

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



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

March 2008

Twenty-eighth Year of Publication

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web page – <http://victoriarhodo.ca>

Meeting

7:30 pm Monday, March 3, 2008

Garth Homer Centre, 811 Darwin Street, Victoria BC

**SPEAKERS: Janet Gardner/Sharon Tillie
“Rhododendron Adventures in Washington State”**

March Refreshments:

Evert Vaneerden, Ken and Madeleine Webb, Evelyn Weesjes, Ellen Wellborn, Bob and Betty Whitlock and Don and Joyce Whittle 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 February's Talk

By Theresa McMillan

Agnes Lynn's talk on Wild Rhododendrons of Vancouver Island was filled with beautiful pictures taken by Dave Lynn and fascinating details about the uncommon rhododendrons found in remote areas, like Rhododendron Lake near Qualicum, and an area near Jordan River.

The white *R. albiflorum* is a high-altitude plant (generally over 3000') and can be found on a ridge above China Beach near

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**VRS 2008 SHOW AND
PLANT SALE**
Second call for volunteers
MARK YOUR CALENDAR
SET-UP April 25th
SHOW and SALE April 26th
Volunteer sheets will be circulated at the March meeting

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Jordan River and in several other high altitude areas on Vancouver Island such as Mount Washington. The pink R. *Macrophyllum* can only be found at two locations on the Island, at Rhododendron Lake and in an area near Shawnigan Lake.

We found out that Labrador Tea or *Lendum groenlandicum* is now considered a Rhododendron, and is fairly common in boggy areas on the Island.

The Rhododendron Lake and ridge over China Beach areas are difficult to access, but their remoteness should help preserve many rare plants, like the Arctic starflower, *Trientalis arctica*, Round-leaved sundew, *Drosera rotundifolia*, and Douglas gentian, *Gentiana douglasiana*.

In the ridge area, there is an ecological preserve for Avalanche lilies, *erythronium montanum*, but more needs to be done. This is especially true in the increasingly popular Rhododendron Lake, with so many 4X4 vehicles to bring people there now.

The Annual General Meeting

Elections of officers for the ensuing year are scheduled to take place at the AGM to be held during the March 3rd meeting. Nominations of Gareth Shearman and Dick Pitfield have been received. Further nominations should be submitted in writing to the Chair of the Nominating Committee, Dean Goard, at least seven days in advance of the AGM, signed by the proposing member and authorized in writing by the person so nominated. Additional nominations to the Board, not to exceed two in number, may be made from the floor at the AGM. No one shall be nominated for president or vice-president until he or she has been a member of the Soci-

VRS Board

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ety for at least two years. Only full members of the ARS can vote or be elected to the Board.

THANK YOU

Belated thanks to Keiko Alkire and Norma Buckley for their help in making the wonderful table decorations for the Christmas party.

Sex Drive in Rhododendrons

By M.J. Harvey

As many of you know, Linda and I are moving to Oak Bay and in preparation we have been dispersing the more unusual plants from our Sooke property.

One large plant of *R. pachysanthum* was booked by Carol Dancer (Chief Slave Driver of the Government House Garden Volunteers) for the Government House Gardens. So in late spring 2007 a crew arrived one morning to dig and lift it. The team consisted of Carol and Bill, and Jennifer and Brian Rogers, the latter armed with his early 20th century wholesalers mechanical dolly—a piece of mechanism that has to be seen to be believed.

I've supposedly stopped making Rhododendron hybrids. I have been making plant hybrids since 1959, starting with violets, so when the *pachysanthum* and a dwarf *taliense* flowered simultaneously, the itch set in and I put *taliense* pollen on a couple of trusses of the *pachysanthum*.

The *pachysanthum* move went wonderfully and the working party drove off along Sooke Road in some degree of triumph. The plant is now settled in at Government House at the corner of a bed facing the entrance to the left. It is full of buds and will flower this spring.

After the truck left I inspected the hole and was amazed that such an awkward shrub had been moved with so little damage. In fact there was only one twig on the ground and yes, courtesy of Murphy's Law, the twig was the one with the *taliense-pachysanthum* cross on it. I thought, well I really did end my hybridization career the previous year. But for

sentimental reasons I stuck the twig in a beer bottle (antique Carlesberg) with some water and left it on the kitchen window ledge.

Some six months later, the twig was dusty and barely alive so I thought I should throw it away. I crumbled the small capsules using, pliers, sieved the detritus and found what looked like small, pale seeds. These I sowed on 3 Nov 2007 and put them on top of the hot water tank, which kept them at about 18C.

Nothing sprouted for two months but I was too busy to throw them out. Then four seedlings showed. By this time it was mid January 2008. Then by the end of January many more showed; on 4 Feb I counted over 80.

I don't know what I'm going to do with these seedlings but will keep them until they are larger and hope that other people will adopt them. Guessing from what the parents are the seedlings should develop rather smallish, heavily indumented leaves on a compact plant. I don't think there is a record of this particular cross being made previously so we shall just have to see what develops. All this goes to show that Rhododendron seed has amazing survival capabilities. Previously I have found that seed left for over ten years germinates perfectly well so the old rule of throwing seed away after a couple of years does not apply to Rhododendrons.

P.S. I know that I will not be able to entirely stop making hybrids. My most successful plants have been ones using *R. makinoi*, the Japanese long-leaved *Pontica* member. If anyone has a makinoi that will flower this year I would appreciate a little pollen. Makinoi is a difficult plant to grow and I discovered that the vigorous plant in Finnerty Gardens that is so labeled has bad pollen and is presumably a hybrid already.

Notices

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.

HELP!—Species Workshop March 15-16

Billets are needed for some up island participants of the Vancouver Island Rhododendron Species Workshops for the evening of Saturday, March 15th in Victoria. If you are willing to billet one of the participants, please call Bill McMillan at 478-3515. We are presently short THREE places. Thank you.

Life's Chosen Few

by Norman Todd

Reprinted from the October 2001 VRS Newsletter

Do you recall your years in high school and your sometime strivings for academic and social success? In my recollection, at any rate, it seems that one or two of my contemporaries managed to take everything in stride; they

understood the tricks of trigonometry intuitively, could recite Shakespeare's sonnets after one scanning and never double faulted at tennis. These people, perhaps you were one of them, were destined, it seemed, to be leaders, to flourish, and live beautiful lives.

There are a few rhododendrons that seem to have these same secrets to happy survival stamped into their genetic code. They grow and bloom and look contented and well composed year after year. 'Nancy Evans' is one such happy camper. She is a good looker and although of modest stature, wins beauty



contests at all the shows. She is consistent in her performance and manages on an everyday diet, being neither bulimic nor anorexic. She is at home in almost any garden in these parts. Her equanimity assures her acceptance by the rest of the rhododendron group. Her comportment equates to harmony, a harmony that extends to her being one of the most prolific and nurturing parents in the rhododendron community.

I would also place 'Rosamundi' in this easygoing, congenial group.

'Rosamundi' will not be the garden's valedictorian, or medal winner, but will

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shine in her season and move on smoothly from year to year. I would guess that because she starts to bloom so early in the season and is so popular and ubiquitous, she gets more notice than almost any other rhododendron. I have observed that even visitors to our part of the world who come from inhospitable places (in a horticultural sense I mean) – like Ottawa or Flin Flon – want to know who is this modest but radiant beauty, blooming in January. Furthermore, she enjoys blooming so much that she does it for three or four months. She is always modestly unassuming and unobtrusive but thoroughly reliable.



I also recall from schooldays the new arrival bursting onto the scene and taking the place by storm. A big and brassy and invincible sports jock idolized by half and feared by the rest. You could certainly claim that 'Point



Defiance' and 'Horizon Monarch' fit this caricature. If they were human they would be sent for drug testing. Their stature and strength are suspiciously enhanced. By what? they ask for no special favours. Compare the behaviours of, say, *fargesii*. *Fargesii* whimpers at the slightest threat of thirst,



rolling its leaves in premature pique. It can barely bear to breed as it may die if its swelling seedpods are not removed. I have noticed the same defect in 'Chief Paulina'. If the seed capsules are not detached – difficult procedures with the Chief as she is particularly loathe to part with them – it is probable that the twig bearing the pods will die. It has to be admitted that our super heroes 'Point Defiance' and 'Horizon Monarch' also have the rachis pretty well secured to the end of the branch but a quick snap at the right spot removes the spent blossom and I'm sure it does not hurt all that much. These two giants will grow more than a foot a year and once they start to get hair on their chins they blossom profusely every year. I could speculate that the breeders of corn will be looking at how to use their genes to give metre-long corncobs. But perhaps the cobs would be on five metre corn plants and therefore hard to harvest.

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Another, get-it-right-first-time, shiner is 'Blaney's Blue'. He could be the show-off of the class. What a power bloomer! I don't think that in my garden 'Blaney' will ever be deadheaded. It's a life's career to tackle a full deadhead. But it doesn't make any difference. There is that old chestnut about an English gardener, Lord 'So-and-So', observing that deadheading is a foolish practice – it just makes the job more onerous the next year. This does not apply to 'Blaney's Blue'. The creature will carry on showing off with thousands of blossoms no matter how it is neglected. Also, have you noticed that often when someone is not very gifted academically she will be at the top of the heap by having a keen sense of humour? 'In her attire doth show her wit, it doth so well become her.' I am thinking of 'Paprika Spiced'. Here is a seriously freckled blond who stops her audience by evoking simultaneously, mirth and sympathy. She may even elicit a

therapeutic response, as she appears to have an advanced case of chickenpox. 'Paprika Spiced' is surely a comic but she is also a cunning commercial success.

Being born with a deformity can be exploited to advantage if it is not too debilitating to one's health. 'Linearifolium' is among the most admired and all because of her genes being really messed up. I suppose some of her popularity could be due to her striking similarity to marijuana and resulting hop headed response of rhododendron illiterates. 'Linearifolium's' flower is not at all striking; it has been described as strappy. The message here, I suppose, is to use what God-given features one has to the full advantage and bask demurely in the attention generated.

Some of us react very negatively to another's BO; especially so when squeezed in a crowd, shoulder to shoulder, or more accurately, armpit to armpit. However, this is the way I like to grow my rhododendrons and in particular the ones that exude smells. I personally like the BO of almost all rhododendrons and we should remember it is there because it gives some evolutionary advantage. Stripping the leaves of russatum when doing cuttings releases an odor that I hope will be present in the afterworld. Charitopes has a fruity sweet aroma; it will please the nose of an oenophile. I used to have a plant of kongboense (now on the most wanted list) and it was fun to ask little ones to crush a leaf and tell what it smelled of. "Toothpaste", "Bubblegum", "Kool Aid" were some of the responses.

Most of us, of course, are not endowed with film star looks or stratospheric IQs. Rhododendrons, as with people, are unable to defy

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the laws of statistics. Most are right in the middle of the great giant bell curve. So the 'Anna Kruschkes' and the 'Percy Wiseman's, and the 'Dora Amateis's' will survive, as will we, contributing our two bits and being content to be among the great silent majority of the populace, paying our taxes and keeping out of trouble. We are with honour but not singularly honoured. We cut the mustard but don't leave a burning sensation. I think O. Henry had it right when he wrote: "I'm not headlined in the bills but I'm the mustard in the salad just the same."

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 24-25, 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 24 and 25- 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 24 with return to Duncan by 6 pm on May 25.

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 15. 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.

ARS Chapter Newsletters Archived Online

Every so often, we will publish a list of a few chapters of the American Rhododendron Society who archive copies of their newsletters on-line. The archived newsletters make interesting reading and you can discover the personalities, activities and events that are playing an important part in other ARS chapters.

This month, we start with the nine chapters of our district – District 1 (the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island of British Columbia)

Reading other chapter newsletters on-line can take a fair amount of time. So, pour yourself a cup of tea or coffee and open up one of the archived newsletters for an enjoyable and informative read. Perhaps you will meet some new friends or find some new activities for your chapter to try.

District 1 – British Columbia (Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island)	
Cowichan Chapter	cowichan. rhodos.ca/previous_newsletters.html
Fraser South Chapter	www.flounder.
Fraser Valley Chapter	fvrs.rhodos.ca/
Mount Arrowsmith	mars.rhodos.ca/
Nanaimo Chapter	nanaimo.
North Island Chapter	nirs.rhodos.ca/
Peace Arch Chapter	www. “Newsletter”
Vancouver Chapter	www.
Victoria Chapter	victoriarhodo. ca/newsletter/newsletter-archive.html