

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



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January 2010 Twenty-Ninth Year of Publication

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**MEETING 7:30
MONDAY, January 4, 2010**

GARTH HOMER CENTRE, 811 DARWIN STREET, VICTORIA, B. C.

Speaker: Norma Senn “Kiwi Magic”

After Dr Norma Senn retired from her position as Director of the Dept of Agriculture at the University College of the Fraser Valley, she moved to Victoria and we are very pleased to have her join us.

Norma hasn't met a rhododendron she didn't like, but in her new and (sadly) smaller but zone 8 garden in Victoria, she thinks she will have to specialize in dwarfs that can be tucked into existing beds but will try to grow some of the slightly more tender types. Her experiences in New Zealand will help her make those choices.

REFRESHMENTS

Coffee and tea are provided by the Rhododendron Society after the meeting. A cookie or a bar is always a nice treat. Would the following members please provide wrapped refreshments for January's meeting? Thank you in advance.

Keiko Alkire, Margaret Argue, Ingrid Atrott, David Ballantyne, Peter Barriscale, Joan Bekius and Roy and Lois Blackmore.

Joanna Massa would appreciate help in setting up the table, serving and cleaning up after. Please phone her at 250-642-5491 to confirm, or leave your regrets that you will not be attending the meeting.

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Our Christmas Party

By Theresa McMillan

Our Christmas party on December 7 was an enjoyable evening on a dark cold winter night.

Red, white and green tablecloths had been set out by Joanna Massa. Keiko Alkire, Lois Blackmore, Karen Morrison and Jacqui Bradbury had made table decorations and raffle donations of winter foliage and berries.

Thanks to the donors, we had many interesting and appealing raffle items, so that choosing which ones to place raffle tickets beside

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took time. Dean Goard had supplied our traditional fruit punch, Karen Morrison brought the ham and Ken and Madeline Webb brought sliced turkey. The pot-luck choices included many salads, appetizers, and casseroles. The dessert table displayed fruit, cheeses, chocolates, and many smaller items like tarts or cookies.

Joanna Massa provided welcome tea or coffee to finish the dinner.

After dinner, in a new and very well-received addition, several members showed pictures of their gardens, and talked a little about them. Included were Dean Goard, Lois Blackmore, Ann Widdowson, Gareth Shearman, Norman Todd, Jocelyn Harder, and Lloyd Gilmore. Bill McMillan talked about activities at the VRS-sponsored rhododendron garden at Glendale Gardens. Thanks to Calvin Parsons who set up the PowerPoint presentation.

Because some raffle items came in later, members were able to make more choices before Moe Massa and Jacqui Bradbury started the raffle. A donation of \$308.85 was made to the Mustard Seed.

After the party, Keiko Alkire and Mary Kay Lacalli took the extra food to Street Link.

The next day, Jacqui Bradbury took our canned and dried food donation to Street Link also. These donations were most welcome!



Setting out the feast



What a great raffle—thanks contributors!



Getting ready for the slide show and hard raffle choices



The all-important raffle tickets



Let's hurry and finish this crossword or no food!



This table got all the answers quickly!

RHODODENDRON SEEDS

By M.J. HARVEY

Spring is coming. The snowdrops are starting to bloom. Time to sow some rhododendron seeds. Many sources are available, especially the ARS Seed List, [<http://www.rhododendron.org/seedexchange.htm>]. Below are a few local seeds which will be available at the Victoria Rhododendron Society meeting over the next months.

1. R. xagastum x adenopodum
2. R. degronianum 'Enamoto' x adenopodum
3. R. degronianum 'Enamoto' x coeloneuron
4. R. macrophyllum x [maximum x ungeronii]
5. R. macrophyllum x xagastum
6. R. [maximum x ungeronii] x macrophyllum
7. R. pachysanthum x pseudochrysanthum
8. R. pseudochrysanthum x adenopodum
9. R. pseudochrysanthum x coeloneuron
10. R. smirnowii x adenopodum
11. R. smirnowii x xagastum
12. R. smirnowii x yakushmanum 'Yaku Angel'
13. R. yakushmanum 'Yaku Angel' x adenopodum
14. R. yakushmanum 'Yaku Angel' x xagastum
15. R. yakushmanum 'Yaku Angel' x coeloneuron
16. R. yakushmanum 'Exbury' x degronianum 'Enamoto'
17. R. yakushmanum 'Yaku Angel' x yakushmanum 'Exbury'

NB R. xagastum is a wild hybrid collected by Peter Wharton, as was R. coeloneuron. We need some get-togethers on how the Wharton plants are doing.

FRAGRANCE IN RHODODENDRONS

by Harold Fearing

Reprinted with permission from the November 2009 issue of The Yak

A few days ago as I was weeding in the greenhouse - an endless task - I brushed against the foliage of a small plant and noticed a wonderful spicy fragrance. That got me to thinking. Fragrance is something we don't normally pay much attention to in rhododendrons. Only a few of the normal lepidote or elepidote rhododendrons have fragrant flowers, unlike some of the azaleas which are quite fragrant.

Of the regular hardy rhododendrons, *R. fortunei* is probably the best known fragrant species. It is usually a vigorous, large growing plant with pale pink flowers. The fragrance is subtle, not something you notice across the



R. fortunei (above) and *R. diaprepes* (below) are both members of the Fortunea subsection, members of which are often known for their clean, sweet, if somewhat subtle fragrance.



plant. Others of the Fortunea subsection, such as *R. decorum* and *R. diaprepes*, have similar fragrances.

Probably the most fragrant regular rhododendron we have in our garden is one distributed in the lower mainland as *R. rigidum* 'Bodineri'. This plant originated from Frank Dorsey. While I don't remember all the details of the story he told, the 'Bodineri' part was a name he apparently coined. The plant keys out to *R. rigidum*, and appears identical to two other clones of *R. rigidum* I have, except for the fragrance. And this is fragrance you can smell across the garden, especially on a sunny warm day. The plant covers itself with blooms as well, so it is a spectacular plant for the gar-



R. rigidum 'Bodineri'

den.

There are also several relatively tender rhododendrons which are supposed to have large and very fragrant flowers: *R. maddenii*, *R. nuttallii*, *R. dalhousiae*, and *R. edgeworthii*. I have no personal experience with these, as they are all too tender for the exposed garden we have. I think some people in more protected gardens in the lower mainland are able to grow *R. edgeworthii* successfully however.

Among the deciduous species there is more choice. One of my favorites is *R. atlanticum*. This is a smaller plant with gray green leaves. It spreads by stolons and so eventu-

eventually becomes a spreading bush with lots of stems. The flowers have a long tube with flaring petals at the end and a sweet fragrance powerful enough to smell from some feet away.



Deciduous azaleas, *R. atlanticum* (top left), *R. luteum* (centre) and *R. occidentale* (top right) can perfume an entire garden.



R. luteum is another very fragrant plant. It is a deciduous azalea, bright yellow and a native of the Caucasus area of eastern Europe. Many of the fragrant hybrid azaleas have *R. luteum* in their parentage. Our own west coast azalea *R. occidentale* can also be very fragrant, as are several of the east coast native azaleas, such as *R. viscosum*. I have seen the claim in several places in the



literature that most fragrant rhododendrons are white or pale pink. The theory is that the fragrance attracts pollinators and so there is no need for flashy colors. *R. luteum* is obviously a glaring exception to this claim. Although many of the others are pale colored, I don't really know how strong the scientific evidence for that claim is.

But enough of flowers and back to what got me thinking about fragrance in the first place. The plant I was weeding was *R. ledebourii*, considered a variety of *R. dauricum*



by some. Simply sweeping your hands through the foliage is enough to release a sweet spicy fragrance. The related species *R. sichotense*, and *R. dauricum* itself, have similarly fragrant foliage. This characteristic is also inherited by some of the *dauricum* hybrids, e. g. the well known 'PJM'. I have written

about *R. ledebourii* before. It is a native of Siberia, so is completely hardy, and is also one of the earliest to bloom, even in late January or early February.

Several other small leaved species share a similar fragrant foliage, for example *R. sargentianum*, and its selected form 'Maricee', and the similarly flowered *R. primuliflorum*. Among the somewhat larger-leaved plants, the foliage of *R. cinnabarinum*, with its attractive blue green foliage, is supposed to have a distinctive spicy smell when crushed. However I could not detect this, at least on a cold November afternoon, in any of the several clones I have, except for *R. xanthocodon*, which is now considered a subspecies of *R. cinnabarinum*. Again according to the books, *R. hippophaeoides* is another common species with fragrant foliage. A narrow leaved version, var. *occidentale*, which I recently got from Sue Klapwijk, does seem to be fragrant, but the more common wider-leaved clone 'Haba Shan' has no smell that I could detect.

So, while fragrance of either flowers or foliage would probably not be the primary reason for choosing a particular plant, it is another dimension to our enjoyment of rhododendrons. And at this time of year, when you are crawling around on hands and knees weeding, a few plants with fragrant foliage can certainly make the task more bearable.



The small-leaved *R. ledebourii* (previous page), *R. dauricum album* (bottom left), and *R. sichotense* (top), all have aromatic leaves whose spicy sweet fragrance wafts up when the leaves are brushed or when the sun warms them. *R. xanthocodon* (bottom) is a member of the *cinnabarinum* family, whose lovely blue-green leaves have a bracing resinous odour if rubbed or crushed.





Key to the Symbols



General Meetings
Garth Homer Center
811 Darwin Street
Saanich



VRS Show and Sale
Cadboro Bay United Church
2625 Arbutus Road
Saanich



Propagation Group Meetings
(contact Ken Webb to be added to the email list.)



Summer Picnic
See May Newsletter for details on location and time

T Garden Tours

30 ARS Convention Brehmen, Germany
Meeting and Tours

2010

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Date: 07/2010