

The Victoria Rhododendron Society *Newsletter*



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

January 2011 Thirty-First Year of Publication

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MEETING 7:30

MONDAY, January 9, 2011

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

Speaker: Agnes Lynn, “Subalpine Flowers of Vancouver Island and Nearby.”

Agnes Lynn is a long-standing member of the VRS.

She has talked to us previously about the local wildflowers near sea-level, but what does one do when those flowers are finished for the season?

We visit other areas at higher elevations and recreate spring once again. The wildflower shows can go on into August if you go high enough. Agnes will show you some flowers close to home on Vancouver Island and a few from farther away.

Propagation Workshop Oct 30 2010

By Bill McMillan

More than 40 participants got together at the home of Ken and Madeleine Webb for the propagation workshop. Ken had a large tarp in place to shield us from the weather but luckily it was a fine day. The workshop was run by members of the Victoria Rhododendron Society's Propagation Group with an informal format designed to stimulate participation and generate lots of questions.

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REFRESHMENTS

Please let Betty Gordon know at 250-479-0210 if you are coming to the meeting and bringing goodies.

Karen Burns and Dave Mackas, Carolyn and Tony Marquardt, Moe and Johanna Massa, Peggy McCarter, Bill and Theresa McMillan, and Joan McMurray.

Please wrap your cookies or snacks. Coffee and tea are supplied.

Assistance in setting out the food, milk and sugar, napkins and helping Betty Gordon serve coffee and tea, and helping in the kitchen cleanup is really appreciated.

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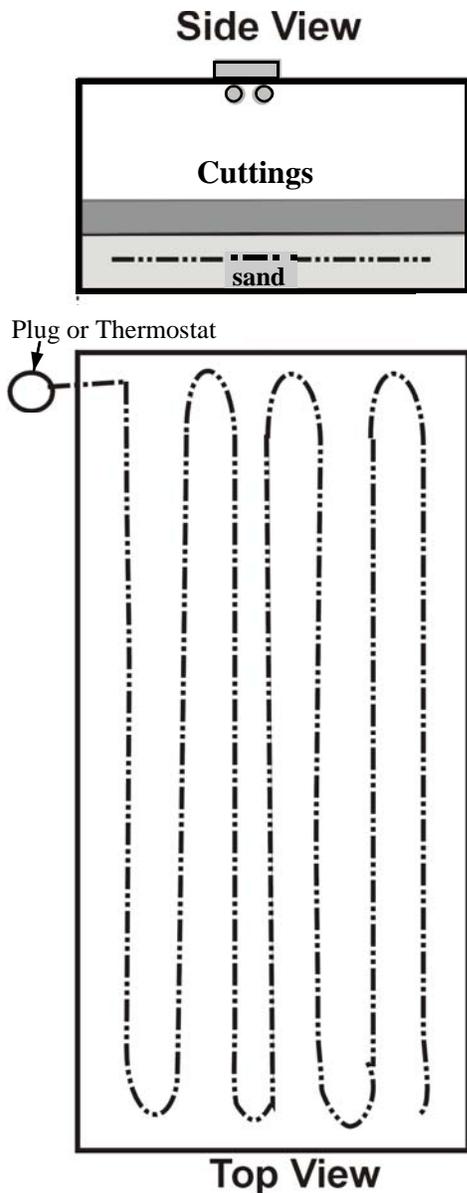


A typical propagation box

Topics covered included various methods of propagating plants (seeds, cuttings, and grafts), hybridizing, and practice in taking cuttings.

Propagation boxes are highly varied but most have some common characteristics. Dean Goard and Bill McMillan described those used by members of the VRS Propagation Group and showed photos. The following sketch shows the layout of a typical propagation box. It features a sand layer base, heating coils, a propagation layer, a light source and an enclosure to maintain 100% humidity. Dean also brought a mock-up propagator constructed by Mo Massa. There was lots of interest in Archie Brown's tabletop model, and in the fact that he had good results with it! The following figure illustrates a typical set-up but much simpler ones can be effective.





Legend

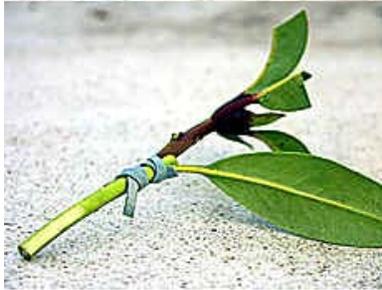
--- Heating Cable

☐⊙⊙ Fluorescent Light

Dean also showed various stages in growing rhododendrons from seed. His set-up is shown here. Seed pods brown then split when the seeds are mature. You can order seeds, or pick pods from one of your plants that have been fertilized (they swell in size) and put them in an en-

velope or container to dry. Once they split, the seeds will release or you can shake them out into your envelope. You sprinkle the seeds onto a moist medium (1:1 peat and perlite as an example) and cover them to ensure 100 percent humidity is maintained. Place the container in a warm place or on a heating pad until germination occurs (generally a few weeks). Once the dicots (the early two leaves) are replaced by the first 'true' leaves, transplant into separate containers with more spacing between the seedlings. Some people use weak liquid fertilizer once germination has occurred (I diluted 20:20:20). Once the seedlings are 1 to 2 cm in size, they can be moved to 4" pots. Weak plants are discarded at each transplanting stage. When they 'fill' the pot, move them as individual plants into larger containers until they mature enough to be planted in the ground. The process takes several years.

Ken Webb described his methods of taking and preparing cuttings for propagation. For most rhododendrons, cuttings should be taken from this year's growth that has hardened but not turned brown. A simple bend test and the color help you decide which to try. Thinner branches seem to root better. The propagation mix is prepared and again 1:1 peat (or perhaps coconut fibre?) and perlite are often used. The cutting is prepared by stripping all but 3 leaves, then cutting those in half. Then make a fresh cut, wound the lower centimetre to the cambium layer, dip it in hormone (Stimroot #3 for rooting hardwood cuttings is a good choice), tap off any excess and insert into the propagation mix. Do not forget recording information about the cutting and labels is critical. Do not rely on your memory! Typical set-ups feature bottom heat and a cover to maintain 100 percent humidity. Most of the group set the temperature at 65 to 70° F. Rooting can occur in a few weeks but it generally takes several months, If the cutting stays green,



there is always a chance that it will root (some are stubborn and take 1 to 3 years!).

Don Whittle talked about grafts and demonstrated a nurse graft using R. 'Cunningham's White' as root-stock. As he says: "A nurse graft is similar to other

grafts, except that the graft is made to an unrooted cutting of Cunningham's White. The advantage of this method is the easy manipulation of the root stock/scion combination. For a successful result, the cutting must root and the graft must also be successful.

As demonstrated, the scion is carefully sliced to produce a two-sided wedge about one inch long. The root stock, with potential active growth sites removed, is trimmed and then partially split to receive the wedge-shaped scion end. The scion is inserted into the root stock cut in such a manner that the cambium layers of the two parts are touching. The union is secured with a grafting rubber band and can, if desired, be protected by grafting compound. The root stock cutting/scion combination is then inserted into propagating medium for rooting. With luck, the Cunningham's White will root and the scion start new growth. The portion of the root stock cutting above the graph can then be cut off, creating a new plant."

In these photos, the method used is slightly different but the concept is the same. Cambium layers must be touching for the scion and root-stock to 'fuse'.

(the photos are from http://www.rhodoland.nl/propagating_grafting.en.htm)

Lloyd Gilmore described techniques for producing hybrids and the objectives of his hybridizing program. One of Lloyd's goals is to produce small, scented double flowered plants. He brought some examples of plants he has produced.

The participants got hands-on experience. They took their own cuttings in Ken and Madeleine's extensive garden, prepared them then put them into Ken's propagator, where it is hoped they will root. Once they are rooted, people can come, pot them up then take them home.

The day ended with a pleasant dinner get-together at Fonbo's Restaurant where we filled up on Chinese fare. A great day, fortuitous weather and a wonderful response!

General Propagation Notes

Gathered by Bill McMillan

Planting Mediums

For Seeds

3 Peat to 1 Perlite; 100% humidity; warm spot (J Harvey). One person also adds 100:1 fertilizer (15-10-5) and gradually goes to 50:1 as the seedlings sprout

1 Peat to 1 Perlite (Don Whittle); fill tray ½ full with moist Peat Moss as the base ½ Peat ¼ Screened Bark ¼ Sewage Sludge (Clint Smith)

Peat. Some people cover the seeds with ground sphagnum moss (I don't); some use Damp Off or other fungicides (I don't)

Cuttings Mix

Many and varied:

Perlite (1) + Peat (1) + Gravel (1) or 'Sharp' Sand or 40% Peat 40% Perlite 20% Coarse Sand

Sand (1) Peat Moss (1) Perlite (1)

Perlite (1) Vermiculite (1)
Peat (40%) Perlite (40%) Grit (20%)
Sharp Sand only
Perlite only

Potting/Growing-On Mix

Soil/compost (3) bark (1) Sand (1)
Sunshine#4 (50) + Perlite 40) + Bark Mulch (10)

Soil-Sawdust-Peat-Dolomite-Perlite-Vermiculite + Osmocote

Peat (1/4) Perlite (1/4) Potting Soil (1/2)
*Some people are now using coconut fibre instead of Peat

Timing of Cuttings

Deciduous Azaleas – June-July seems to be best

Evergreen azaleas – August

Rhododendrons – depends partly on when the new growth timing. Take them after the new growth hardens but before it browns and becomes woody. Those with early growth generally are ready sooner. I start in September and have taken cuttings as late as February. One member found that Lem's Cameo cuttings are best taken in January.

*Cuttings taken during damp weather or after a rain seem to root better. Conversely, if you are at home, water the plants a day or so before you take the cuttings. Thinner shoots may root easier than thicker ones (not very scientific but it seems to be so). Some soak the cuttings in a weak bleach solution before putting them in the cuttings mix (RSF I think). Try cuttings over a period of time if rooting is difficult. Nurse grafts on Cunningham's White may be worthwhile in some cases.

Fertilizing

One approach is to fertilize shortly after you are sure the cuttings are rooted. Use ¼ strength (Norm Todd) of 10-8-6. I use a weak 20-20-20 solution on cuttings and seeds. You might want to emphasize phosphorus for root growth.

Layering

Simple – Summer, light sandy soil best – add Peat Moss if too sandy, strip leaves for 4” either side of the soil contact point, wound and use a pebble to keep it open, pin to the soil. Bury the contact so it is in the dark and keep the area moist. Takes 1 to 2 years for rooting. Leave in place for 1 or 2 months after the connection to the mother plant is severed.

Air Layering - Similar approach but start in the spring. Enclose the wound in a medium like sphagnum moss and secure it in a waterproof covering to keep the area moist.

Tips

To moisten Peat moss that has dried out, pour on boiling water until it is wet. Top it up monthly to maintain moisture level (Don Whittle).

When you put seedlings out, put them in a North-facing spot with no direct sunlight.

Don't overdo the rooting compound – shake or tap off the excess amount. Too much may cause calluses to form, not roots (some debate about the result but all agree to avoid too much hormone).

Use of lights varies for cuttings but Don W uses a fluorescent light fixture with 1 warm white and 1 daylight bulb 2” above the plants. He keeps them on for 14 hours. Ken runs them 16 hours, Dean 24.

The ARS is a source for seeds

Bottom temperature should be between 60 and 70 degrees F.

Don puts his seedlings outside in August in the shade but allows sun in the winter.

Cleanliness is critical. I wash my propagator

sand in a weak bleach solution before I start taking any cuttings.

For grafting, the root stock is often Cunningham's White; some use Polar Bear or calophytum.

Use a weak 20-20-20 solution to fertilize seedlings and plants in pots.

Best to label each cutting if possible – mix-ups are very frustrating.

When you pot them up, acclimatize the rooted cuttings before you put them outside.

The Christmas Pot luck Dinner, December 6, 2010

By Theresa McMillan

Neither a nasty wind storm (as on November 15) or freezing winds and snow (as between November 19-25) hampered our Christmas party. We had the usual dark cold December night when some 51 members attended our annual pot luck dinner. We entered the brightly lit hall filled with fragrant evergreen table decorations and raffle offerings.

There was an area where non-perishable food stuffs for the Mustard Seed were gathered. The tables for the raffles included plant material, crafts, wines, jams and cookies ready to be bid on.

While people tried to decide on their raffle items, several sipped Dean Goard's punch or drank tea or coffee prepared by Betty Gordon. At the back of the room, the dinner tables carried a tasty variety of savories, salads, casseroles, meats and desserts to tempt us. However, the first tables to sample the feast had to solve a crossword puzzle provided by Peter Barriscale. The challenge brought a lot of chat and laughter.

After the dinner came the raffle, with the proceeds going to the Mustard Seed to help families in need.

Finally, Jacqui Bradbury, our President, presented the A.R.S. Bronze Medal to Moe and Johanna Massa for all their services to the Victoria Rhododendron Society, the raffle, refreshments, garden visits and hundreds of neatly labeled trusses of rhodo flowers for our Show and Sales.

Just as people were preparing to leave, one person at each table was able to take home the evergreen and berries centerpiece, so artistically arranged by the group of volunteers led by Jacqui.



Johanna and Moe Massa, ARS Bronze Medallists



John Hawkins and Archie Brown enjoying a talk



Thurston Lacalli, Lois Blackmore, Norma Senn, Mary Kay Lacalli, Roy Blackmore and others puzzling over the crossword.



Sharon Joseph buying raffle tickets from Bill Gordon



**The Christmas Pot Luck Dinner,
December 6, 2010.**



Joyce Parker, Heather Dickman, Joe Harvey and others checking out the raffle tables.

Beat the February blues by attending the Western Weekend Study Weekend in February 25-27, 2011.

Along the Silk Road

2011 Western Winter Study Weekend
 February 25-27, 2011
 at the Mary Winspear Centre
 2243 Beacon Avenue
 Sidney-by-the-Sea, British Columbia



Speakers:

Stephanie Ferguson: expert rock and crevice gardener from Calgary, Alberta

Vojtěch Holubec: author of *The Caucasus and its Flowers*, consummate grower of alpiners and seed collector

John Massey: owner of Ashwood Nurseries, UK ; renowned for his expertise on Asian and European hepaticas

Hans Roemer: bulb collector and ecologist

Yvonne Rorison: avid photographer of flowers on all continents

Bill Terry: Meconopsis expert and author of *Blue Heaven – Encounters with the Blue Poppy*

Dr. Bobby J. Ward: from Raleigh, North Carolina, author of *The Plant Hunter's Garden*

Plus: Workshops, Plant Sales, Seed Sales, Displays, Open Gardens

Registration: Early Bird (before January 28, 2011) \$135. After Jan 28/2011 fee is \$155.

Hosted by the Vancouver Island Rock & Alpine Garden Society

For more information and Registration Form, please visit the website

www.virags.ca/winterstudyweekend

Or contact: Registrar – Kathy Lalli (kathylalli@hotmail.com, 250-478-9251)