

THE RHODOTELLER



R. quinquefolium (a broadleaf deciduous species azalea) photo by Helen Stefiuk

Meetings & Events

Nov 8 Executive Meeting

Nov 14 General Meeting @ 7:30 pm at Comox United Church (goodies reminder: Sheryl M, Patty M, Lyn S, Becci R, Antje G.)

Dec 12 Christmas Party (Doors open at 5:00 pm. More info at the Nov. meeting and in the Dec. newsletter.)

President's View

By Naomi Chester



“Autumn is a second spring, when every leaf is a flower.” Albert Camus

I hope that you are all enjoying the fall colours that are truly stunning this year. This mild, showery weather makes for an excellent time to plant your rhododendrons and there's still time to plant your bulbs. As the plants return to the ground, the leaves fall and we put our gardens to bed for the winter, some of us may feel relief (after the long period of heat) or have mixed feelings. Remembering that the magnificent blooms of our rhododendrons and winter/spring bulbs and plants are only a few short months away can give us something to look forward to.

Many of us were inspired by the “No Dig Gardening” presentation by Kerry Ann Griffiths at our October meeting. These quieter gardening months will provide time for planning any changes to our gardens to take advantage of that concept. The program in November with Harry Burton will also be of great value to those of us who want to learn more about apple/fruit trees which many of us grow in addition to our rhododendrons.

I'd like to thank all of you who have recently volunteered your time to help make fun events happen for our members and the public next Spring. If you'd like to get involved in the organisation/preparation of any of our events please contact me. All volunteers are welcome!

Thank you to all who came out to the Comox Valley Rhododendron Garden (CVRG) work parties this year. These have now ended and will recommence in March.

Lastly, please mark your calendars for our Christmas party on Tuesday, December 12th.

See you soon.



R. Kimono 'Maraschino' Azalea (top), Hamamelis 'Arnold's Promise' (bottom) photos by Naomi Chester.

Plant of the Month

by Ron Sutton

Rhododendron Loderi King George

This is a hybrid cross between two species, *R. fortunei* and *R. griffithianum*. There are a total of 34 Loderi hybrids, but King George is the most well-known. It grows into a tree-sized plant. It's rate of growth is relatively fast and will be 6 to 8 feet tall in 10 years. In early to mid-May on the island, it blooms with loose trusses of 5 to 6 white flowers with a touch of pink. They are 4+ inches each in width and are delightfully fragrant. It's hardy to -18°C and prefers part shade.

It's difficult to find because it's difficult to propagate. The photo is of my young plant in bloom on May 10. I acquired my 2 plants from Perennial Ridge Farm, however, they no longer propagate rhododendrons.



Comox Valley Rhodo Garden

by Maureen Denny

Thanks to everyone who attended our last Work Party of the year on October 12th at the CVRG. Eleven volunteers working hard made our clean-up time go quickly, more time to socialize afterwards with coffee and cake...Thanks to Antje for being our coffee barista and all who have supplied cakes and cookies for us.



A consultation was held with Tyler and Luke from Courtenay Parks to discuss tree pruning and thinning of branches to let more light into the Rhodos below. This work will be done sometime this winter. The NIRS sign which was repainted this summer will be taken down for the winter. A few areas on this sign need some cracks filled and being kept out of the winter weather will prolong the life of our sign.

Work parties will resume in March 2024. Here's hoping the Rhodos will have lots of buds and then blooms for next spring. That is something all of us Rhodo lovers can look forward to.

Rhodo waterer Patty Matthews holding her chosen rhododendron reward

Membership

by Dan Ryan

Forty members and 1 guest attended the October meeting and we received 9 renewals. We currently have 82 members, including 7 Associates.

It's time to renew! The dues for membership are: regular \$40.00, Associate \$10.00. Once again we are offering the "Early Renewal Program." Register before November 30th, and you will be entered into a draw to win your membership fee.

You may mail your cheque to the N.I.R.S. P.O. Box 3183 Courtenay B.C. V9N 5N4, or e-transfer \$40.00 to the club Treasurer, Noni Godfrey, (nonigod@shaw.ca), or bring cash or a cheque to the November meeting.



'King's Red Exbury' Azalea (top),

PJM 'Checkmate' (middle),

R pachysanthum (right)

Photos by Diana Scott

Revenue Table

by Maureen and Judy

Now that the cooler and wetter weather has arrived and our outdoor gardening tasks are winding down, this is the time of year to move on to indoor gardens, we are talking about houseplants! If any of you are dividing or propagating your indoor plants please consider donating some to our Revenue Table. We also will gladly accept lightly used garden accessories, tools, ceramic pots, or whatever else that is garden-related.

The Revenue table is a valuable source of income for our club, donations are really appreciated. Please take home any items that have not sold. Thanks!

Ways & Means Nov 14 Raffle Prizes

By Aubrey Ferris



R. wiltonii

Colour is white to pink, spotted and blotched crimson. Truss holds about 10 flowers. Blooms: Early Midseason. Cold Hardy to -23°C.

Leaves oblanceolate to broadly elliptic, upper surface with deeply impressed veins, lower surface with rust-red indumentum,

Plant Habit: Broadly upright shrub Height: 3 feet in 10 years.



R. vinerouge

Flowers openly funnel-shaped Colour is a deep red.

Truss is conical, with 20 flowers.

Plant upright, yet broad, branching moderately, 1.2 m. tall x 1 m. wide in 22 years.

Blooms in late May. Hardy to at least -9°C

Presenter on Nov. 14: Harry Burton

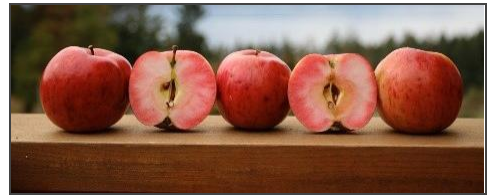
Organic Apple Growing



Harry Burton of Salt Spring Island will be the guest speaker for our November 14th meeting. Harry was born and raised in Cobalt, a small silver mining town in Northern Ontario. Upon graduation, he studied Chemical Engineering and received his degree in 1970. He then taught Lab Sciences at a Community College in North Bay, ON for 35 years.

In the summer of 1979, he holidayed on Salt Spring Island where he immediately knew he wanted to own a farm. So, the following year he bought a 5-acre parcel of land and, upon retirement in 1998, began his permanent orcharding. He always wanted to grow apples and Salt Spring was a natural fit.

Today, Harry grows over 200 varieties of the world's best tasting apples, including about 60 red flesh varieties. He will discuss some of these varieties and provide taste samples at our general meeting on Tuesday, November 14th.

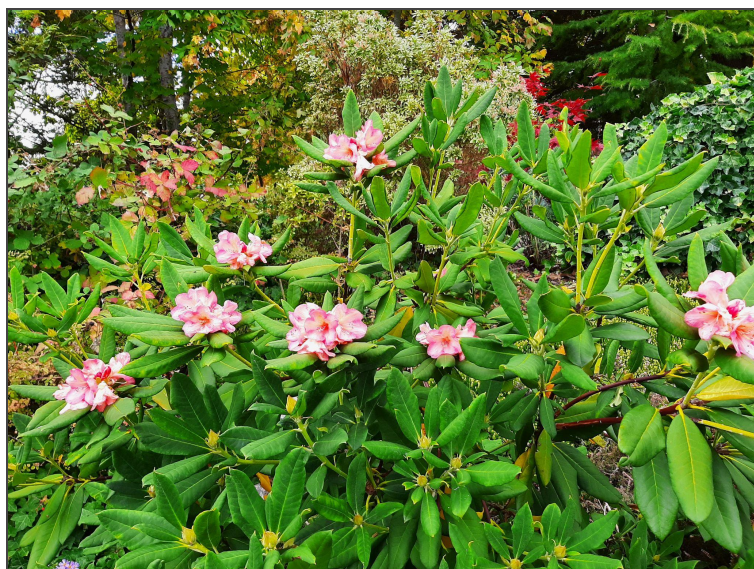


As always, doors open at 7 PM with the meeting and presentation beginning at 7:30 PM.



*Dahlia and Japanese Maples
Photos by Nadine Boudreau*

Confused Rhodos this Fall



R. 'Whitneys Orange'
photos by Sheila Borman



R. 'Whispering Rose'
photo by Kathy Haigh

R. 'Hill's Bright Red' photo by Diana Scott



Not Rhodos ... but fauna found in our gardens

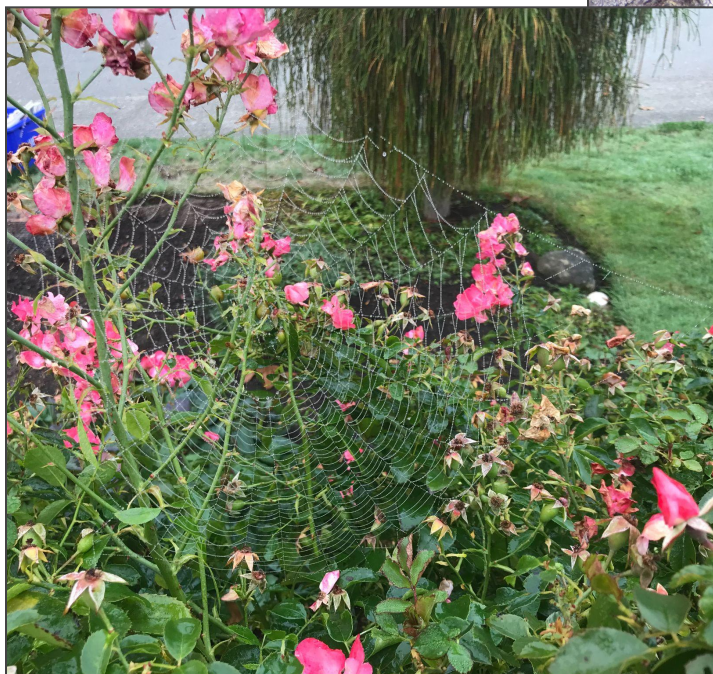


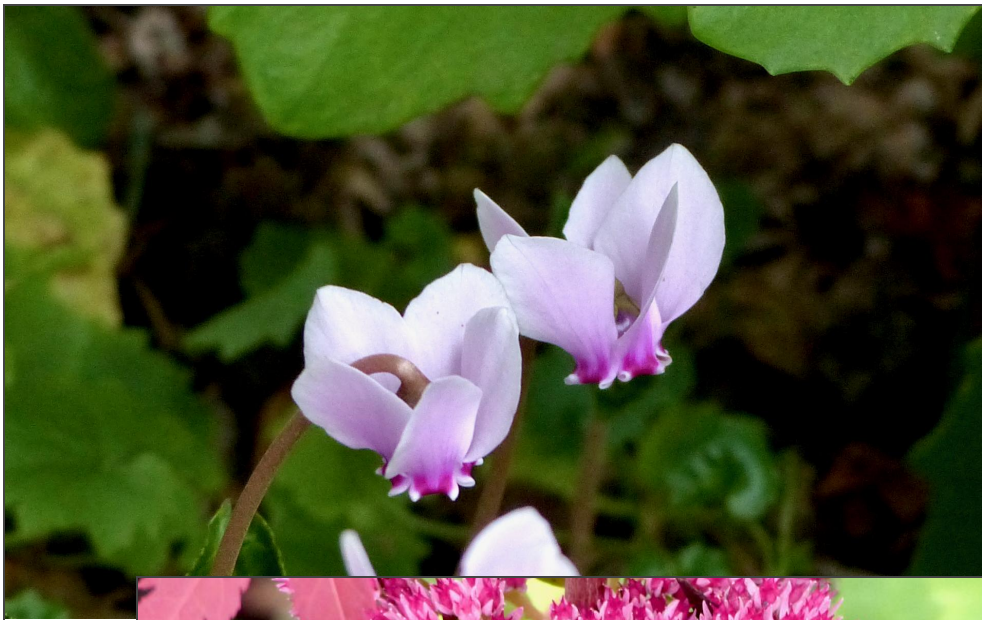
Pacific Tree Frog in Dahlia photo by Diana Scott

Great Horned Owl photo by Jill Gould

Spider web photo by Dan Ryan

Flicker, Magnolia 'Leonard Messel' seeds photo by Diana Scott





Cyclamen hederifolium
(left), *Sedum* and
maple (middle) and
Callicarpa (bottom)
photos by Diana Scott





The RSBG is updating its member benefits to bring you more value and exclusive garden privileges! These new and improved benefits will take effect January 1, 2024.

After listening to the needs of our members and garden visitors, we have updated our member benefits to bring you more value and new perks! We hope that you will take advantage of the new opportunities to enjoy the garden, connect with staff and continue to cultivate your home garden with plants and supplies from the RSBG.

The RSBG has not updated its pricing for over a decade and is restructuring its membership program to be more in line with other botanical garden loyalty programs – and to provide additional value to its members.

To make the transition as smooth as possible for current members, we are offering a free trial of upgraded benefits beginning Jan. 1 through the remainder of your first membership year. If you would like to retain your new perks once your membership expires, simply renew!

If you are currently a Supporting Member or above, many new updated benefits will become available to you beginning Jan. 1, at no additional charge. We are offering these benefits as a free trial through the first year of membership. If you choose to retain your new perks, simply renew when it's time to do so.

For those with an Individual Membership, the RSBG will honor the 10% discount on gift shop and onsite nursery purchases through the first year of membership. If you would like to keep this discount, we ask that you select the Dual Membership level when you renew.

[Click here for a detailed description of our new benefits and prices.](#)

The RSBG continues to thrive because of its dedicated members, and we thank you for your continued support!



Acers and hostas photo by Lois Clyde

“Rosalie’s Oak”

by Aubrey and Valerie Ferris

We received this small oak tree from Garth Wedemire a few months ago.

We finally got around to planting it from the pot into the ground. We tried to find out more information online about the “Rosalie’s Oak”, but the searches provided no knowledge of this tree.

Just recently we were talking to Garth and mentioned we could not find any info on the tree. He explained why.

Garth and Sue found this oak growing from an acorn in their backyard. They decided to pot it up on the same day their granddaughter was born...Rosalie.

We love its beautiful red colours and now hope the real Rosalie will someday come and see the oak tree named after her.



Cyclamen hederifolium photo by Sheila Borman



Acer shirasawanum 'Autumn Moon'
photo by Diana Scott

Special Report

by Lloyd Gilmore

Rhododendron Crosses from Planning to Flowering

I have had only one rhododendron seedling bloom in 30 months from seed in all my time hybridizing. The species *R. yeufengense* is a precocious pale pink flowering species with rounded leaves that has a low growth rate. One seedling out of five from the ARS seed exchange bloomed at 3.5 years after sowing; the rest bloomed this following Spring. It holds exciting possibilities for small different plants as a parent. Rhododendron Species take up to 20 years, most hybrids take 4 or five years to bloom. They bloom faster in pots than in the ground. The second-year flower is a better qualifier of its potential. Growth habit, leaf structure, cultural stresses, root strength, ease of propagation and size are also important traits. Also, we must remember that most gardeners are not connoisseurs so the plant must be a good doer; we do not want to turn off the average gardener.



'Sooke Clouds' x *neriflorum* 'Rosevallon'

The crosses are researched back three generations, looking for dominant traits. Seedlings may lean genetically more towards one parent than the other. Community pots may show seedlings with different growth rates, leaf structure and habit. "Unseen traits" are plant hardiness, fertilizer tolerance, sun and drought tolerance. I am indifferent to some plants dying. Survival of the fittest. Nature will weed out the unfit over the seasons.



Dwarf red various pollen

As hybridizer labeling is most important, this starts with recording the cross in a book and marking the cross somehow. I use flagging tape with the cross recorded twice using a wide sharpie then tied on the base of the truss. The truss only has one type of pollen covering all the truss's sticky stigmas. All petals and anthers on the truss are removed to reduce unwanted pollen transfer. Plants that are pollinated are given extra fertilizer and water during the summer. Seeds should swell through in summer and in the fall go from light green to yellow at this point and weekly checking should occur. When the truss seedhead turns medium brown, the seedhead plus flagging tape should be picked and stored in a paper bag or glass until the seed capsule starts to split. Gentle use of pliers and a small flour sifter helps separate seeds from the chaff. Store in an open tall glass to prevent mold with label included. Use an HB pencil. I write the cross top and bottom of the label in case the label breaks. Very special plants get an extra yellow label. I generally start sowing rhododendron seed about late December or early January.

You could also order from the ARS Seed Exchange starting in mid-January.



21-month-old various crosses

I use 3-inch pots or 6-inch azalea pots for germination depending on seed quantity and size. On the bottom I place maple leaves or a paper towel to prevent soil loss through the holes. Then comes a coarse mixture filling half the pot, then a finer (no perlite) mix to just about the inner rim. I then sterilize the mix with a very weak boiling mix of 20-20-20. A separate container of peat moss is also sterilized and a thin layer of about 3mm is placed on top and allowed to cool. Two labels are placed in each pot before the seed is sown and checked against the flagging tape. Excess seed is stored in the fridge in labelled pill vials with the cross and date.

Rhododendron seed is sown on top of the peat layer as it needs light to germinate as well as moisture and heat of about 23° C. provided by the fluorescents in my 8-foot by 12-foot insulated shed. Squares of Saran wrap cover the top of the pot held in place by large elastic bands bought at Staples. The Saran wrap is removed when the first true leaves are evident. Pots are placed in seedling trays with the soil surface about 8 inches below the 32 or 40-watt cool white fluorescents. They are on 14-16 hours per day controlled by a battery backed up

timer from Canadian tire. Be sure that the timer can control the inductive wattage of your fluorescents plugged into it. Watering if needed, should be done by putting water in the bottom of the seedling tray. Germination can start in about ten days with a majority germinating by 3 weeks; some stragglers take up to 3 months. Germination rates vary greatly with the cross and even vary if the same cross is made a few years later. It seems some parents must mature.

I know that my method seems complex. I grow a lot of seedlings, but if you can meet the light, temperature and moisture requirements you have a chance.

Alternately I could possibly supply established community pots with about 20-30 seedlings for club members to divide up and grow on. This would have a greater chance of success compared to somebody trying seedlings for the first time.

Your main threat to small seedlings is Fungus Gnats, I know from experience. Sticky Traps to spider webs to sundews are tried, and you thought damping off was an issue. Fungus Gnats are attracted to peat moss.

The plants are Dicots, and the first true leaves appear about three weeks after germination. At this point the plants have a fighting chance against fungus gnats. If germination is very good, I separate any seedlings with different radicle colours, and they are planted in a separate pot with the right label. Sometimes excess seedlings are thrown away as I have other crosses that I want to sow. I cannot grow everything. Sometimes good-looking seed does not germinate or germinates and then dies, everything to do with plant physiology and not culture.

All my seedlings are planted permanently outside after about 4 months after seeding. Seedlings are not shaded from the sun. I try to plant after the last frost and during a period of cloudy rainy

weather. All plants are in community pots using six-inch azalea pots. Potting mix should be relatively well drained. Courser mix occurs on the pot base, finer mix towards the top. The mix includes sand, perlite, organic matter, peat moss and a touch of dolomite. It is important that it drains well. Weak solutions of 20-20-20 and fish fertilizer are fed throughout the growing season ending in August on all pot sizes. On small seedlings use a wand to not disturb the surface soil mixture with 20-20-20 or a small can of weak fish fertilizer poured gently onto the soil surface. As the root systems are very small initially the soil surface must be kept constantly moist, as the plants get larger this can be relaxed.



I try to repot in early Spring before shoot growth starts. Generally, I have 2 or 3 pots with the same labels, and I repot seedlings according to size. All transplanted seedlings regardless of size must be heathy. My aim is to have leaves just touch each other after the coming summer growth to maximize winter photosynthesis and reduce weeds. My community pots have between 2 to 20 plants per pot dependent on the cross and age of the seedlings. After this they go into separate one-gallon pots. A few go into

21-mos community pots in front and 1 gallon of 33-mos 2 plants per pot using a fairly coarse mix. From seed germination to flowering will require about 4 or 5 Spring repottings. Seedlings languish if potted in too big a pot.

Culling occurs throughout the year: bad leaves, poor health, and me being underwhelmed by the plant makes it a good compost candidate. But sometimes you hit the jackpot and this wonderful plant drives you onward. Then there is also that plant that is OK in your eyes but somebody else really likes it, give it to them. If you get seedlings or seeds from me, it is more important to me that you try to grow them than never try. Even if you fail the first time. I usually have more seeds. Do you have a bucket list? Are you curious?

I started growing seedlings in kids' play pools a few years ago as it saves water. Even larger one gallon pots with about one inch of water seem to benefit during the summer heat. Later in the cooler fall the plants will be placed on the ground.

[Editor's Note: Lloyd Gilmore is the current President of the Victoria Rhododendron Society.]



Mainly 54-month-old firsts bloom seedlings with a few 66-month-old second bloom seedlings.

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Monkshood and Asters photos by Kathy Haigh

