Ucluelet's "George Fraser Project." On behalf of the Ucluelet and Area Historical Society, David recently narrated a program on George Fraser and has agreed to provide this information to our members.



The Greig Rhododendron Species Garden at Milner: Report Oct 26, 2022

by Jill Gould

This was the first in-person meeting in a couple of years due to pandemic restrictions. Members from Vancouver Island University and various Vancouver Island Rhododendron chapters were present. I remind you that the GRSG is unique to Canada. Yes, we are the only Rhodo Species Garden and it's just down the road!

Mention was made of the charitable status of the GRSG Endowment fund, and Giving Tuesday, which is the last Tuesday of November. Possibility that donations may be "matched". After the financial report and discussions on new, improved and more signage for the public, John Deniseger stated that there is room for more plants. Some have died. Though drainage on the site is generally good (being sandy) some beds need to be raised. Secondary pathways are necessary. Work Bees have been ongoing, the last one in September; mainly weeding. A small but enthusiastic group participated. No other work parties are planned for this year. In 2023, more mulch will be a priority.

Phase 2: From the existing Viewing Platform, a steep area sloping towards the beach needs to be professionally thinned, removing "weed" species such as holly, ivy, and laurel. Some maples, Grand Firs and Balsam Firs will also go. Large Douglas Firs will be retained. The whole project will cost approximately \$50,000 over several years, including site preparation, plant purchases, irrigation etc. [continued...]



Helianthus tuberosus (Jerusalem Artichoke) Photos by Garth Wedemire. *Colchicum* 'Waterlily'

John Deniseger has a plant “wish list” which has been perused and revised by several people. (List available from John.) Most of the plants will be large-leaved, including endangered species. Sources are mainly the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington, with the final selection depending on availability and the advice of Steve Hootman from the RSBG. Douglas Justice from the UBC Botanical Garden has offered cuttings and Glen Jamieson has about 300 cuttings already started.

Ron Sutton from Nanaimo Rhodo Society will be travelling to Washington sometime this fall and has offered to bring back up to 50 plants from the RSBG for GRSG. Storage will be in the newly-erected Shade House area, with plant pots mulched in for winter. We need plants as large as possible, but not in big pots. Provenance is of great importance.

The Shade House is not visible from the driveway, but better access is being planned. A metal hoop house 30 by 45 feet with a gravel floor is in place, covered with shade cloth, utilizing repurposed materials from other projects. Water and electrical have to be installed. Future plans are for propagation and storage areas. It all sounds very exciting!

The next meeting is scheduled for February 1, 2023. We hope for an Open House for ARS member clubs at the GRSG in early or mid-April.



Hamamelis x intermedia 'Jelena' and 'Diane' photo by Garth Wedemire

Revenue Table Year End

By Judy Walker

The November meeting is our last chance of the year to enjoy revenue table excitement, so please bring extra plants and garden-related items for the November table. Please include labels, as known and special plants are always popular. The items generously donated by the members provide 100% profit for the NIRS, which we use for our activities throughout the year.

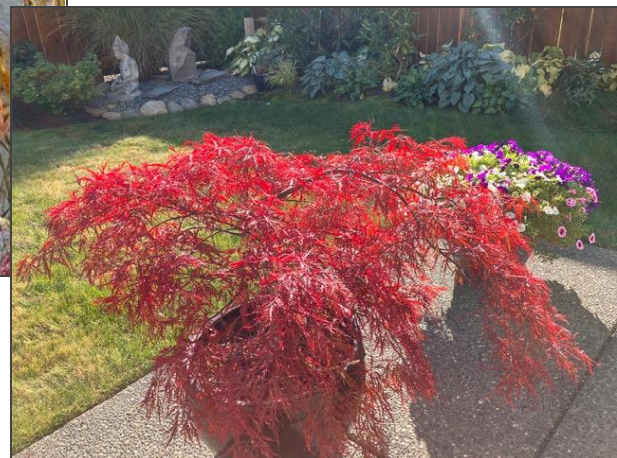
Just remember to pick up anything that doesn't sell as we can't store items until January! Thank you.



Acer aconitifolium photo by Diana Scott

Acer "Waterfall" photo by Lois Clyde

Acer "Red Dragon" photo by Bette Hopwood





Hydrangea quercifolia (Oak Leaf Hydrangea)

Disanthus cercidifolius

Top of Driveway

Photos by Garth Wedemire



The Banded Woolly Bear

by Jill Gould

No relation to the Frumious Bandersnatch! Children playing outdoors will be familiar with the Banded Woolly Bear caterpillar, the larva of the Isabella Tiger Moth (*Pyrrharctia isabella*). I have noticed a lot of them this year.

The caterpillar is easily identifiable: very fuzzy, black at the head and tail with a rusty-brown section in the middle. The width of the brown section varies among individuals. These caterpillars are often seen in late summer and early fall, trundling across lawns and driveways on a determined mission to find a wintering place. When picked up, they assume a defensive C-shape.



Woolly Bears are actually quite beneficial. Their diet consists of a variety of weeds, including dandelions, plantain, dock, goldenrod and grasses. Unlike tussock moths, which can devastate the foliage of trees, Woolly Bears rarely damage trees and crops.

Their fall migration is driven by their need to find winter shelter, usually under logs or stones. Surprisingly, they do not pupate in fall. They manufacture a cryogenic substance which enables them to remain dormant (literally freeze) until spring. As the weather warms, they become active, will feed for a short time and then pupate. The moth emerges a few days later. The Isabella moth, a handsome light orange-brown with a fuzzy head, is mainly nocturnal and often attracted to lights at night. The resting pose is described as “rooflike”.

The width of the brown band on the Woolly Bear caterpillar gives rise to speculation that the wider the band, the warmer the winter. A few small studies were conducted in the past but the results were inconclusive, though the width of the brown band may increase with the caterpillar’s age. Woolly Bear (or Woolly Worm) Festivals, notably in the eastern U.S., include such things as caterpillar races up a vertical string! No doubt great fun for the kids: Woolly Bears are easily identified, cute, harmless and easy to catch. Just remember to put them back near a log or stone so they can continue their “hibernation.”



Sunflowers photo by Bette Hopwood

Membership

by Dan Ryan

At our October meeting, 37 members and 1 guest were in attendance. We had 13 renewals, so there currently are 81 members including 6 Associate Members.

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). Once again we are offering the "Early Renewal Program." Register before November 30th, 2022 and you will be entered into a draw to win your membership fee.

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) or you can bring cash or a cheque to the November meeting.

Acer 'Autumn Moon'

*Photos by
Diana Scott*

Calluna 'Firefly' and peony



CVRG “The Rhodo Garden”

by Maureen Denny

Thanks to Aubrey, Jill, Antje and Dan who attended last month's work party. This small bunch of tough senior gardeners managed to spread 3 yds. of mulch! This left them with no time to do the usual clean-up tasks, and now with leaf fall happening a large turnout of volunteers at the next work party would be wonderful!

The next work party will be held (weather permitting) on Thursday, November 10 at 10 am. Coffee and goodies to follow the work. Please join us for this last work party of the year, we always have fun!



Crocus, Colchicum autumnale
photo by Sheila Borman

Hibiscus photo by Naomi Chester

Japanese Toad Lily, Tricyrtis hirta
photo by Jill Gould



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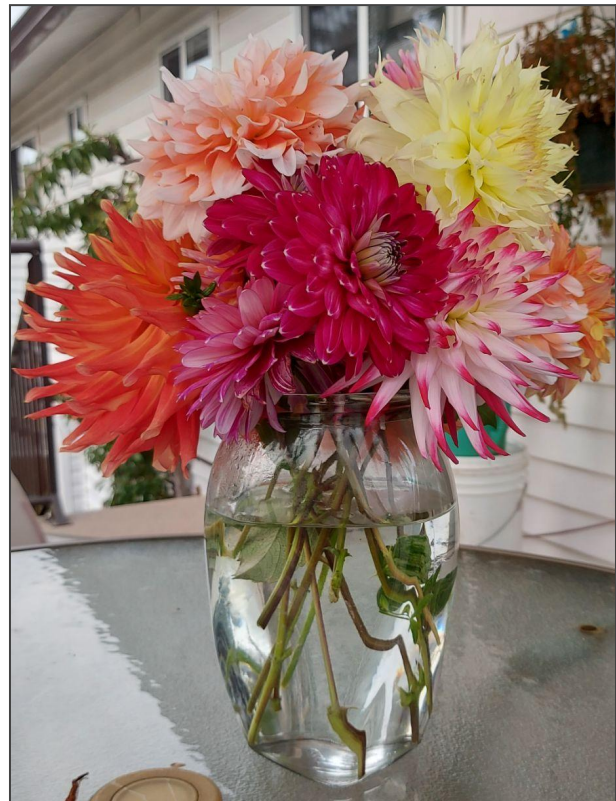
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Dahlias photos by Barb Barker

