

the Rhodoteller

North Island Rhododendron Society Vol. 40 Number 8 April 2026



Corydalis by N. Boudreau



Forsythia by D. Godfrey

Meetings and Events

April 1 Board of Directors Meeting @ Judi Murakami

April 14 General Meeting @ Comox United Church 7:00 PM (doors open 6:30 PM)

Speaker: Barrie Agar - "Some Irish Gardens"

Refreshments reminder – M. Denny, J. Chrysler, B. Desrochers, S. Murakami

Apr 21 – 25 ARS 2026 Spring Convention

Rhododendrons & Companions in a Changing Climate

Register for the ARS Convention in Qualicum Beach then choose one or all of the pre and post-convention garden tours. Each day of garden tours is individually priced, lunch included. Dinners are optional.

- Apr 21 Tuesday – Pre-tour of gardens from Victoria to Shirley, BC with the Victoria Rhododendron Society (VRS)
- Apr 22 Wednesday – Pre-tour of public and private gardens in Victoria with VRS
- Apr 23 Thursday – Pre-tour of country gardens by car in the Cowichan Valley with the Cowichan Valley RS, starting late morning.
- Apr 23 Thursday evening – Early arrivals in Qualicum Beach are invited to join us for no-host beverages and/or dinner at the Shady Rest Pub on the Salish Sea.
- Apr 24 Friday – ARS Convention & Rhododendron Species Foundation AGM at the Qualicum Beach Civic Centre: Welcome breakfast, speakers, plant sale, prizes, lunch, Milner Gardens & Woodland tour, Rhododendron Species Foundation AGM, social time with friends, ARS Awards and optional buffet dinner. All organized by Mount Arrowsmith RS and Nanaimo RS; Plant sale managed by North Island RS.
- Apr 25 Saturday – Post-tour of gardens from Qualicum Beach to Nanaimo organized by the Nanaimo RS.
Optional dinner in the evening at a local restaurant.

Our long-awaited spring has arrived, and the beautiful spring flowers are bursting forth here in our garden. I do love the bulbs that bring quick bursts of early color, and as well the tiny white hardy primulas. Many thanks to whoever brought those white double flowered primulas to an NIRS revenue table – they are a lovely addition to our garden!

April is always a busy month, and really, I need more days in the month, so many jobs to do in the garden. One job to avoid is to do too much cleaning up of the garden debris under the rhodos and other shrubs... those old leaves and twigs will be providing homes for the many native pollinators in our gardens for a few more weeks.



Red Flowering Currant by M. Griffith-Cochrane

We had to postpone our CV Rhododendron Garden work bee in March due to heavy rains. Maureen will be letting us know when the next one is scheduled.

I am sending a thank-you to Santa who brought me my favourite garden tool – I found the cultivator mattock, from Lee Valley, wrapped up and placed under the tree perfect for digging out the dastardly snapweed, *Cardamine hirsuta*, described by Diana Scott in our last newsletter.

Please remember when you are tidying up your own garden, and find some plants to “split and repot” - save them for our companion plant table at the NIRS Plant sale May 3rd.

Please note - our April meeting is almost mid-month, as the second Tuesday lands on April 14th. I hope to see you there.

Happy Gardening to all,

Margaret

Items of Interest

England's largest rhododendron planted 120 years ago is now the size of 10 double-decker buses, 30 – 40 ft high, 120 ft long & 80 ft wide. Commonly known as “Big Rhodey” or “Shrubzilla”. It is a *R. arboreum smithii*.

How big can a rhododendron grow if the label says 3 ft in 10 years?



Fun on Seedy Saturday & Questions - Jill Gould

We had a great time at Seedy Saturday on March 8. Thank you to Wolfgang, Margaret, Kathy and of course, me. Those of you who hid when volunteers were being sought, you made a mistake. It was fun! Surprising to me: not many NIRS members even attended the function. We met only one (thanks Diane!). We handed out information brochures, promoted our club, dished out “knowledge” such as it is, and even found some new members.

The most frequent questions seemed to be, “What do I do with this huge rhododendron in my yard?” or “This rhododendron is blocking the light from the windows”. Wolfgang was most helpful in explaining that yes, you can prune rhododendrons. This seems to evoke panic in some folks, who hesitate to prune anything in case they “do it wrong”.

Rhododendrons, once they are happily established, can grow into large shrubs. Indeed, some turn into trees. Pictures of rhododendron forests in Nepal come to mind: *R. arboreum* is a case in point. The first thing, when planting, is to choose a variety which will remain somewhat compact. But “grows to five feet in ten years” does not mean it stops growing in ten years! So do not plant it against the wall of your house, next to the driveway, or under a window. For those folks who have inherited huge rhododendrons on their property from a previous owner, outright removal is often what the homeowner will choose. Pruning is an easier alternative. There have been cases where we have cut every branch down to one foot or so, moved the plant, and had the rhodo come back in a year or so happier than ever. Pruning is best done after flowering, thus giving the plant time to put on new growth during the summer. Following basic rules on pruning, do not leave stubs! And here is the magic thing: even if you cut right back to the main stems, hidden buds on that stem start to form new growth. You may not get flowers for a year, but your plant, with proper fertilization and regular watering, will survive.

R. ‘Jean Marie de Montague’
one year after cutting back



Janna van Kessel

Winner of the rhododendron at Seedy Saturday

Congratulations and Welcome to NIRS



Rhododendron Garden Work party

by Maureen Denny

CVRG Pathway some years ago.
The Rhodos were much smaller.

April Work Party

As I write this the March weather is cold, then warm, frost and then all over the place. By mid-April I hope spring is truly settling in and we can depend on a warm sunny day for our next Work Party. The date will be Thursday April 16 at 10am. This will be a general clean up session. Please bring weeding tools, secateurs, broom, rake and a bucket. The work is followed by treats and decaf coffee at the picnic table.

Come join us!



Euphorbia by D. Godfrey

NIRS 2026 Rhododendron Sale and Truss Show

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

MAY 3, 2026

10AM TO 1 PM

K'OMOKS FIRST NATION HALL 3320 COMOX ROAD

Plans are underway for the plant sale and truss show. We will be selling our Propagation Rhododendrons, NIRS companion plants, and Joan Wyden will be a vendor.

Our plant sale is a great time for members to get together and share our knowledge and admiration of Rhododendrons (all plants really) with the public.

The success of the sale is largely due to volunteers. There are many positions available: hall set up, cashiers, loaders, truss display, signs, the NIRS companion table and rhodo sales.



Please contact Nadine at ger.nadboud@shaw.ca or Margaret at mgriffico@gmail.com if you can join the fun and help. I have the list of members who signed up at the March meeting. I will send out confirmation e-mails shortly.

The NIRS companion plants sales table are plants that are donated by the members. This is a popular table with the public. Now is a good time to look in your garden at what could be divided or seeded that you could donate. We try to have good quality plants (not invasive) that are labeled, if possible, as these sell quickly. If you do not know the name of the plant we will try to identify it for you. If it looks good and healthy, please bring it along.



Don't forget our Truss show! The customers are very interested in seeing all the blooms on display. There should be lots of trusses open to bring along!

Meeting Program

Barrie Agar – Some Irish Gardens

Barrie started her horticultural career in a market garden on a large estate in Ireland with a large walled garden and espaliered trees. Her initial horticultural training was at Greenmount Agricultural College in Northern Ireland. Barrie has worked in a wide variety of nurseries and gardens in BC and Ireland, and is recently retired from being Head Gardener at Hatley Park at Royal Roads University. Hatley Park is an early Canadian Japanese Garden. Being on the Board of the North American Japanese Garden Association has given further opportunities to study and interact with these amazing gardens.



The Gardens at Ilnacullin, Co. Cork

She is involved with the Cowichan Rhododendron Society, and is the President of the BC Fruit Testers because who doesn't like apples, and especially Heritage ones.

Revenue Table

by Judy & Maureen

Our next General Meeting will be the last time we meet at the church this year which also means it will be the final chance to bring plants to sell at the Revenue Table. If you are dividing and potting up for our Annual Plant Sale, please pot some up too for the Revenue Table. We will also accept garden tools still in good shape, houseplants, seeds (not out dated), pots and anything else that might be garden related.

1. A brand-new Rhododendron from the NIRS propagation group:

We have a rhododendron that has been crossed with four rhododendrons.

Dexter's Peppermint X Pure Pleasure x Horizon Lakeside x Parksville Sunset.

The winner will be the first of our members to own one. (The winner will have to provide a picture when plant blooms.)

Picture? Flower colour? Fragrance? Bloom time? Habit? Size? Leaves?

2. R. "Goldflimmer"

A compact, variegated evergreen shrub prized for its **gold-streaked foliage** and **soft lavender flowers**. It's one of the most ornamental foliage rhododendrons you can grow in the Comox Valley, and its hardiness makes it a reliable, low-maintenance choice.



Flower **colour**: Pale lilac-pink to lavender with **frilly edges** and **brownish-yellow flecks** on a paler blotch. Flowers are about **1¾–2 inches** across and appear in clusters of **9–14 blooms**.

□ Bloom **time**: Late mid-season (typically May in coastal BC).

□ Foliage: Dark green leaves with **distinct yellow central bands**, making it highly decorative even when not in bloom.

□ Growth **habit**: Compact, mounding, and tidy.

□ Size: About **3 ft in 10 years**, eventually **3-5 ft** tall and wide.

Community News

Denman Island Home & Garden Tour

Saturday, June 13, and Sunday, June 14 **Tickets On sale April 1** via the [Denman Conservancy Association website](#) and select island locations.

MARS Rhodo Show and Sale

Saturday April 18 9:00am – 1:00pm @ Qualicum Curling Centre

Victoria Rhodo Society Sale

Saturday May 9 9:00am – 4:00pm @ HCP (Horticultural Centre of the Pacific) 505 Quayle Rd.

MARS Mother's Day Tour

May 9-10 MARS Mother's Day weekend Garden Tour. Tickets \$20.00 at Garden Centres in April.



Hellebores by K. Selden



Rhododendron amagianum

This is a seldom available, deciduous azalea species.

It belongs to subgenus Tsutsusi, section Brachycalyx, and is native to the island of Honshu Japan, on Mt. Amagi and Mt. Higane.

It is similar to *Rhododendron sanctum*, except *R. amagianum* blooms later, and has more pointed leaf tips. The 4inch shiny leaves of this species are attractive. The leaf underside has fine hairs, mainly along the mid rib. The leaves are arranged in groups of three, and open at the tip of the branches.

The dark pink to orangey red unscented flowers, arrive in the middle of June, and form loose trusses of three flowers, that sit above the leaves.

It is hardy to -21°C, and can handle full sun to part shade. It's a slow upright grower, and will only be approximately 4 feet high in ten years.

This is an attractive plant in and out of flower, I acquired it from the RSBG.

Here is a photo of my plant, taken on June 18, 2025. It gets mostly light shade.



Picture Tour of Member's Garden Behind the House

Valerie & Aubrey Ferris



Valerie and Aubrey have been working on their $\frac{3}{4}$ acre garden for almost 12 years. They have accumulated 114 rhododendron and many more trees, bushes and companion plants. You know gardening is in their blood when they say ('Should we prepare another bed for the plants we have in pots looking for a home in the ground?').

Through the door to the back yard



Greenhouse with flowering plum on the left & Dogwood on the right



Grapes growing over a pergola – makes for a cool sitting area in summer



Star Magnolia & Japanese Maple

One of several sitting areas in the garden
R. 'Vulcan' on the right



R. 'Rosamundii' (flowering)



Flowering on Rt. – *R. moupinese* Lt. – R.
'Seta' & *R. kesangiae* (larges leaved Rt. Back)

Thank you Valerie & Aubrey for the picture garden tour of your garden.

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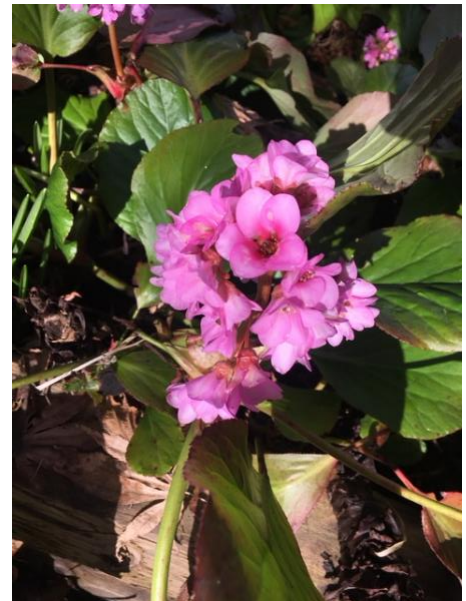
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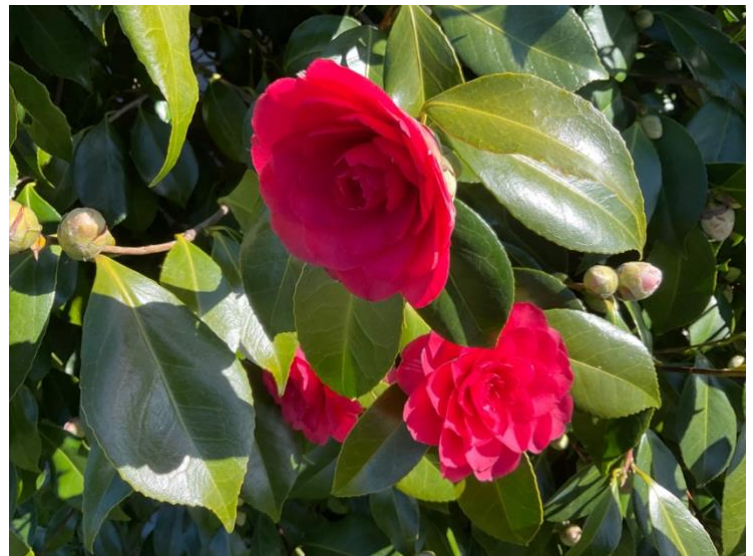
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Newsletter submission deadline is the 15th of each month.

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Bergenia by K. Selden



Camellia by D. Godfrey