

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



Box 5562 Postal Station B, Victoria BC Canada V8R 6S4

April 2008 Twenty-eighth Year of Publication

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Meeting

7:30 pm Monday, April 7, 2008

Garth Homer Centre, 811 Darwin Street, Victoria BC

SPEAKER: Daylen Bayes “Rhododendron Hunting in the Arctic”

April Refreshments:

Ann Widdowson, Marion Woo, Ingeborg Woodsworth, Keiko Alkire, Margaret Argus, David Ballantyne and Peter Barriscale are asked to bring wrapped goodies to March's meeting. Please phone Nadine Minckler at 474-1429 to confirm contributions. Help for Joanna Massa and Heather Dickman is always welcome.

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A Review of March's Talk, “Rhododendron Adventures in Washington State”

By Theresa McMillan

March's talk by Janet Gardner and Sharon Tillie covered several beautiful gardens in Washington State. Last April, in good weather, they went on a tour. Janet made notes, and Sharon took pictures. They began with the Whitney Garden on the east side of the Olympic Peninsula. Next was the Rhododendron Species Garden in Federal Way, southeast of Tacoma, with the lovely woodland setting for the many species

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VRS 2008 SHOW AND PLANT SALE

SET-UP April 25th

SHOW and SALE April 26th

**NEW LOCATION: Glendale
Gardens (HCP)**

Volunteer work assignment sheets
will be available at the April
meeting.

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rhodies. There were some photos of remarkable bonsais from the Bonsai House. The Weyerhaeuser Center, wherein the Species Gardens lie, featured vast areas of well-trimmed English Ivy. Ironically, ecologically sensitive gardeners consider ivy a pest. The Seattle University Mall featured several bronze statues, running water and fountains, and remarkable stone features among the small gardens. There was even a small model of Stonehenge.

Another lovely garden was the Miller Botanical Garden, north of Seattle, full of special plants. It overlooks Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains.

On the way to the Meerkerk gardens on Whidbey Island, Janet and Sharon visited the home of the Rhododendron hybridiser, Frank Fujioko. We enjoyed pictures of his hybrids and the Meerkerk gardens themselves.

The final pictures were of the famous tulip fields in blazing colour in the Skagit Valley, south of Mount Vernon. The Roozengaard Tulip Gardens with the windmill feature were lovely.

We appreciated seeing these gardens from Washington State. I'm sure many of our members have added their names to gardens we want to visit this spring.

Correction by M.J. Harvey

Ah, the frailties of the human mind! In a previous newsletter I mentioned a hybrid using *R. pachysanthum* as the female parent but erred when I said I put pollen of a "dwarf taliense" on its stigmas. What I should have written was *tsariense*. The seedlings are thus *pachysanthum X tsariense* and promise gorgeous foliage on a compact bush.

There is always a degree of uncertainty in making hybrids. The only known is the fe-

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male (seed) parent. In this case I can be pretty certain that the seedlings are hybrid since the specimen of *pachysanthum* does not set seed when left alone for the bees to do their work.

Tsariense grows to above the tree line as high as 4400m in SE Tibet where it is named for the town of Tsari. It is put in subsection Lanata by Cox and Cox.

CHANGES IN THE SOCIETY'S BYLAWS

The following bylaw changes will be voted on at the April General Meeting:

1.2.4 Friend - shall mean a person who is a fully paid up member of the Society but who is not a fully paid up member of the American Rhododendron Society.

Delete Local Member and replace with Friends to agree with 1.2.4

10.5 The Secretary shall conduct the correspondence of the Society, issue notices of meetings of the Society and the Directors, keep the minutes of all meetings of the Society at which business is transacted and of

meetings of the Directors, have custody of all records and documents of the Society, except those required to be kept by the Treasurer, and maintain the register of members.

Note: the Chair of the Membership Committee will work closely with the Secretary.

22.1 The Directors shall see that all necessary books and records of the Society required by the Bylaws of the Society or by any applicable statute or laws are regularly and properly kept.

11.3 Membership Committee. The Chair of the Membership Committee shall be appointed by the President. The Chair may appoint other members. The Committee will be responsible for maintaining a membership list, producing a phone list, and submitting membership reports to the Board of Directors and to the American Rhododendron Society.

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Pachysanthum is another high altitude species, growing a long way from Tibet on the mountains of central Taiwan where it also gets to above the tree line to 3300m. It is placed in subsection Maculifera.
Rhododendrons that grow in sun are frequently heavily indumented and my hobby was raising hybrids with indumentum. Many handsome plants have resulted. Where I have failed is in getting owners of my hybrids to site them in full sun where they can develop their dense foliage and short shoots. I find many plants have been planted in shade and kept wet, under which conditions they struggle for light and fail to show their potential. I am pleased to say the seedlings are doing well and I shall attempt to distribute them when they are larger.

Notices

The Board decided to allow advertising on the VRS Website. It must be related to rhodo-

dendrons or gardening and/or be relevant to members of the Society. A copy of the advertising policy will be available on the Website.

Jacqui Bradbury 389-1379 asks for the return of the VRS Show trophies in their protective bags so that they can be cleaned, in preparation for the Show and Sale in April.

The Vancouver Island Rock And Alpine Garden Society's 2008 annual show and sale will be held at Cadboro Bay United Church, 2625 Arbutus Road, Victoria, B.C. on Friday, April 25th from 1 pm to 8 pm and on Saturday, April 26th from 9 am to 4 pm. VIRAGS will also be hosting the American Primula Society National Show at this time.

The Victoria Chrysanthemum Society will be having its annual sale of rooted cuttings on April 19th from 10 am to noon at St. Mathias

Church Hall, corner of Richmond Road and Richardson Street.

The Nanaimo Chapter's show and sale will be Saturday May 10, 10 am to 2 pm, at the Centennial Building at Beban Park complex, 2300 Bowen Road, Nanaimo.

The Peace Arch Rhodo Society's plant sale will be Saturday, April 5 at Elgin Hall, 14250 Crescent Road in Surrey B.C. from 9 am to 3 pm.

A SPRING SURPRISE

By Norman Todd

I know spring is not here yet if you go by something as technical as an equinox that occurs with some precision someplace in the world, but there is a first flower on a plant that had been forgotten in the mess I call my garden and that to me means spring has arrived. The plant has the name *hylaeum* on it. That probably doesn't mean much to most people but that is really not so surprising as until fairly recently those who know about these things said it was doubtful if it was in cultivation.

Hylaeum means 'living on the mountain' and I can believe that is where it would show up best as it will get to be a fairly large shrub or small tree. The now dated but still regularly used Davidian's *The Rhododendron Species* with its four volumes of boilerplate prose does not even describe it other than placing it in with the Thomsonia. The Coxes say it should probably be merged with *faucium*. No matter, it pleases me. The one, solitary truss has a dozen rich pink flowers, bell shaped, each about 5 cm long. These are supplying an army of small ants with a Cowichan Bay smorgasbord of

scrumptious sustenance. The upper lobes of the corolla are heavily spotted in purple/pink.

Now comes the dilemma. The Species Workshop starting this coming weekend (15,16 March) will have the top North American taxonomical expert, Steve Hootman, teaching those fortunate enough to be attending how to key out the various species. This abstruse and, to most, mysterious process will be made transparent by Steve. This could confirm, or deny, the authenticity of my plant's label. But to sever that one truss would take a fair amount of courage. Then, if Steve pronounced it was merely *faucium* or, still worse, a hybrid could I accept the resulting psychological damage? I still have memories of a visit Steve made to our garden and to my deep chagrin pronounced many of my chest-swelling treasures to be rouges. One characteristic of the plant gives me a little confidence; the bark is supposed to be smooth and peeling. My plant is not old enough to show this clearly but there are indications that the bark may exhibit this. I hope so. *Barbatum* is another species with shiny purplish bark. I have a clear image in my mind of a surreal grove of century-old *barbatums* in Dunedin, New Zealand with shining ghostly trunks. My plants of *barbatum* are still just juniors at a quarter of that age and only now does this become a feature worth remarking on.

I have a lovely yellow of low sprawling habit now blooming that I am not going to take to the Workshop. It has the name *valentinianum* on it. I can't remember where this plant came from. It may be it came from a now demised plant of that name that occupied what proved to be an inhospitable site. The late Herman Vaartnou decreed it to be merely a lowly hybrid called 'Quaver'. 'Quaver' is a Rothschild cross of *sulphureum* and *leucaspiis*. Herman maintained that *valentinianum*

should have a straight style (you can gather from this degree of exactitude how fussy these darned taxonomists can be — and very often they disagree with each other). The little that I have read on *valentinianum* does not mention a straight style as being diagnostic. The few pictures I have seen of *valentinianum* show a style much longer than the anthers — not the case in my plant — so I am resigned to having one less species and will not waste Steve's time. From a landscaper's plebian point of view, 'Quaver' is probably a more pleasing plant so I can rationalize about playing down the snobbiness.

Somewhat disappointing this year is the amount of bloom on the four or five plants I have of *irroratum*. The flower colour on the species is very variable; some are deep pink, some almost white and some cream. Some open in early March and others stay in tight bud until April. They all exhibit a severe case of measles. Every lobe is covered with (non-infectious spots) that might inhibit our medical members from including *irroratum* in their gardens. Two of Victoria's local dignitaries are commemorated by what the socially conscious cognoscenti claim to be good members of the species; 'Prince Abkhazi' and 'Princess Abkhazi'. These originated from the aforementioned Herman Vaartnou's garden and were grown from open pollinated seed. The Prince, in accordance with the pro-



tolcol, comes two weeks before the Princess. I would never wish to be counted among those who cast any doubt on the purity of their lineage so the plants are in the *irrorata* for sure and I will definitely not take a branch to the Workshop for forensic examination. We have a very fine watercolor by Bonnie Moro of the freckled Princess gracing a wall that one faces descending stairs so it is always advisable to hold the banister tightly as the picture is mesmerizingly dangerous.

I will remark on one other gem that is in bloom. It may be worth having keyed out. I got it many years ago from Milton Wildfong of Mission. He called it the Exbury form of *strigillosum*. Most of us think of this species as being a strong primary red and I have to admit that I like the forms that stay red better. (Also they are certainly better sellers.) The Exbury form opens with deep red flowers but fairly quickly they fade to deep pink. There is a close relative called *pachytrichum* that has pink flowers. Ken Gibson grows a plant called *monosematum* that some authorities classify as a variety of *pachytrichum*. This is described as being half way between *strigillosum* and *pachytrichum*. It could be that what I call the Exbury form of *strigillosum* is this intergrade.

I have to mention one other spring surprise. Again, I have some doubt about the correct nomenclature for this plant. It is certainly *oreodoxa* but is it Variety *oreodoxa* or Variety *fargesii*? The flower is a deep pink that is more typical of *fargesii*. I have another plant with that name and it is the best moisture meter in the garden. As soon as this *oreodoxa* experiences any lack of moisture the leaves curl up, long before any other rhodo shows any sign of stress. This is said to be a genetic trait of *oreodoxa*. The plant that is blooming now does not evince this habit.

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Members' Activities



Belated Christmas party pictures



Judges Training Workshop in March



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One conclusion from all this is that names can become a fetish or a phobia. One should also remember that there is sometimes no clear disjoint between species. The concept of a species is a fluid one— essential for science but not at all necessary for the enjoyment of a garden. Still, I would not like to be referred to as thingimijig.

March 2008

New Zealand Gardens Tour

Diane Weissman, De Anza Chapter, is organizing a trip to New Zealand this fall to attend the **New Zealand Rhododendron** convention in Geraldine and then tour both public and private Gardens of the South Island of New Zealand. Dates are **24th October—10th November, 2008.**

Here's your opportunity to visit an area which has been called "garden heaven" on a fully escorted tour with a group of fellow rhodie members. Full details will be available shortly— contact Diane at diane1030@gmail.com or 650-964-1003 (California). Diane is a licensed travel professional. She and her husband Bob Weissman, ARS webmaster, have been members of the American Rhododendron Society for over 20 years. Diane has previously taken rhododendron groups to Hawaii and Tasmania.

UpComing Sales & Garden Visits

Plant Sale & Garden Open . Saturday April 19th 10 am -Evelyn Weesjes' 10629 Derrick Rd. (left off West Saanich to Downey, left off Downey to Derrick)

Plant Sale & Garden Open. Sunday April 20th 11-4pm. -Carmen Varcoe & Friends 5450 Old West Saanich Rd. Parking available next door at the Gazebo B & B.

Plant a Holics Sale. Sunday May 18th (9 - 12pm) ABKHAZI GARDENS- A Plant sale extravaganza. 1964 Fairfield Rd. Parking at Margaret Jenkins School. Gardens Open Free 9:00 to 12:00 Tearoom Open from 10:00 on. More info call Abkhazi Gardens 598-8096

Tofino and Ucluelet Tour – May 17-18, 2008

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society has organised an exciting two day tour of rhodo gardens and special sites on the west coast of Vancouver Island at Tofino and Ucluelet on May 17 and 18- the peak blooming times for rhododendrons in several major heritage gardens.

We welcome any Garden Club member on south Vancouver Island and adjacent islands to join us on this overnight tour to premier gardens and enjoy the company of dedicated rhodoholics and fellow gardeners in a spectacular location near Pacific Rim National Park. The tour includes the following:

A guided tour of the magnificent old growth Douglas fir and western red cedar forests of MacMillan Provincial Park

- A boat trip to Stubbs Island near Tofino to view the island's world-class rhodo collection on the only Open House day at this garden. CVRS members who have visited the site rate it as "amazing" and "must see".
- A visit to one of Vancouver Island's most impressive rhodo gardens hosted by Ken and Dot Gibson of Tofino.
- An evening session about the life and accomplishments of George Frazer, an early rhodo pioneer and horticulturist on Vancouver Island.

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- A tour of George Frazer's original and restored rhododendron garden in Ucluelet established more than 75 years ago.
- A tour of the main beaches in Pacific Rim National Park.
- A Visit to the 70 acre Milner Garden woodland and rhodo estate in Qualicum including afternoon tea and plant buying opportunities

The costs including all meals (2 lunches, 1 breakfast, 1 supper) coffee breaks, afternoon tea, hotel, and bus transportation, gratuities and taxes are \$210 per person (double occupancy). Single supplement is \$70 extra. Departure will be from Duncan bus station at 7 am on May 17 with return to Duncan by 6 pm on May 18.

Limited hotel capacity in Tofino means we need to confirm booking ASAP and definitely by the end of February. To join the tour you must send a cheque for \$50 per person made out to Bill Dumont, 1753 Peerless Road, Cobble Hill, BC V0R 1L6. Balance will be payable by May 8. Non-members, spouses and others are welcome and encouraged to join us for this chance of a lifetime visit to Canada's true west coast. For further information contact Bill at 743 9882 or wedumont@shaw.ca. If you are mailing a cheque please advise by email ASAP. Book early to confirm your seat on this exciting tour. Thanks.

2008 GARDEN VISITS

Two gardens will be open for viewing this year

THE WHITTLE GARDEN

Tuesday, April 22 6:00 p.m. 1762 Shearwater Terrace, North Saanich

The Whittle garden is a waterfront garden with an emphasis on Species Rhododendrons and on Maddenii plants. There is also a beginning of a species peony collection. The garden is about two thirds of an acre in size and is relatively new. A number of plants, particularly the species rhododendrons have not yet blossomed but do show attractive foliage.

The garden is built on a slope and there are several steep paths and sets of steps on the bottom half of the garden. Don is a propagator and many of the plants in the garden, not to mention those in pots and flats are the result of his efforts.

Directions: Take the Pat Bay Highway to the last exit. Take the exit then stay in the left lane across the overpass onto Lands End Road. Continue to Dawson Way. Turn right, and right again onto Shearwater to 1762.

THE JOHNSON GARDEN

Sunday, May 18 1:00 p.m. 635 Lost Lake Road, Highlands

The Johnson Family is honoring Charlie and his love of gardening by having an open garden in his memory. It is a forested garden situated on Teanook Lake. A number of rhododendrons were inherited from Sue's father and many more have been collected over the years. A large waterfall and pond anchor the garden in what is known as the Rhododendron Dell. Winding pathways, rhododendrons and native vegetation describe this natural and beautiful garden.

Directions: Coming from town, take Hwy. 1 to exit 14, choosing the Highlands option. Continue on Millstream until Lost Lake Road. Turn right and continue to 635.