

the Rhodoteller

North Island Rhododendron Society

Vol. 40 Number 3 Nov 2025



Meetings and Events

Nov 5 Executive Meeting @ Carolyn Chester 2636 Parker Road, 10:00 am

Nov 11 General Meeting @ Comox United Church 7:00 pm (doors open 6:30 pm)

Goodies reminder: Ruth Fowler, Heike Schnoor, Janet Campbell, Henri Beaudoin, Antje Guertler



Oriental Poppies by J. Looy



Papaver cambricum by J. Looy

The regular November general meeting falls on Remembrance Day. We are dedicating our November newsletter to honor those for their service and sacrifices.

CWGC - The Memorials at Vimy and Horticulture

Nine years after I attended the memorial 100th year anniversary celebrations in Vimy Ridge, the tranquility of the cemeteries and the continuing work done by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to honour the dead lasts deeply in my mind.

The cemeteries are caringly designed with large graceful elms and oaks, perennial garden borders, and unbelievably large rows upon rows of gravestones. For me as a visiting Canadian the stone carved images of poppies and maple leaves brought a feeling of home to these far away sites.

Margaret at Great Uncle's grave

Unlike the war graves of centuries before that were spontaneously created where the men died, often less than 100 miles from Britain, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) was created. They emerged to care for the dead and create permanent memorials for the fallen from the Great War.

Gertrude Jekyll, a renowned British garden designer was consulted by the men of the CWGC and is credited with the design of the cemeteries and memorials. She apparently suggested the use of perennial borders, and created the British solid practical designs – so families and grieving friends could visit the graves. She incorporated colour in plantings and used trees for solid continuing beauty during the changing of the



seasons. Interestingly for the maintenance of the cemeteries, women were not allowed to be employed by the CWGC until more recent years.



Papaver somniferum by M. Denny

Within the carefully manicured lawns and rows of gravestones one can find many floral symbols - the red poppy which emerged from the mud after the horrifying destruction of battle - our symbol of remembrance for all who die in conflict. For France - the blue cornflower, *Bluet de France*, is their symbol of remembrance. Flowers speak their own language, and in the gardens bordering the graves are red roses representing love, bleeding hearts for heartache, white lilies for purity and virtue, and daffodil for remembrance.

Sir Rudyard Kipling became the literary advisor, and created the epitaphs for the gravestones such as “Known unto God”, “Their name liveth forever more” and “A soldier of the great war”.

By 1918, 587,000 graves were documented by the Red Cross in the Western Front area of north western France/Belgium. As well, within the forests and farmer's fields were unnamed casualties and mass grave sites - 559, 000 unknown persons to be accounted for and then reburied. The task of finding the fallen, relocating, identifying and then building the cemeteries must have been daunting. Immediately after the war the farmers and towns people were returning to claim their homes and fields which had been destroyed by 5 years of war. The work had to be done quickly, and gravesites which would last in perpetuity needed to be acquired. An enduring principal for the CWGC is the fallen must all be equally honoured: recognizing “no difference for the dead in rank or creed or race”. This is seen in the gravestones.

The CWGC became one of the largest horticultural organizations in the world, and by preserving the memory of the fallen, encourages us to remember their sacrifice. Currently, beyond the battlefields of WW1 and WW2, there are 23,000 sites in 153 countries around the world: from Gaza to Singapore, to India and South Africa.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0l10fJzy8mQ&t=52s>

The history of the commonwealth War Graves commission, Julie Summers.

<https://lucybetterridgedyson.com/2019/05/01/the-flower-power-of-the-cwgc/>

The Flower Power of the CWGC, Lucy Betteridge-Dyson

<https://thehistorypress.co.uk/article/the-commonwealth-war-graves-commission-a-centenary-of-commemoration/>

The CWGC: A Centenary of Commemoration



Bény-Sur-Mer Canadian War Cemetery by D. Scott

Items of Interest

Pink Mountain Diversity Research <https://www.agc-bc.ca/pink-mountain>



The AGCVI* presents

Ron Long

Pink Mountain

When Ron Long first visited Pink Mountain some 30 or so years ago, he quickly discovered what a unique ecosystem existed there.

His background as SFU scientific photographer allowed him to recognize that many of the plant and animal species were extremely rare. At the same time, he was alarmed that the entire mountaintop was easily accessible by road, making it vulnerable to damage by off-road vehicles and industry.

Eventually, Ron spearheaded **The Pink Mountain Biodiversity Initiative**; a privately funded study developed in conjunction with the UBC Botanical Garden and intended as a broad survey of the biodiversity of Pink Mountain. (pinkmountain.ca)

Ron will introduce us to many of the treasures found on Pink Mountain (including some found *only* there) and will tell how efforts to protect it are making a difference.



Ron Long

Date: Monday, October 27th, 2025

Place: St. Mark's Anglican Church
138 Hoylake Road West, QB

Time: Meeting starts at 1pm

Doors open at 12:30pm

--- \$3 entry fee includes ---

plant draw, coffee/tea & goodies

*Alpine Gardeners of Central Vancouver Island

Rhododendron Watering Woes

by Jill Gould

Rhododendrons, as we know, don't like to be dry. In their Asian habitat, they have a dry winter and a wet summer. Here on the west coast of North America we have the opposite. What do you do when you are in a drought (like this summer) with no city water, no irrigation, no well water and the hoses don't reach far enough? We have a cistern, which is filled by rain water gathered from the house and garage roof. The capacity is 5,000 gallons, which works for a domestic water supply. No problem in winter, but in summer we may have to have water trucked in.

There are about 17 Rhodos scattered around the property, competing with other shrubs, fruit trees and mature spruce trees. Hand-watering is our only option. Each watering can is 3 gallons and is pretty heavy. The Boss gets the job. By summer's end it becomes a dreaded chore. Each rhododendron gets the bare minimum, enough for survival, (I have to say R. Percy Wiseman was looking very stressed and needed emergency care).

On September 26, it rained. Thank goodness!



R. 'Jean Marie de Montague' and friends

Greig Rhododendron Species Garden Update

by Jill Gould

The fall meeting of the Advisory Group was held October 7 at Milner Gardens. The plants being held in the “Long Meadows” greenhouse (about 75) have done well, with very few losses. Not much progress has been made on development of Phase Two (going down the bank towards the water) for two reasons: a shortage of Archaeologists means no digging permits have been issued, and there is a labour dispute at present which would hold up any Archaeology work.

The deer fence is in poor shape, but proper repairs on hold until digging permits are issued. See above! So deer have been getting in.

In the meantime, more trees have been removed, often due to stress or damage. The stumps are left to 24” and may be hollowed out for future Rhododendron planting (this is permitted). Mulching of the Phase One site can continue this fall since this does not involve ground disturbance. We use arborists’ chippings if possible.

In April 2026 the ARS Annual Convention will be held in Qualicum Beach, and it was our hope that more progress would be made in the Species Garden. Phase One will be at its best, but there may still be a hold-up on development of Phase Two.

Rhododendron Garden August Work Party

Maureen Denny



Despite a sprinkle of rain on Thursday morning, the Work Party did go ahead as planned. Myself, Judi Murakami, and Diane Van Oostdam were able to rake and sweep and get the gardens looking great. This was the last Work Party of the year.

Thanks to everyone who volunteered this past season, and a special thanks to Antje for faithfully supplying coffee and treats.

The Work Parties will resume in March of 2026.

November Meeting Program

House and Garden Arthropods – The Good, Bad and Beautiful



This talk will discuss characteristics and features of many of the major arthropod families and species found in gardens and structures on Vancouver Island, including insects, arachnids, crustaceans, centipedes and millipeds.

Bio:

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 (Mount Arrowsmith; 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.

Revenue Table

Judy & Maureen

Thanks to everyone who brought in plants to sell at the October meeting. The funds collected for September and October have been very good. This income is an important source of income for our club.

For the November meeting, ideas for the Revenue Table could be fall bulbs, houseplants, gently used tools, seeds, gardening books, and if the weather is still on the warm side, plants from your garden.

There is also time to divide and pot up plants for next year's Plant Sale in April. By next spring plants potted now will have a nicely developed root system and be all ready to grow. At the November Meeting we will also have for sale our Library Books and magazines.

Maureen and Judy



'Jonathan Shaw' is a striking hybrid known for its vivid violet-purple blooms and compact, dense growth habit.

Foliage: Evergreen, elliptic leaves with wavy margins; matte green and retained for 2 years.

Size: Grows to about 4 feet tall and 5 feet wide in 10 years. Bloom Time is spring to early summer.

Greer book page 146



'Russatum', often called the *purplish-blue rhododendron*, is a compact, evergreen species prized for its vivid coloration and hardy nature. Flower Color is an intense violet-blue to deep indigo-purple, often with a pale or white throat due to fine hairs. Bloom Time is early to mid-spring. Foliage: Small, aromatic, dark green leaves with brown scales underneath.

Greer book page 62

Membership

Kathy Haigh

Have you renewed your membership for 2026 yet? Those who renew by November 15th will have their name put in a draw for a free membership. The draw will take place at the Christmas party. The other bonus is the discount we all get at gardening shops listed on the back of your membership card.

The NIRS annual fee remains at \$40 if you want to have the ARS Journal in digital format (or if you want the journal in print format, it will cost \$55 CDN). Your friendly membership volunteers will take your payment at the Nov 11th general meeting and provide your 2026 membership card and receipt on the spot. Alternatively, you may send an email and e-transfer to me at any time, and your card and receipt will be available for pick up at the next general meeting.

Do you see your name in this photo? If “yes,” then please see me at the next meeting to get your nametag. (Yes, this is a test to see if you read the newsletter.)



Plant of the Month

by Ron Sutton

Rhododendron 'Purple Passion'



Do you like the colour purple? If yes, then this rhododendron should be in your garden.

When I first started collecting rhododendrons in Ontario, it was one of my favourites, that's why I have two of them planted in our garden. Its rich purple flower colour looks great in the garden. It's an open pollinated seedling of R. 'Purple Splendor' introduced by M.A Blough. The 4 inch long green leaves are unremarkable, with no tomentum or indumentum. The 3 inch wide purple flowers with a white blotch are the reason to have this plant. They form beautiful ball shaped trusses of 12-16 flowers, and bloom here in late May. The plant grows to approximately six feet high in 10 years. It is quite hardy, but not as hardy as rated though, which is -32°C, from my experience growing it in Ontario. It would get pretty beaten up from temperatures half that low,

but would survive. Here on the island, everyone should be able to grow it. Ideally it likes part shade, but will tolerate full sun. This rhododendron is pretty common in the plant trade, and it is readily available at garden centers. It's so common, I almost didn't want to write about it. The photo is of my plant taken May 26, 2019 with Azalea 'Gibraltar' next to it

Christmas Party



Date: Tuesday December 9th

Time: 12:00 – 2:00 pm

Place: Driftwood Chinese Restaurant, 1130 Cliff Ave, Courtenay

Price: \$15.00 for members only. NIRS will top up the cost of the ticket to cover the tip.

Tickets can be purchased at the Nov. meeting from Margaret or Nadine

Theme for December Newsletter

What pops of colors are showing in your garden?

Send in your pictures!

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Viburnum trilobum by A. Ferris

Newsletter submission deadline is the 15th of each month.

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