

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



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MAY 2009 Twenty-ninth Year of Publication

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**Meeting 7:30 p.m.
Monday, May 4, 2009
Garth Homer Centre, 811 Darwin Street, Victoria, B.C.
Speaker: Joe Harvey "Reminiscences of an Out of
Control Hybridizer"**

REFRESHMENTS

Dick and Peggy Pitfield, Gillian Rhodes, Jennifer Rogers, Rhonda Rose Norma Senn and Gareth and Mae Shearman are asked to bring wrapped refreshments to May's meeting.

Please phone Johanna Massa at 250-642-5491 to confirm.

Help for Johanna and Heather Dickman is always welcome.

NEWS FLASH!

Theresa McMillan is ill and in the hospital. The Newsletter was completed by Bill McMillan and lacks some of the normal features. Theresa should be recovered in time to prepare the June Newsletter.

A review of the April talk by Ted Irving will be in the June Newsletter.

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THE SHOW IS OVER! Well done everyone, it was first class despite the rotten winter and slow spring. Congratulations to the Show Committee with Chair Lois Blackmore and a special thanks to the many outstanding volunteers – it would not go without you!

The generous donations made by members to the Raffle and Silent Auction are gratefully acknowledged. The operating costs of the club stem largely from the Show and Sale and the donations are vitally important! THANK YOU.

Helleborines—a personal view

By Theresa McMillan

When I read Joe Harvey's article on epactic helleborines, I wondered what the plant looked like. First, I checked in two books at home: Pojar and Mackinnon's *Plants of Coastal British Columbia, including Washington, Oregon and Alaska*, and C. P. Lyons and Bill Merilees *Trees, Shrubs and Flowers to Know in British Columbia*. I had no luck.

Then I used my computer and did a Google search for "helleborine". There it was, but the photos of the plant didn't look familiar. Then I remembered reddish-brown stalks that I have been weeding under the rhododendrons at Glendale Gardens for several summers. A closer look at the photos: yes, helleborines in seed!

Michael Dowling, the head gardener at Glendale, confirmed this discovery. He pointed out the place where a particularly fine crop of helleborines comes every year. They are near the upper entrance to the Takata Gardens, along the gravel path on the other side of the rhododendron garden.



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Oddthoughts 3

By Joe Harvey

English/Spanish Problems

I've just moved to a much smaller and older house and garden in Victoria, B.C. In the garden I aim to plant some of the hybrid rhododendrons, peonies, hellebores and magnolias I have developed over the past 20 years. Before I can get anything into the ground, many of the existing shrubs and herbs have to be removed. Smaller shrubs are being donated to the Government House gardens' plant sale, larger ones will be chipped. The drifts of snowdrops and crocuses are absolutely charming and will stay.

The problem is a dense carpet of aggressive bluebells. It is apparent that at some time in the past—the house was built in 1930—someone put in a few bluebells. Bluebells are the rabbits of the bulb world. They multiply.



Hyacinthoides hispanica

What are bluebells? Eliminate for the time the delicate Scottish bluebell, *campanula roundifolia*, of the moors and cliffs. I like those. The ones in excess are the bulbous plants native to Western Europe and North Africa. In their ancestral woodlands, they paint the glades

with a haze of cobalt blue during their massed flowering in spring. I loved them when I lived in England. In B.C. we have the camas occupying the same niche but flowering maybe three weeks later.

Let me digress with their generic name; it is one

of those confusing messes. When Linnaeus first classified bluebells in his 1753 book, he grouped them with hyacinths and *hyacinthus*. But they are not really hyacinths so they got called *endymion*, which I rather like, but for technical reasons that name had to be abandoned. They were transferred unhappily to *scilla*, another genus of blue-flowered bulbs. The search was ended when someone said, well they “look a little bit like a hyacinth”, put that into Latin and came up with *hyacinthoides*. This is the current and probably the final name. As me how it is pronounced some day.

The reason scientists have been arguing for centuries about the name are the bulbs. The bulbs are odd. Instead of being composed of readily separable leaf bases, like onions, the bulbs are fairly solid chunks of tissue with no outer skin and made up with partly fused leaf bases.

This peculiar bulb certainly helps when one is digging one up because in the absence of any protective skin, it is shining white against the soil. It is also full of slime, which helps it resist summer droughts and makes it hard to kill. The two main species of bluebells are *h. non-scripta* (‘not scribbled on’, i.e. no flower markings), the English bluebell, and *H. hispanica*, the Spanish bluebell. And how do you tell one from the other?

Bluebells:	Spanish	English
Anthers	Blue	Cream
Stamens in	3 high, 3 low	Same level in Flower tube
Petal tips	Straight	Recurved
Flowers	Hang to one side	Equally distributed

In many gardens there are intermediates. This is because both species have been planted in the past, and bees have moved pollen from one to the other. The two are quite infertile, but the hybrid seed germinates readily and the resulting



Common Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, syn. *Endymion non-scriptus*, *Scilla non-scripta*)

hybrids are quite vigorous.

My cynical impression is that the seed germinates 100%. Initially it forms a pea-sized bulb which then produces a 'sinker'—a shoot going downwards, which produces the new bulb at its tip. By repeating this process for a few years the bulbs drag themselves down to, say, 9 inches. This fact and the large numbers make cleaning up an old garden a laborious chore.

How to get rid of bluebells? Digging with a trowel is ineffective because most often you leave the bulb while breaching off the shoot. A good spade and a strong back will dig up some but even so the deeper bulbs often win. Continually chopping off the leaves over many years will weaken the plants and eventually cause their demise.

Timing is important. I was advised by a plant physiologist how to eliminate bracken fern with its deep rhizomes by spraying it with RoundUp

just as the young foliage reached its maximum spread. At this point the plant has exhausted its underground food stores, but has not yet recharged the rhizome for the next year. A similarly timed approach may work for bluebells—but I doubt it.

I was explaining my problem to Ian Back one day, and he said he had the solution for getting out deep bulbs. What is more, he brought it around the next day for me to try. It is the 'Pro Weeder' produced by Radius Garden (www.RadiusGarden.com), and very well designed it is.

The weeder consists of a narrow blade, under 2" wide, almost semi-circular, about 11" long, made of reinforced hardened stainless steel. This widens above to a triangular section forming a footrest for forcing the blade into the ground. A coated steel shaft ends in a ring handle and provides the leverage to haul up the bulb. Because of its shape, I call it the bikini spade. Works like a charm. Problem solved.

UpComing Sales & Garden Visits

Plant-a-Holics Sale

Sunday May 17th (9 -12 pm)

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.

The **Victoria Lily Society** will be holding the 12th annual "Summer Scentsation" Garden Show and Plant Sale on **Saturday July 4th** from 10 am to 3:30 pm at the Cadboro Bay United Church Hall, 2655 Arbutus Road. Highlights include a display of early

summer garden flowers and ornamental lilies, floral arrangements, flower arranging demonstrations, and a general plant sale (to include potted lilies). Entries by the general public are welcome for both the judged competitions and the non-judged displays. Admission is by donation. An elegant tea (with homemade sweets, scones and jam) will be available for \$4.00. Free ample on-site parking.

Show Handbook URL: <http://www.members.shaw.ca/lilynet/vicilil/2009showhandbook.pdf>



Sale Plants



Lloyd Gilmore's Display of his Hybrids

WORLD ROSE FESTIVAL

The World Rose Festival is a one-time indoor flower event. Buy your tickets and get planning your week of being surrounded by beautiful roses!

Mark your calendar now to attend the World Rose Festival 2009, from June 19 to 21 at the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre, Vancouver, BC, Canada!

To buy tickets, visit their [online ticket sales site](#) or go to any Garden Works store

World Rose Festival
www.worldrosefestival.com
 World Rose Convention
www.worldrose-vancouver2009.com



Lepidote Species

POTS NEEDED

Ken & Madeleine Webb have need of 4x5 scotch pots, and 1 gallon and 2 gallon pots. You know they would bring them back full for the raffle one day. Please contact them at 250-744-1785 if you can donate pots.



R. niveum



R. 'Edith Boulter'



Dean Goard—Propagation is fun and easy!



Fraser Trophy-Best Vancouver Island Hybrid



R. 'Trewithen Orange'



The Trophy Display