

the Rhodoteller

North Island Rhododendron Society

Vol. 40 Number 6 Feb 2026



Potted Lewisia has provided colour all winter
Photo by Kathy H.

Frosty R. 'Silver Skies'
Photo by Diana S.



Meetings and Events

- Feb 4** Board of Directors Meeting @ Margaret G. RSVP Margaret
Feb 10 General Meeting @ Comox United Church 7:00 PM (doors open 6:30 PM)
Goodies reminder – P. Matthews, D. Williams, L. Clyde, K. Selden, B. Simonson

Apr 21 – 25 ARS 2026 Spring Convention

DATE! Apr 21 - 25
 American Rhododendron Society
 2026 Spring Convention
 Vancouver Island, British Columbia
 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.

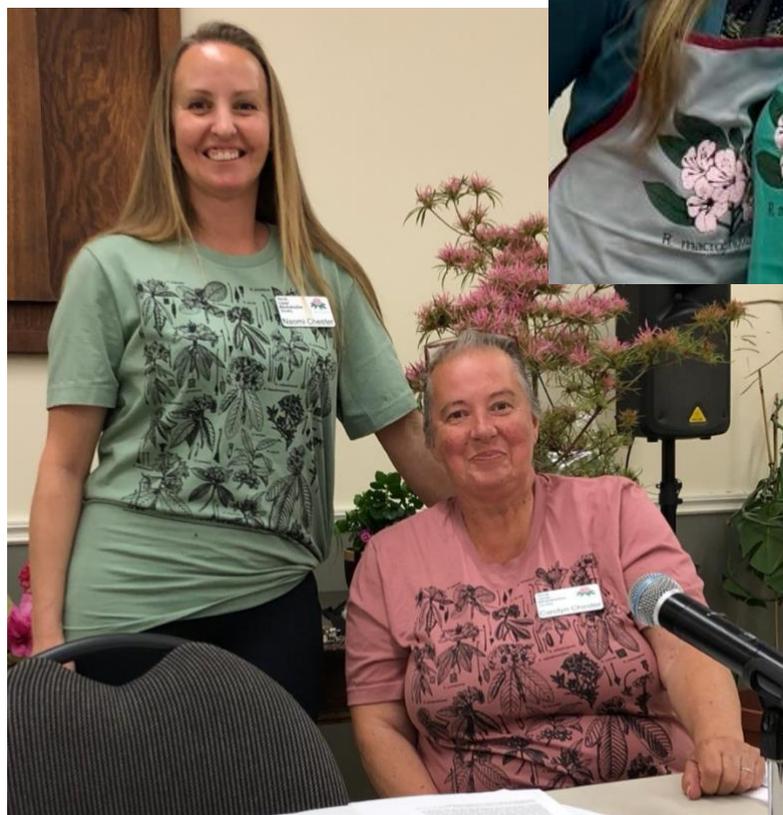
President's View

by Margaret Griffith-Cochrane

January has been a sad month for us in the NIRS and in the surrounding Vancouver Island gardening community. We suddenly and unexpectedly had to say our goodbye to our dear friend, NIRS secretary and garden buddy Carolyn Chester - when she died in mid-January

As we move forward, her unrelenting love and joy in all things Rhododendron, or purple, her willingness to volunteer for club jobs, the delight in meeting new friends or touring their gardens, finding treasures in nurseries that required a visit on trips down the island and her pleasure in helping people - will keep her always in our hearts, and she will keep our gardens and community friendships thriving. Carolyn embodied all that is good about a garden society, sharing time and talents with each other and the community, loving to learn about new gardens or plants, and as well she did enjoy a good plant rescue and finding that little rhododendron or companion plant a new home!

Rest in peace Carolyn.



Items of Interest

Plan Before Planting

by Harry Wright

Courtenay, British Columbia

Reprinted from the North Island Chapter newsletter, October 1991

Before a rhodo is planted, some thought should go into the planting site. Only by proper site planning can one expect a plant to thrive and reward its owner with quality flowers, foliage and form.

Your plant problems will be greater if you select a site that encourages late autumn and early spring growth, such as a south-facing wall. A northern exposure allows greater shade or less direct light, which slows growth earlier in the fall and shields plants from premature spring warmth. Plants growing under a canopy of trees or in partial shade will enter dormancy earlier than plants planted in the open garden and will respond later to spring warmth.



When early morning sun touches frozen leaves and flowers, bud damage will be more severe than in areas where the air temperature rises gradually. This is the main reason why unsheltered eastern and southern exposures are less desirable for early flowering plants than northern or western sites. Any warm sunny site open to frequent winds will increase water loss from plant tissue. If soil freezes through the root ball there is no way for the plant to re-supply the lost moisture. The use of mulches will help reduce freezing in the root zone and help to maintain a more constant soil temperature. A mulched rhodo with its lower roots extending into unfrozen soil can supply moisture to transpiring leaves. Protect your plants from wind by installing screening material such as fencing or evergreen boughs. Never plant rhodos in the lowest area of the garden, especially if there is little or no air circulation. Cold air, like water seeks the lowest possible level.

Christmas Donations



Darlene Linden accepting for Comox Bay Care Society

Donation to Comox Valley Food Bank



Community News

2026 Vancouver Island Seedy Saturdays

Seedy Saturday season is approaching! We will list dates for upcoming events as they become available. Keep an eye on this page in the coming months.

- February 7, 2026: [Qualicum Beach Seedy Saturday](#). 10am-3:30pm. Qualicum Beach Civic Centre (747 Jones St)
- February 14, 2026: Victoria Seedy Saturday. Times tbd. Crystal Gardens.
- February 14, 2026: [Port Alberni Seedy Saturday](#). 10am-2pm. Echo Center (4255 Wallace Street)
- March 1, 2026: [Nanaimo Seedy Sunday](#). 10am-3pm. NDSS (355 Wakesiah Ave)

Meeting Program

Ron Sutton - Azaleas

For those who don't know me, I took up the gardening hobby in Burlington Ontario, in my early 40's. My wife and I bought a new home with just a lawn in the back. So the interest in plants and gardening, started while doing a little landscaping to make the yard more attractive.

My interest in rhododendrons began when I saw a large pot of *Rhododendron* 'Nova Zembla' in bloom, so I added some of the hardier, common rhododendron varieties to our garden. The internet however, introduced me to rhododendrons that I never knew about, because they weren't hardy enough for local garden centres to offer. When I learned that some were fragrant, I knew had to experience those.

So while searching where to get fragrant rhodos, I learned about Greer Gardens, a mail order nursery in Oregon, that sold world-wide. Well, that really kick started my rhododendron passion, and I ordered many from Harold Greer, including some that were fragrant, such as *Rhododendron* 'Loderi Venus', *Rhododendron* 'Oh Kitty', and *Rhododendron* 'Avalanche', to name a few. The ones that were hardy enough, were put in the garden, others were kept in pots. I wanted to grow plants too tender for our small zone 6 garden, so I retired early and moved to the island in 2017.

We rented in Nanaimo for a short time. It was during this rental time, that we joined the local Nanaimo Rhododendron Society, which eventually led to me becoming their



treasurer and then also their president. I continue to write a "Plant of the Month" article for the Nanaimo and North Island club's newsletters about our various plants.

In December of 2017, we moved into our current place in Fanny Bay. Now, with plenty of gardening space in a warmer zone 8, we began transforming the property, with mainly rhododendrons and azaleas and other plants.

An NRS club member, (Craig Clark) introduced me to buying plants from the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden. This started my species rhododendron collecting.

As already mentioned, I like fragrant rhododendrons, actually all fragrant plants. This led me to collect tender species and hybrid Maddenii rhododendrons, most of which are fragrant.

Program Topic - Azaleas

The lesser cousin to the well-known rhododendrons that we all love.

These are popular plants, in either evergreen or deciduous form. They adorn most, if not all, members' gardens. Many of the deciduous ones are fragrant, and some have colourful fall foliage.

This presentation will cover species azaleas and some popular hybrids.

All are attractive to hungry deer unfortunately.



Revenue Table News

by Judy & Maureen



The garden looks hopeful these days - witch hazels, winter aconites, winter jasmine, hellebores, cyclamen, snowdrops, hazelnut catkins and more are all appearing with all sorts of narcissus "snouts" poking up too! This is the time to check out your garden for future plants to pot up in early spring for the revenue table and for our big plant sale in April. It's a fun

way to share plants with friends and the revenue supports many activities by the NIRS members. As well as plants, any gardening related items are always welcome, such as seed packets or collected seed (labeled & dated of course!) as long as they aren't too old (under 3 years is best). And we still have a wonderful collection of our library books for sale at only \$2! Remember to plan well ahead of our plant sale in April - it's best to pot up your plants weeks ahead of the sale so they are well established and healthy.



Thank you from Maureen & Judy

Ways and Means Raffle

by Aubrey Ferris

Rhododendron piercei

Shrub, about 1.5 – 2.5 m tall

Flowers

- Crimson, tubular campanulate
- 28–35 mm long
- Darker nectar pouches
- Bloom: March–May
- 6–8 per tight truss
- Hardy plant -15 to -20 C

Partial Shade (avoid harsh afternoon sun).

Greer p. 58



Rhododendron tomentosum (referred to by some as “Labrador Tea”)



It is a low shrub growing to 50 cm (rarely up to 120 cm) tall with evergreen leaves 12–50 mm long and 2–12 mm broad.

The flowers are small, with a five-lobed white corolla, and produced several together in a corymb 3–5 cm diameter. They emit strong smell to attract bees and other pollinating insects.

Note: “Corymb” is pronounced “Kor-im” and it means that it is a type of flower cluster where all the flowers end up at roughly the same height, even though they attach to the stem at different levels.

Membership

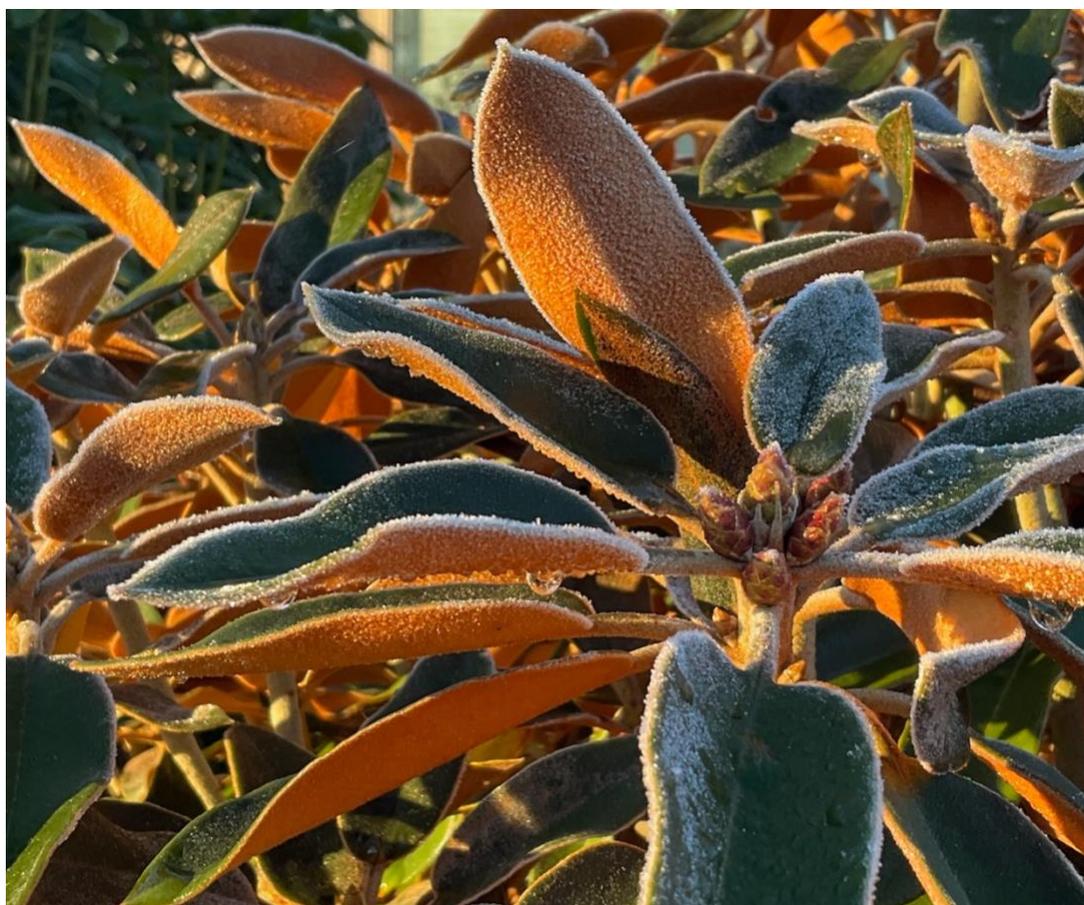
by Kathy Haigh

NIRS memberships run for the calendar year, and as of January 1, 2026, we have 64 regular members, 6 associate members (who are primary members of another ARS club) and 4 honorary lifetime members. That's a total of 74 current members.

If you notice that you are not receiving NIRS emails after February 1, please contact me, as there may be 1 or 2 problems: Either we do not have your current email address, or you forgot to renew your membership. If you don't contact me for renewal, I will assume that you decided not to.

Membership has its benefits. Be sure to look at the back of your membership card for all of the places that provide discounts to NIRS members.

Congratulations to Julie Waller, who won the membership draw, as one of the folks who renewed before December.



R. pachysanthum Photo by Diana S.

Plant of the Month

by Ron Sutton

Rhododendron hodgsonii

This beautiful, big leaf species rhododendron, is native to many areas in Asia, such as Bhutan, Sikkim & Arunachal Pradesh India, south Tibet China, Bengal, and Nepal.

It belongs to section Ponticum, subsection Falconera. The leaf size can range from 6 inches to 12 inch long, by 3-4 inches wide. depending on age of the plant and growing conditions. The leaf surface is noticeably textured, and the underside has a light brown plastered indumentum. The flower is pink to magenta colour and is 1.5 inches wide,



forming tight trusses of 15-25 flowers. It flowers in late March to early April. The first photo below of my plant was taken April 02, 2024. The second photo is one from the internet.



It isn't fast growing; the height is listed to be 5-6 feet after 10 years.

It's one of the hardier big leaf rhododendrons cold hardiness rated to -18°C.

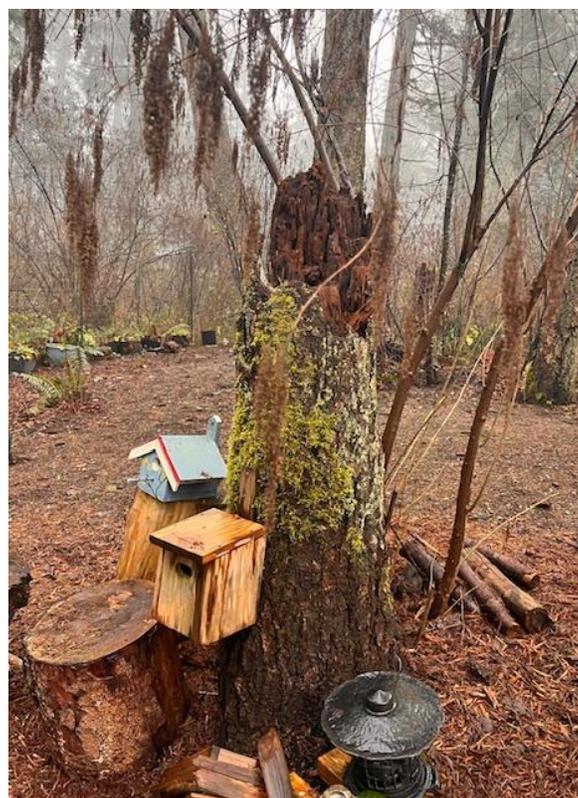
This plant prefers part sun.

Picture Tour of Member's Garden Behind the House

Margaret & Ross Griffith-Cochrane

We moved onto our property 15 years ago from East Courtenay, and what a difference in gardening; living close to the ocean in Little River we have an abundance of sandy soil. Drainage is never an issue. We are trying to keep the native plants, but as you know those tenacious roots of the salal and thimbleberry are a bothersome challenge. My favourite plant is the ocean spray, *Holodiscus discolor*.

The photos – taken in one day, mostly the morning at 9:00, misty moisty foggy January 20th.



My grandchildren's Fairy Garden
I love the cascade of ocean spray above it. The cascade of pyramidal flower clusters makes such a dramatic show. The fairies leave little treasures and my grandkids return the favour with flower petals, pretty stones and shells. It's a fun way to pass along the treasure chest of costume jewelry I inherited from my mother-in-law.

Symphoricarpos albus in amongst native sword ferns.



Rhododendron rex.

I purchased from Paul Wurz a number of years ago. It is very content amongst the fir trees.



Rhododendron 'Goldflimmer' and a native dogwood, *Cornus serica* that seeded itself here. They seem happy together so far.



Arbutus menziesii

I am giving big shout out to our member Jill Gould who propagated and brought arbutus seedlings to our revenue table several years ago - this is a happy tree, albeit with a bit of dark fungal spots on the leaves. They seem to disappear in the summer.

Garry Oak, *Quercus garryana*, with *Rhododendron* 'Anne Goss' in front of our home. It grows well in full sun.



Ross built me a patio outside our dining room during COVID, complete with a fountain (covered during the winter). Orb-weaver spider web.

Thank-you Margaret & Ross for the picture tour of your garden.

Board of Directors & Committee Chairs ***2025/2026***

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Judi Murakami 250-338-4901

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Maureen Denny 250-890-0522

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Newsletter submission deadline is the 15th of each month.

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