

the Rhodoteller

North Island Rhododendron Society

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You know spring is near when ...



Photo by Maureen Denny

Right now winter aconite are carpeting the lawn in the Filberg Park beside the grape arbour and blooming in the flower beds as well. The Filberg gardener said they would weaken perennials in the flower beds if not kept under control. *Eranthis hyemalis*, or winter aconite is a member of the Buttercup family, native to calcareous woodlands in France, Italy and the Balkans.

Meetings and Events

- Mar 5 Executive Meeting @ Comox United Church 10 am
- Mar 8 Seedy Saturday Filberg Centre, Courtenay 10 am - 3 pm
- Mar 11 General NIRS Meeting @ Comox United Church 7:30 pm (doors open at 7 pm)
Goodies reminder: Connie Prain, Heike Schnoor, Judy Chrysler, Monica Dahl & Judi Murakami

June 5-8 ARS Convention in Nova Scotia. [ARS2025.org](https://www.ars2025.org)

As I write this the sun is shining on the melting snow-covered garden and the birds are incredibly lively, it's almost like they're announcing that Spring is near. We've had a very mild winter thus far and plenty of moisture giving our plants a great opportunity to grow strong, healthy, deep roots ready to put on lots of above-ground growth come Spring. We're into the last few weeks of winter before the Spring Equinox begins on March 20th so we're nearly there!

March beckons us to start putting our garden plans into action whether that's starting seeds, planting trees/shrubs, pruning out dead wood etc. though still taking care not to clean up too much and let our pollinators/beneficial insects develop for a while longer. March asks us to be patient and not do too much too soon as most of us know what it's like to get caught out by unexpected frosts between now and May. Been there, done that!

March 8th sees the debut of the NIRS table at the Seedy Saturday event at the Filberg Centre, Courtenay. Do come and say hello and bring your friends with you. We'll be accepting new member applications with a free prize draw for those who sign up at the event as well as other bonuses.

Towards the end of March, when the weather is hopefully warmer, our Propagation group will be repotting the first of our rhodo "babies". We'll be taking the rooted cuttings out of their current 2" pots and transferring them into 4" pots. We need approximately 300 4" pots to complete this first session so please consider donating any pots that you have spare to the Propagation group. Pots can be brought to the March meeting, dropped off on the Chester's driveway (address in your Yearbook) or arrangements can be made for pick up by emailing me at naomichester@yahoo.com

I look forward to seeing you at the March meeting when we'll be joined by the director of our ARS District (District 1), Glen Jamieson, for his presentation on "My recommended PNW tree and shrub species.". More details on this are in the Program Section.

Happy gardening!

Naomi

Volunteer Opportunities NIRS 2025-26

2025 brings lots of opportunities to get involved in the running of our club and it's never too early to start thinking about how you might like to volunteer!

- Nominations & Elections Committee (needed **March - May** AGM)
- In the Spring we need a small committee to plan & coordinate the 2025 Mother's Day Garden Tour, and in May garden gate sitters will be needed.
- In April we'll need plant sale volunteers.
- Our AGM is in May, and we need a member to offer to host it.
- A host is also requested for the June club picnic.

Several positions are becoming available on the Executive Committee. If you would like to support the club please consider putting your name forward for any of the following positions. This situation provides the opportunity for other members to drive the future of NIRS. For more information about any of the positions please contact Naomi Chester.

- President
- Vice-President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Director
- Web Master (to start **April**)



by **Dave Godfrey**

Our North Island chapter's website has been in existence since 2006, almost 20 years! Garth Wedemire was instrumental in designing the website and tutored me over those many years on how to make changes and updates.

There are many photograph albums, new and historical newsletters as well as current club information, stored on the website for the interest of all of our members. I hope that many of you have had the opportunity to enjoy this content.

Unfortunately, both Garth and I are aging out and no longer wish to continue maintaining the site. Therefore, I have given notice to the executive board that I will be resigning from the position effective July 1st, 2025.

If any other member of the club wishes to take over as webmaster, please advise me or our President as soon as possible; otherwise, the website will become dormant. The executive will also have the option to contract an outside company for changes and maintenance. Of course, this will likely come at great expense to the budget, but it is an option.

Thank you for your continued support and compliments on the website over the past 20 years. My special 'thank you' goes to Garth for his understanding, patience and support. I look forward to enjoying what comes next.

Photos by Valerie Ferris



R. macabeanum



R. praevernum

Rhododendrons grown for foliage
R. 'Golfer' in foreground
R. 'Makinoi' behind that



R. ponticum

The Beauty of Foliage

by Harry Wright (2010)

Most of my days start with 10 trips around our property, and 45 minutes later I am ready for a few hours work in the garden. During my walks I have time to enjoy the plants that call our garden their home. The reason these plants catch my attention is because of the way they are dressed, in foliage. Of the foliage they wear, many are similar and many more are so very different.

Visitors to the garden, most during April and May, are only interested in the flowers and seem to miss the real beauty in the plant. Some of the Rhodos have really attractive foliage all summer long. *R. campanulatum* var *aeruginosum* has great indumentum on the underside of the leaf, and the top side is a striking soft blue all summer. *R. tsariense* has beautiful indumentum on the new leaves.

Indumentum is a growth of fine soft hairs which appear like cobwebs or as firm as felt, in shades of light or dark brown or grey, white or yellow in colour. Leaves can also have scales, that are very tiny openings which, like indumentum, help to control the loss of moisture during hot weather. Scales and indumentum are usually on the underside of the leaves, but can be on either side.

As plants with indumentum get larger and closer to the eye, they become more attractive. I have a 10 ft, 'Sir Charles Lemon' that is difficult to walk past when the rising or setting sun passes.

From a distance, it can be the shape of the leaves that catches the eye. *R. 'Olympic Lady'* and 'Temple Belle' are two plants that have rounded leaves. *R. obiculare* is a species with rounded leaves, as does *R. williamsianum*. These two rhodos are the parents of *R. 'Temple Belle'*. *R. williamsianum* is also one of the parents of *R. 'Olympic Lady'*. As the story goes, good parents make a difference.

Another attractive leaf shape is displayed by *R. roxieanum* var *oreonastes*, oblong to lanceolate which means long and narrow. *R. yakushmanum* and its hybrids are extremely attractive with light coloured new foliage that always reminds me of small rabbit ears.

Size can make a difference. The little species *R. radicans* has leaves 1/2" long, while *R. sinogrande* leaves can grow to 30" in length. As for colour, the rhodo that tops the list during the winter months is *R. 'P J M'*. In the fall the small rounded leaves turn to a beautiful mahogany colour which last until after blooming.

So many people when buying Rhododendrons are only concerned with the colour of the flower that really only lasts 2 to 3 weeks. In my mind, it makes more sense to get a plant that has attractive foliage, since that is what you are going to be looking at for the rest of the year. If you have a good looking plant and not impressed with the flowers, pick the buds off, buy balloons of your choice, and hang them for two weeks. Then enjoy your plant for the rest of the year.

I have been working with Rhododendrons for over 40 years and now appreciate the plants more each year because of the varied selection of foliage; its texture, colour, and shape.

Items of Interest

The AGCVI presents DR. RICHARD HEBDA

Winter Jewels: Snowdrops & Crocuses

Date: Monday, March 31st, 2025

Place: Qualicum Beach Civic Centre, 747 Jones Street, QB

Time: Meeting starts at 1 pm Doors open at 12:30 pm

\$3 entry fee includes plant draw, coffee/tea and goodies.

seasonal article of interest, previously featured here and still relevant:

Rhodo Leaves Curling in the Cold

by Diana Scott

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 sustain winter damage from time to time, but usually weather 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, shrivelled-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?” 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 shrivelled may 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!

Propagation Update

by Sheryl Murakami

All the Rhodo cuttings look very healthy and when it warms up will be ready to be moved to larger pots.

Thanks to all the volunteers who have been coming to check on the Rhodo cuttings on a daily basis.



R. 'Hardijzer's Beauty'

Dr. Glen Jamieson

My Recommended Pacific Northwest Garden Tree and Shrub Species, other than Rhododendrons, Conifers and Most Native Plants.

Dr. Glen Jamieson has a B.Sc in Agriculture from McGill University and a M.Sc. and Ph.D. in Zoology from UBC. He worked for Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) as a research scientist for 31 years, both in the Maritimes (5 yr) and at the Pacific Biological Station in Nanaimo, BC (26 yr). He retired from DFO in 2008 and became editor of the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society in 2009. He joined the ARS in 1995, and has explored for plants in Yunnan, China (2005); Borneo (2008); Ecuador and Peru (seven trips between 1998-2014) and in Sikkim, India (2015). He has travelled to over 80 countries and with his wife Dorothy, lives and maintains a garden in Parksville that is periodically on his local chapter's (MARS) garden tour, where he also has an extensive vireya collection, possibly the largest in Canada. He is the editor of the Journal American Rhododendron Society, created the online journal Rhododendrons International, and is the ARS District 1 Director.



Although there are about 200+ planted rhododendrons in their half-hectare garden, Dr. Glen Jamieson's ongoing interest in the smaller and more unusual species of shrubs (48) and trees (33) that can be grown in southwestern British Columbia. Plant criteria for the plant selection are largely those with significant flowers, unusual seedpods, bark, or leaves, and edible fruit.

The regular membership stands at 67 and 6 Associates.

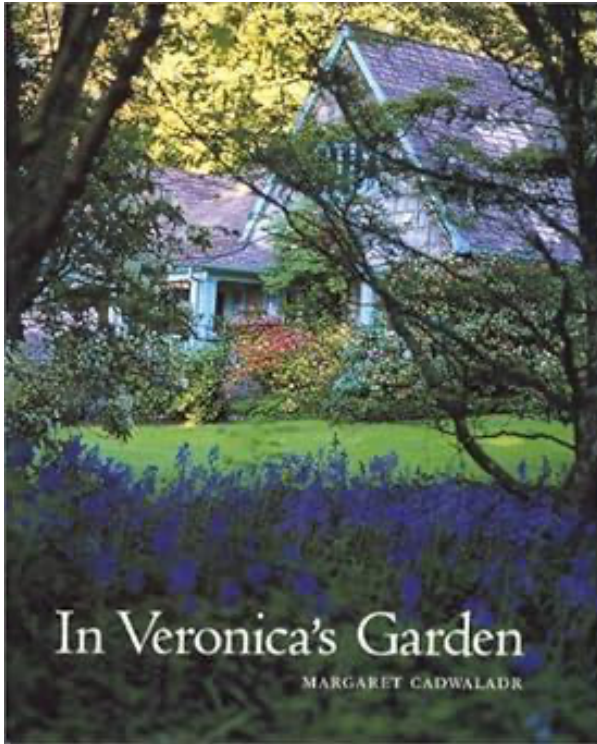
We would like to welcome new members Ken & Jenny Jordan, from New Zealand, to the NIRS.

R. 'Polarnacht' (Hachmann) is a beautiful hybrid rhododendron. This evergreen shrub is known for its stunning deep purple blooms, each accented with spotted red throats, and glossy green leaves. It typically grows to about 3 feet tall and spreads twice as wide (page 180 in your "Greer" book).

Photo: Steve Henning



"In Veronica's Garden" by Margaret Cadwaladr is a book that tells the true story of the Milner Garden in Qualicum Beach, British Columbia. It's



a social history of the garden and its creator, Veronica Milner, who was born into the Edwardian British aristocracy and was related to Winston Churchill and Diana, Princess of Wales. The book traces Veronica's life, her move to Canada, and the creation of her stunning garden. As a young bride, she moved to an Irish castle. When widowed after an unhappy marriage, she remarried and moved to Canada where she built a garden in the style of Victorian garden writer William Robinson. Visitors to the garden included royalty. Malaspina University-College (now VIU) was gifted the garden in 1996.

Note: This beautiful new book was donated by Kathy Haigh for our raffle. Be sure to check the raffle table for a preview. Thank you Kathy.

Plant Sale & Show April 27 by Nadine Boudreau

Our annual Plant Sale and Truss show will be held Sunday, April 27th at the K'ómoks First Nations Hall, 3310 Comox Ave, Comox.

This sale and show is a great time to work and meet with other members. There are lots of areas to help: NIRS companion table, Propagation Rhodo area, payment area, greeters, truss display, kitchen, general set up, loaders, and delivery of Propagation Rhodos from the Smiths to the hall. We will have volunteer signup sheets at the next meeting; if you are unable to attend the March meeting but would like to volunteer, please email Nadine @ ger.nadboud@shaw.ca.

The companion plant table relies on plant donations from the club members. Please start looking around your garden for plants you could divide and pot up. Please keep in mind that a nice healthy plant with a label sells. Remember to refrain from potting up plants that can become invasive. Judy will provide a list of 'no thank-you' plants.



Rhododendron hunnewellianum ssp. hunnewellianum

There are so many wonderful species of Rhododendrons to write about, and for this post I have chosen Rhododendron hunnewellianum.

This plant belongs to section Ponticum, subsection Argyrophylla, and is native to Sichuan and southern Gansu China. It was discovered by E.H. Wilson in 1908. It was named after the Hunnewell family of Massachusetts, who were prominent American horticulturists in the 19th century.

It has narrow half-inch wide by three to four-inch-long leaves that tend to hang somewhat vertically. The underside has pale grey to white indumentum.

The one-and-a-half to two-inch wide flowers, which appear in late March, are mostly white with a pale pink blush at the petal tips and have red speckles. They are displayed in open lax trusses of four to eight flowers. It is reported to be hardy to at least -18°C.

It's not a fast grower, only reaching five feet after 10 years, with an ultimate height being approximately fifteen feet. My plant, seen in the photo, has only seen part sun, but it can also handle full sun. The RSBG sometimes offers this plant for sale, but otherwise, very few sources exist.

Photo taken March 20, 2024



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Newsletter Editor

Sheryl Murakami 404-703-6254

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PO Box 3183, Courtenay BC V9N 5N4

<http://www.nirsrhodos.ca>