

# The Victoria Rhododendron Society

## *Newsletter*



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

October 2008      Twenty-eighth Year of Publication

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### Meeting

**7:30 p.m. Monday, October 6, 2008**

**Garth Homer Centre, 811 Darwin Street, Victoria, B.C.**

**Speaker: Garth Wedemire**

**" Lu Zhu - A Plant Collector's Passion "**

#### OCTOBER REFRESHMENTS

Margaret deWeese, Robin & Betsy Dening, Mary Dennis, Heather Dickman, John Dickman, Milius Douglas, Leslie Drew, Anne Allen & Ian Duncan are asked to bring wrapped refreshments to October's meeting. Please phone Nadine Minckler at 250-474-1429 to confirm. Help for Joanna Massa and Heather Dickman is always welcome.

#### Membership Renewal

It is that time of year again. Our memberships for the 2008 - 09 season are now due. If you wish to become a full member of the ARS the dues are \$50. For this you get 4 issues of the ARS Journal plus full membership in our local club, the Victoria Rhododendron Society. If you wish to be a local member only, the fee is \$25. You will not receive the Journal or be eligible to serve on our Board, but you will receive our monthly newsletter.

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If you are already a member of another ARS chapter you can join our chapter as an associate for \$10.

Please pay your dues this Fall. If you want to be an ARS member and are late with your payment you may not receive all this year's Journals.

All members are encouraged to arrange to receive our local newsletter by e-mail rather than postal mail. You get the benefit of full colour illustrations and any important updates that may be sent out between newsletters.

The fewer newsletters we have to mail the more money the club has available for other

projects.

Please remember to notify me if your postal address, phone number or e-mail address changes.

Thank you

Gareth Shearman, Membership  
shearman@victoria.bc.ca  
250-479-2851

## REVIEW OF SEPTEMBER'S TALK by Theresa McMillan

Dr. Brian White's talk, "Plant collecting in Vietnam with Peter Wharton", was an excellent beginning to the new season of VRS monthly meetings.

Brian White and the late Peter Wharton enjoyed imagining themselves as adventurers fighting through rain forests and climbing perilous mountains to find rare and exotic plants, or even plants new to botanists. The two men would be like the great plant hunters of yore.

In 2004, the men traveled to North Vietnam, the Sa Pa area, the Huang Lien National Park and the Fan Si Pan range.

Mount Fan Si Pan is the highest mountain in southern Asia, and the south slopes range from subtropical forest to temperate broadleaved evergreen forest to upper cool temperature forest to wind sheared elfin forests on exposed ridges. The flora at all levels is wonderfully diverse.

The Huang Lie National Park uses people from five ethnic minorities who live in the park to act as guides and porters. With the aid of Black Hmong porters, Brian White and Peter Wharton climbed the slopes of the Fan Si Pan range.

The trails up were almost vertical rock and tree roots, very slippery and often muddy. The rains were often incessant, but there were many moments of fleeting sunshine and discoveries of botanical joy.

We saw pictures of *R. sinofalconeri*, orchids, primulas, gentians, pleones,

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arisemias and other plants. There were many rhododendrons, some never seen before. The mountain ridges are magnets for lightning during thunderstorms. In one such storm, Brian and Peter were awakened by the violent winds, heavy rain, thunder, then explosions. The propane tank next to their tent had been hit by lightning, and created a blackened circle in

the bamboo.

In January and February, there is often snow on the peaks. Many of the plants on them could be grown in the Pacific North West. So Brian and Peter and crew carefully collected seed and leaves and flowers in an attempt to enrich our gardens. They had many adventures finding those special plants.

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**IN MEMORY OF JAMES... Here is a reprint of an article showing James Fuller's impish sense of humour....**

### **The Tyranny of Pink**

by James Fuller - April 1999

To an outlander emigrating from almost anywhere else, the great bursts of spring colours in Victoria are surprising, even shocking, and eminently seductive. Having been raised in Winnipeg where spring lasts for 15 minutes between winter and the mosquito festival, having sojourned in various centres of Ontario whose proud boasts of vernal glories are frequently (and quite properly) compromised by visitations of sleet through mid-May, having struggled through the canyons of Chicago where spring is the time of blown hats and broken umbrellas in every street corner bin, I was wholly unprepared for the richness of the local scene. Even where the Gulf Stream blesses Northern Europe, I found the Yorkshire moors to be drab and the polders of Holland wet and grey under leaden skies in this season of hope.

Charmed by a twenty-foot pink Donation camellia blooming fiercely one April, I hastened to have it by purchasing my new home. Proudly at first but just diligently now, I collect a half bushel of fallen blooms every day for the whole month, every year. Gradually, I've noticed that each succeeding spring becomes pinker. With the passage of time, my

older eyes appear to undergo a quantum strain in this season. Is it pink trauma? Pink is ubiquitous in Victoria. Strong pink, light pink, streaky pink, browned pink from stale but stubborn blossoms, nauseating pink, screaming pink.

Of the several rhododendrons in our garden, Rosamunde is the healthiest. Year by year it gains vigour; in midwinter it teases with a blossom or two, increasing momentum to a full crescendo of colour around Easter. Its lush foliage shows no sign of mildews nor the weevilling of lesser breeds. That its colour is pink would be barely bearable, but for its situation at the garden entrance beside a flourishing forsythia. Oh, the horror of pink juxtaposed with bright yellow! Visitors are polite though undoubtedly undone by a painful transit. The regular postman usually books off sick for the duration of these bloomings.

Is there no merciful prospect of relief somewhere, somehow, from this oppressive tyranny of pink? For now, we can only shade our eyes and endure.



**R. Rosamundi**

**We miss you James!**



**Judy Gordon receiving the George Fraser memorial trophy for the best Vancouver Island hybrid in the 2008 spring Show**

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**POTENTIAL VRS SHOW  
SITES: Cadboro Bay United  
Church? Glendale Gardens?**

Due to problems getting a suitable date at Glendale gardens for this coming spring, the VRS Board has booked the Cadboro Bay United Church for our set-up and show on April 23-24, 2009. Thus there will be no need for discussion on the choices at the October meeting.

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**Peter Wharton Memorial Fund**

As many readers know, Peter Wharton, curator of the David C. Lam Asian Garden at the UBC Botanical Garden, died in June 2008.

The Garden has established a memorial fund to honour Peter. Please read the letter from the garden's acting director, Douglas Justice, below:

“Peter Wharton had a long and productive career with the UBC Botanical Garden. Throughout the past 30 years, he was instrumental in developing the David C. Lam Asian Garden, one of the highlights of the Botanical Garden.

In honour of his contributions to horticulture, and in consultation with his family, we have established the Peter Wharton Memorial Fund. We would like to grow this fund to be able to host an annual lecture that would bring a distinguished speaker to lecture on topics such as plant conservation and biodiversity. We feel this would be a fitting tribute to Peter, who will be remembered for his love of plants.”

If you would like to contribute to the Peter Wharton Memorial Fund, please see below for instructions. Questions can be directed to Maryn Ellis, Development Officer, UBC Annual Fund, [maryn.ellis@ubc.ca](mailto:maryn.ellis@ubc.ca) or 604-822-5345.

Donate by cheque: Cheques should be made out to the University of British Columbia with Peter Wharton Memorial Fund written in the memo section.

Mail to:

UBC Annual Giving  
Attn: Maryn Ellis  
500-5950 University Boulevard  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z3

Online by credit card:

[Http://www.supporting.ubc.ca/giving-options/commemorative.php](http://www.supporting.ubc.ca/giving-options/commemorative.php)

Indicate Peter Wharton Memorial Fund in the “I prefer to donate to” field. You should also add Peter Wharton in the “Name of Person you Wish to Commemorate” field.

Donate by phone:

604-822-8900

Toll free in North America at 1-877-717-GIVE

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**VRS GARDEN TOURS**

Our club is thinking of having paid Garden Tours as a way of fund raising. Please be prepared to discuss the pros and cons at our October meeting.

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**Pathogens: Not All *Phytophthora* are Born Equal!**

**Source: The Internet**

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*Phytophthoras* are mostly pathogens of dicotyledons, and are relatively host-specific parasites. Many species of *Phytophthora* are plant pathogens of considerable economic importance. *Phytophthora infestans* was the infective agent of the potato blight that caused the Great Irish Famine (1845-1849). Plant diseases caused by this genus are difficult to control chemically, thus resistant cultivars are grown as a management strategy. Research beginning in the 1990s has placed some of the responsibility for European forest die-back on the activity of imported Asian *Phytophthoras*.<sup>[1]</sup>

Other important *Phytophthora* diseases are:

- *Phytophthora alni* – causes alder root rot
- *Phytophthora cactorum* – causes rhododendron root rot affecting rhododendrons, azaleas and causes bleeding canker in hardwood trees
- *Phytophthora cinnamomi* - causes cinnamon root rot affecting woody ornamentals including arborvitae, azalea, Chamaecyparis, dogwood, forsythia, Fraser fir, hemlock, Japanese holly, juniper, Pieris, rhododendron, Taxus, white pine, and American chestnut
- *Phytophthora fragariae* - causes red root rot affecting strawberries
- *Phytophthora palmivora* - causes fruit rot in coconuts and betel nuts

- *Phytophthora ramorum* – infects over 60 plant genera and over 100 host species - causes Sudden Oak Death<sup>[2]</sup>

*Phytophthora quercina* – causes oak death

*Phytophthora sojae* - causes soybean root rot.

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***Phytophthora ramorum* – the cause of Sudden Oak Death**

**Symptoms:** Leaf spots are irregular and necrotic and usually are on leaf edges or tips. Infected leaves usually fall off. Spots are easily confused with leaf scorch, chemical damage, or various mechanical injuries. Spotting symptoms due to various *Phytophthora* species are essentially the same. Branch cankers are shiny black but not sunken. Usually the tip dies back, and the branch defoliates.

**Rhododendron -- *Phytophthora ramorum* Blight**

Note the numerous necrotic leaves.  
(Photo by Jay W. Pscheidt, 1991)



## Winter Sun in Bloom

by Alec McCarter December 2002

We are now at that time of year when cloud and rain will soon replace the unreliable sun. No matter. Every year since Peggy planted it, and starting in early October, Mahonia x "Winter Sun" has brightened the dark days with great clusters of bright racemes of tiny flowers. Like the rays of the sun, each shaft of yellow radiates outward from the center to make a wide disc of light. Each disc is held aloft by sturdy stems well-clothed in long, prickly leaves of dark and shiny green. It has already started to bloom and it will continue through the winter and into March. Unlike the sun, its light is unaffected by weather. It survived the freezes of November 11, 1985 and February 1, 1989. Under the heavy, crushing snows of December, 1996, it bowed, but did not break. It bent to the ground, but when the snow melted, it sprang back up and once again its cheery bloom spread warmth and joy. In contrast, some of our rhododendrons suffered badly. "Cotton Candy" broke off at ground level. A low and spreading Acer japonicum was split from top to bottom requiring surgery to put it back together.

But Mahonia "Winter sun" is more than just a replacement for its namesake. Situated close to the bird-feeder, it has provided a refuge and shelter for countless juncos, sparrows and house finches. Except, when it was young and thin, its sturdy growth and prickly leaves have discouraged predators. When it was just a youth, a Cooper's hawk burst recklessly through the shrub, clawed-feet first. There was a flurry of feathers and leaflets, but startled birds at the feeder escaped. Anna's hummingbird finds nourishment in the nectar of the sweet-smelling flowers. Hordes of bushtits send down showers of tiny yellow petals as they forage for something edible along the clusters of flowers. One winter, a wood warbler (Townsend's) eked out a living for months using "Winter Sun" as a source of food and shelter. The bird was perfectly camouflaged with markings of brilliant yellow, green, and dusky olive matching the shrub's flowers, leaves and dark shadows.

When at long last the stalks of flowers have done their duty, dark-blue berries with a heavy bloom enlarge and ripen along each stem. If these are not picked, they soon attract hordes of robins, including mottled-breasted young. Last spring, a hungry flock of cedar wax-wings joined them and soon no berries were left for us to pick.

These berries, if cooked and squeezed through a muslin bag, make a dark-red juice, sweet and sour. It will not gel without added sugar and pectin, but then it makes a

delicious spread for bread. An acquaintance makes wine from the juice, and by freezing it to remove water, concentrates it to make a delicious liqueur.

After the berries, a new delight is the tuft of bronzy foliage that sprouts from the top of each terminus of a trunk. Each new leaf presents ten or so pairs of leaflets along the stem terminating in a single leaflet. And each tuft is comprised of ten or more leaves. It is a magnificent sight.

"Winter Sun" is a cross between *M. Iofariifolia* and *M. japonica* (sometimes named *Berberis* instead of *Mahonia*). A similar plant is *M. media* x "Charity". At one time, we had both, but "Charity" died of thirst and too much sun during a long hot and dry summer. Its requirements for health appear to be different from those of our native *M. aquifolia* and *M. nervosa*. Some shade and more water might have kept "Charity" alive. Never mind, "Winter Sun" is as big a plant as the scale of our garden will permit – another would be too much.

We do still have *M. japonica* and it is thriving. It is definitely japonica and *M. bealei* – its leaves are long and narrow and its flowering racemes are long and loose, even pendulous, in contrast to *bealei*'s shorter, thicker and wider leaves and leaflets. Each year, japonica becomes larger and more beautiful. Like "Winter Sun", it brightens each day and persists through the winter. These are two shrubs that we could not be without.

Reprinted with thanks from January 2002 University of Victoria Finnerty Gardens Newsletter.

