

THE RHODOTELLER



R. 'PJM Northern Starburst' photo by Diana Scott

Meetings & Events

March 6 Executive Meeting

March 12 General Meeting: Keith Russell- Bonsai

April 28 Annual Rhododendron Sale and Show

May 12 NIRS Mother's Day Garden Tour

May 2-5 ARS Spring Convention, Bellingham, WA



Snowdrop (Galanthus nivalis) by Diana Scott

President's View

By Naomi Chester

After an unseasonably warm February we await what beauty March brings us. I must admit to feeling somewhat cautious as the temptation to get going in the garden is building. I've recently heard from some friends about how they've been "tidying up" the leaves as they couldn't wait any longer. I understand this urge all too well. Whenever it comes over me, I find that I have to pause, breathe and remind myself that I want to see lots of birds, butterflies and pollinators in the garden and that I just have a short while longer to be patient. When there are glorious blue skies and sunshine outside I find that I have to repeat this over and over to myself! We're not out of the woods for a cold snap just yet either so I'm choosing to focus on the abundance of spring bulbs that bring so much joy as the spring clean up will come soon enough.

After the mildness of this winter, combined with the moisture, it is possible that we'll see a rise in fungal diseases rather than winter damage this Spring. A common one to be on the lookout for is Grey Mould (*Botrytis cinerea*). This air borne fungus is present year round but is particularly common at this time of year in rhododendrons (shoot blight), peonies (*Botrytis paeoniae*), primulas, cyclamen, hellebores, soft fruits etc. We can help prevent this by improving ventilation and reducing humidity around susceptible plants now. Any dying leaves, buds or flowers should be promptly removed from these plants as practicing plant hygiene and maintaining healthy plants are the best ways to combat this fungus. Natural and chemical fungicides do exist; however, prevention is more effective than the cure in combating this particular fungus. Apparently, *Botrytis* spores are killed at the lethal heat dose of 46.3 Celsius for 2 minutes (J. Henderson Smith, *Annals of Applied Biology*, Feb 2008) which might explain why we haven't seen so much of it in recent summers!

At our February meeting we were delighted to celebrate the upcoming 90th birthday of one of our founding members, Gwen Wright. Gwen and her late husband, Harry, were two of a small group who created the North Island Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society back in 1984. Since then Gwen has been a founder of many gardens in the valley and beyond with her efforts being rewarded and appreciated. As a life long member, she is dear to all our hearts and we thank her and her family for joining us for birthday cake.



The feedback from Chris Southwick's presentation on "Rhododendrons recommended by NIRS members" was that it was so good everyone wants to do it again next year! The stunning photos and comments by members made for a fun and educational evening. I'm glad to have a copy of the list to act as a wish list now...if anybody would like a copy please let me know. Thank you so much again Chris!

continued...

A big thank you to Wolfgang Hoefgen for his Saturday morning workshop on propagating conifers. As always, we are enthusiastic to learn from Wolfgang's wealth of knowledge and expertise. Now to put what we learned into practice...



This month is an excellent time to divide/pot up any plant donations for the annual Rhododendron Sale and Show taking place on April 28th. All donations are appreciated for the companion plant table.

As the local nurseries are open again for the season I look forward to seeing you all out and about in between meetings!

Happy Spring!

Naomi

R. stenopetalum in greenhouse

Photo by Jean Looy



CVRG

By Maureen Denny

Time has flown by and spring is once again just around the corner, the most anticipated season of the year for all us gardeners! It is also time to announce our first work party of the season at the Comox Valley Rhododendron Garden (CVRG) on March 14 at 10 am, weather permitting.

Here are details in case you are new to our club: The gardens are located off of Cliffe Ave. just south of the 17th St. Bridge, beside Comox Valley Kayak & Canoe. Work parties happen the Thursday morning following our monthly General Meeting, from about 10 to 11 am, followed by donated goodies and coffee. Please bring your own tools, such as pruners, rake, lopper, trowel, and a bucket. There will be lots of cleanup to do after the winter.

These work parties are fun and a great way to get to know other club members. Looking forward to seeing and gardening with you!



Snowdrops photo by Beth Hopkins

March 12 Presentation: Bonsai

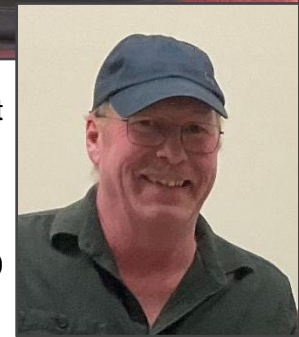
by Dave Godfrey

Keith Russell will be the guest speaker for our March 12th meeting on his favourite subject "Bonsai".

In 1986, Keith acquired his first Bonsai tree. He caught the bug and learned the art of Bonsai through trial and error. Back then there was no such thing as YouTube to help with demonstrations. Through gathering information from books, he began the process it takes to create beautiful Bonsai. The basics of developing and caring for these trees is an art which is easy to learn. Many Bonsai techniques are commonly used in everyday horticultural practices.

During the presentation, Keith will be sharing his knowledge as he demonstrates how to make a Bonsai along with a display of different varieties of finished Bonsai. Pictured here: Satsuki azalea. [Check out the matching raffle prize!]

As usual, the doors open at 7 PM with the presentation beginning at 7:30 PM - at which time the church hall doors must be locked.



Ways & Means March 12 Raffle Prizes

By Aubrey Ferris



R. 'Lee's Dark Purple'

Flower: broadly funnel-shaped, 2¾" across, deep purple with greenish brown to ochre marks within. Held in ball-shaped truss of about 16 flowers. Blooms in later midseason. Leaves: slight waviness, glossy, dark green. Upright growth up to 6 feet in 10 years. Hardy to – 26°C. Parentage: catawbiense x unknown. Page 154 in Greer. Reference: RHS 58



Satsuki White Azalea

Blooms beautifully contrast with the glossy green foliage, composed of slender, pointed leaves. This charming azalea grows into a low, dwarf mound reaching a height of approximately 18-24 inches and spreading out to about 3 feet. Its compact, mounding habit makes it an excellent choice as a specimen or border plant in smaller garden spaces. (Or maybe as a Bonsai!)

Plant of the Month

By Ron Sutton

Rhododendron huanum

This seldom-seen species rhododendron is found in southwest China in the following areas: Chongqing, Guizhou, Sichuan and Yunnan.

The spelling of this rhododendron's name is often seen with an "l" in the name, huianum, which is incorrect. According to Steve Hootman, huanum is the correct spelling. Regardless how the name is spelled, it's a beautiful plant.

Rhododendron huanum has olive green leaves and grows into a five foot shrub in ten years. The flowers are a stunning lavender colour and form loose trusses of 12-14 flowers. Equally attractive is the reddish purple contrasting star shaped calyx of each flower.

Blooming begins on Vancouver Island in late April to early May. This rhododendron prefers part shade and is listed hardy to -18°C. This is a photo (right) of our plant in bloom, taken May 3, 2023.

The RSBG occasionally sells this plant. Here is a RSBG link to a great photo and article about this plant. [New: R. huanum – Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden.](#)



*Cyclamen
photo by Jean Looy*

Open Garden Tour For Members

by Judy Walker

Come to view the lovely spring show of over 90 years of chionodoxa spreading in the original Gage orchard. Date to be announced when flowers are at their best, which hopefully will be a Sunday afternoon from 1-3pm. Stay tuned!



It was such a surprise to see Olive blooming away after another not-so-nice winter. Brian and Barb Staton used to bring in trusses of Olive every February- they have a large specimen. I spotted one at a propagation rhodo sale and had to have it!

R. 'Olive' photo by Nadine Boudreau

Snapweed – One Annoying Plant!

By Diana Scott

Cardamine hirsuta, also known as hairy bittercress, springcress, lambscress, popweed, shotweed, pepperweed, flickweed, snapweed and many other names that are best left unsaid, is one challenging weed. A member of the mustard family (Brassicaceae) it is considered a winter annual/biennial native to Eurasia and likely was brought to North America as an edible bitter herb. If you've seen one in your garden – you'll likely see a million!



Snapweed, as it is commonly called in BC, is typically a brilliant green but looks almost purple in some places in my yard – particularly in the gravel. Described as having a rosette of pinnately compound leaves, it sends up a stalk of tiny white flowers, then quickly goes to seed, often while producing more flowers. The seedheads are thin stalks which like many Brassica species, will burst explosively when touched, sending seeds flying far from the parent plant. Trust me – this is true.

Sadly for those of us in the Pacific Northwest, it is not only one of the earliest flowering weeds, it will produce several generations in a season. It is frost hardy, can survive winter, and will flower as temperatures rise in early spring. The seeds remain viable in the soil for a long time, and any disturbance will bring more to the surface to germinate. On the plus side, *Cardamine hirsute* has a short life cycle. That's it for the plus side unless you think the itty-bitty white flower is attractive. On the minus side, if you find one in your garden and don't remove it, you are in for a battle!

How did you get it? Hard to say – but many sites indicate that it is very common to find them on the surface of container plants in nurseries and garden centers and that it can be introduced unwittingly via container grown plants. It is so common here, however, that it will be rare for a garden NOT to have it.

So, how does one control it? As with all annual weeds it is critical to get rid of it before seed can be produced. Although typically larger, I have snapweed that flowers and goes to seed on plants smaller than a pencil eraser. I am open to any brilliant suggestions, but after trying all the typical methods, the only thing that I have found to be even marginally effective is to pull every one out when I see it. It is my priority in the early spring, and I have spent days on hands and knees with a garbage bag pulling the little guys out. I can't walk by one without thinking that if I don't pull it out now I will have hundreds more to deal with. Makes for a busy day in the garden...

Classic controls are hand weeding, mulching to prevent germination, torching, and applying weedkillers (gasp!). One site suggests applying a mulch of organic matter 15 cm deep to help suppress the weed by preventing germination. Works well, although snapweed seeds are quite happy to germinate in the mulch if seeds from a plant nearby 'pop', and the seeds are viable for many years and will sprout once the mulch is disturbed. I have also tried a propane weed torch on the gravel paths in my previous garden, however it was typically raining or quite wet when the first round of snapweed flowered and went to seed so it took a lot more propane than is sensible to use. This technique was not very effective for me. My main strategy is labor intensive - picking and bagging as many as I can before they've gone

to seed. In my experience, pulling and just leaving them on the soil results in wonky-looking but rerooted, flowering and seeding specimens. So - bag them.

Snapweed seems to love our climate. I have been trying to love it back, but to no avail. Once established, particularly in lawn areas, it is really difficult to eradicate. I believe that snapweed and I will continue to see a lot of each other. My advice: see it, pull it, bag it. Good luck!



Calluna vulgaris 'Firefly' photo by Diana Scott

R. 'Sanderling' budding out 2/22 photo by Valerie Ferris



Membership

by Dan Ryan

Thanks to Nadine Boudreau and Lois Clyde for filling in for us on the membership table while Margaret and I are basking in the sunshine 'down South'.

NIRS membership total to date for 2024 is 75, which includes 8 Associate members. (Associate members have a current membership in another chapter.)

This year a lot of our members have renewed through the treasurer via e-transfers. This is a most convenient way to get the payment to the club, however not so convenient for our members to get their membership card. Please ask at the membership table at the next meeting you attend to collect your membership card. If not already made out, we can have one ready for you before the meeting is over.

The annual members yearbook is now complete and will be issued at the next meeting. Notify us if you have any changes in your email address, phone number or mailing address so updates can be made to the club's data base.

Rhododendron Sale and Show

by Nadine Boudreau

Our annual Rhododendron Sale and Show will be held Sunday April 28th at the K'ómoks Hall. The sale runs from 10am until 1pm. We will have our propagation rhododendrons for sale, and we are happy to announce that Wolfgang will have a table selling plants. We will also have our NIRS companion plant table. It would be much appreciated if you have some plants you could divide and pot up for the sale.

We are looking for a volunteer to help organize the transportation of the Rhodos from the Smith property to the hall. It would involve a few phone calls to the volunteers with the time to load and volunteers with trailers/truck, and be at the Smith property to help with the loading. This would help Antje, our Propagation Rhodo lead.

There will be sign up sheets at the next meeting for volunteers at the sale, if you are unable to attend the meeting and would like to volunteer, please email me, Nadine at ger.nadboud@shaw.ca. Thank you to those who have already signed up.



COMOX VALLEY NATURE

TREES OF THE YEAR

Photo by Jim Whyte

COMOX VALLEY CYCLING COALITION

CVNS

NOMINATE
Your CVN Tree of the Year
2024

Do you know of a tree that deserves special recognition?

All Comox Valley residents are invited to nominate a tree in our area until March 31, 2024

See our website www.cvnature.ca/treeoftheyear for more information and a nomination form.
Questions? Contact toty@cvnature.ca

Species vs. Hybrids

By Bruce Palmer

[Adapted from original "**WORD OF THE MONTH: HYBRID**" By Bruce Palmer, reprinted from January 2015 Eureka Chapter Newsletter]

A member suggested the word HYBRID (Latin hybrida, offspring of mixed parentage) for this month's newsletter because he heard recently that there are about 20,000 rhodie hybrids, far more than the previous estimate of 12,000*. That's probably accurate, given that rhododendrons seem to cross with each other more readily than most other plants. If you are not experienced with rhodies or plant names here a few clues as to how to tell whether you have a species or a hybrid.

WHAT IS A SPECIES?

Species [Latin, species, a shape, kind or quality] is used to describe organisms and is both singular and plural. Plants are placed in the same species if they are similar, interbreed freely in nature and usually do not interbreed in the wild with other similar groups. It's a pretty loose definition and leads to confusion and arguments among biologists but tends to work for identification purposes.

WHAT IS A HYBRID?

Hybrids are plants that have been interbred (usually artificially) from parents of two different species or hybrids. Hybrids are found in nature but are uncommon. Many of us have read or seen demonstrated how to create hybrid rhododendrons.

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF A PLANT IS A SPECIES OR A HYBRID?

1. If you know its name:

It's a **species** if:

The single (species) name after Rhododendron is lower case and italicized, as in Rhododendron *augustinii*.

The name is Latinized, ending in -ii, -anum, -ense, etc.

Somebody who should know told you.

It's a **hybrid** if:

The name(s) (one to three names) after the word Rhododendron are not italicized and are capitalized and in single quotes as in Rhododendron 'Nancy Evans'.

The names after Rhododendron are not Latinized, except for very old hybrids such as Rhododendron McNabii, Rhododendron Fragrantissimum and Rhododendron Forsterianum. Somebody who should know tells you.

2. If you don't know its name:

Experience.

Instinct.

Wait until it blooms and identify it or ask someone who might be able to do so for you.

* According to Rhodyman.net there are 1,200+ rhododendron species, 14,298 rhododendron hybrids, 12,989 Azalea hybrids and 680 vireya rhododendron hybrids

10AM-3PM • ADMISSION \$5 • CHILDREN FREE • FREE TO ALL AFTER 2PM

SEEDY SATURDAY

SEED EXCHANGE AND GARDENING TRADE SHOW

FLORENCE FILBERG CENTRE
411 ANDERTON AVENUE
COURTENAY, BC



2024

MARCH 2ND
SATURDAY

speaking at 11am: Chanchal Cabrera
The Medicine of Seeds



VENDORS

AMANDA KEY DESIGN • AMARA FARM
BACKYARD BOTANICALS / SURPRISE NURSERY • THE BLUEBERRY GUYS • CIRCULAR HARVEST • COMOX VALLEY BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION • COMOX VALLEY COMMUNITY SEED BANK • COMOX VALLEY GROWERS AND SEED SAVERS • COMOX VALLEY HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY • COMOX VALLEY UKRAINIAN CULTURAL SOCIETY • DENMAN ISLAND HERITAGE APPLE • DON'S FUNCTIONAL GARDEN ART • FLEURISH BOTANICAL • FRESH EARTH PRODUCTS • FULL CIRCLE SEEDS • GATHER GARDENERS • GARDEN LORE • GOOD EARTH FARMS • GREEN MOUNTAIN BEES • GOOD SEED TEAM • HOME GROWN BEE • INNISFREE FARM BIOPHILIA CENTRE AND BOTANIC GARDEN • LARRY CHURCH BEES • LAKE TRAIL EDUCATION SOCIETY • LLYR'S BEES • MASTER GARDENERS • METCHOSIN FARMS • MICHALINA'S SEEDS • OLD BIRD FARMSTAND • OMEGA BLUE • RAVENSONG SEEDS & HERBALS • SWEET ROCK FARM • TWINNING VINE GARDEN • VANCOUVER ISLAND WOOL PELLETS • Y GRIP GARDEN TOOL LTD • ZAMBONIES FLAMBONIES

poster design: Victor Lai, bigcedar.agency / illustration: Jaz King



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Helleborus 'Pippa's Purple' photo by Kathy Haigh



*R. dauricum (tall dark pink) with R. praeavernum was
Helen Stefiuk's "show & tell" at Feb. meeting.*