

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



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

November 2009 Twenty-ninth Year of Publication

e-mail: wtmcmillan@telus.net

web page – <http://victoriarhodo.ca>

MEETING 7:30

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2009

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

Speaker: Mike Stewart

“Hybrids and Hybridizers from the Pacific Northwest”

Mike Stewart, former president of the American Rhododendron Society, is owner of Dover Nursery specializing in rhododendrons and azaleas. The nursery is at the foot of Mount Hood in Sandy, Oregon.

In This Issue

- Notes from the Board pg. 1
- October's talk pg. 2
- Our new members pg. 2
- Oddthoughts 6 pg. 4
- Notices pg. 6,7
- VRS 2010 Registration form pg. 8

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 provide wrapped refreshments for November's meeting? Thank you in advance.

Evelyn Weesjes, Ellen Wellborn, Cathryn White, Bob and Betty Whitlock, Don and Joyce Whittle and Ann and Tom Widdowson.

Joanna would appreciate help in setting up the table, serving and cleaning up after. Please phone her at 250-642-5491 to confirm or leave a message.

NOTES FROM THE BOARD

Remember, 2010 membership renewal is now due. A mail-in registration form is on the last page, or you may renew at the November meeting.

Our Pot-luck Christmas dinner will be on December 7. The club provides a cooked ham, fruit punch, tea and coffee. We ask members A to M to bring salads or savories and members N to W to bring dessert items.

(Continued on page 2)

**VICTORIA RHODODENDRON
SOCIETY BOARD**

President:

Jacqueline Bradbury 250-389-1379
jacqbradbury@shaw.ca

2nd Vice President:

Karen Morrison 250-477-8281
bkmorrison@shaw.ca

Past President:

Bill McMillan 250-478-3515
wtmcmillan@telus.net

Treasurer:

Ann Widdowson 250-479-9167
awiddowson@shaw.ca

Secretary:

Theresa McMillan 250-478-3515
wtmcmillan@telus.net

Members-at-Large:

Peter Barriscale 250-385-3950
pbarris@shaw.ca

Lois Blackmore 250-478-6615
loisb@shaw.ca

Carolyn Marquardt 250-477.8387
tonymarquardt@shaw.ca

Calvin Parsons 250-385-1970
waterlily@shaw.ca

Gareth Shearman 250-385-4302
shearman@victoria.tc.ca

Newsletter Committee:

Theresa McMillan 250-478-3515

Joyce Whittle 250-656-7313

Calvin Parsons 250-385-1970

Website:

Arthur Ralfs 250-337-5818

Bill McMillan 250-478-3515

Calvin Parsons 250-385-1970

(Continued from page 1)

If you can, please bring a plant or craft item to donate for the Christmas Raffle. Raffle proceeds will be donated to charity.

On May 8, 2010 at our **Show and Sale**, we will be selling rhododendrons and other plants as usual. As well we would like to offer plants supplied by members, so when you are dividing plants this fall, please pot some up and label them for the May sale. The Show committee will price donated plants.

A REVIEW OF OCTOBER'S TALK
By Theresa McMillan

On October 5, Charlie Sale spoke to us about the gardens of Cornwall. The warm gulf stream washes against the shores of Cornwall and Southern Ireland, making for beautiful lush gardens. The large size and age of many of the gardens illustrate the great wealth of the former owners. The big storm of 1987 blew over many huge old trees, but opened up areas for new plantings. Some of the older gardens needed more pruning to open overgrown sections.

In a garden in western Ireland, there were tree ferns better than the ones Charlie had seen in New Zealand.

There were pictures of masses of rhododendrons in bloom, old and impressive mansions or odd looking castles, and emerald green lawns.

MEMBERS CORNER

Here we welcome them and ask new and recently joined members to tell us a little bit about themselves.

Jan DEMMELL

I have been a member for just over a year. I come with Nadine Minckler who introduced me to Rhododendrons.

There is not much to say about my garden. I have about 7 rhododendrons in my main garden and started another between our yard and my

next door neighbour's. I have a few in there now.

I am still learning the many different names. I went to the BBQ in the summer.

Florence NEWCOMBE

I joined the Victoria Rhododendron Society in the spring and attended your get-together in the summer. I greatly appreciated the friendliness of your members and went home with two plants which are now doing well in my garden

I have loved rhodos since February 1982 when a lovely early pink variety was planted in my front garden in memory of my father. Each February I look forward to its early blooms. My garden now seems to be home base to several deer and I no longer get any joy in spending money on plants only to provide breakfast for them. So far they have left my rhodos alone and since I can no longer put very much work into my garden, I have decided to have shrubs and mulch for decoration. I know very little about rhododendrons and I felt very undereducated at the Sept. (my first) meeting but I hope to pick up enough knowledge to be able to plant and maintain a few varieties in my rather shady 1/2 acre property.

Judith KAY

When the "big snow" of 1996 destroyed a large patch of bush at the top of our large property, we couldn't ignore that area any longer. It took us a few years to decide what to plant, but the area is shaded by huge old oaks and as our garden hosts herds of deer, rhodos seemed like a no-brainer.

Many of the original plants are now huge, some have died, some have been ravaged by

deer rubbing their horns against them, and we continuously seem to need to transplant them as they spread and grow. Dean Goard, one of your members, is a friend who has contributed many lovely specimens to our garden and whose passion for the plant is contagious.

I am now semi-retired and have more time to garden. I hope to make it to many meetings so that my gardening becomes more based on knowledge than enthusiasm.

Tim PEEL

I don't have a garden. However I saw my first rhodos in Boston and was impressed. I have spent the last 8 years in Korea, Japan and southern China where no rhodos are found - azaleas replacing them - even small spindly wild ones - lavender colour in April. I enjoy your meetings - the best in Victoria. I'll see you at the next meeting.

Planting or Moving Rhododendrons

By Bill McMillan

Rhododendrons can be planted or transplanted in fall, winter or early spring, provided that they are kept moist, but late fall or early winter is best. Roots require oxygen and must be well drained. The spaces between soil particles should contain air (oxygen) and not be full of water. Rainwater in freely draining soil passes through and, in doing so, drags fresh air behind it into the soil from the atmosphere above.

Always plant high. Place the root ball either in a very shallow hollow or on the surface. Add a ring of humus-rich soil or compost around the periphery. Mix in a few handfuls of canola meal or alfalfa pellets. Roots are shallow and will grow sideways into this hospitable medium. As successive rings of mulch are added year-by-year, a large flat root will develop. In time, the ground surface will tend to flatten out, but

“The Perfect Little Black Seed”

Coco Chanel once said that every woman should have the perfect little black dress, aka the cocktail dress, for social occasions. Well, as the premiere couturiere she would have said that, since she sold them. The remark came to mind (my mind wanders a lot) when last spring the heap of some three cubic yards of soil I had excavated to level the site for my new greenhouse proceeded to sprout all manner of seedlings. Let me explain.

The seeds that germinated must have been buried for many years. The lot has been cultivated since 1930 when the house was built. Among the seedlings were lamb's lettuce, rocket, bok choy, mustard greens and opium poppy. Except for the latter, these kept us in salad greens for several months. It occurred to me that these plants had evolved what could be called the Perfect Little Black Seed. They belong to several plant families, so this type of seed must have been selected by some common factor in their environment. What is that factor and why are they black?

It turns out that what these plants have in common is that they grow in disturbed sites such as flood plains, rock slides and around animal burrows. But the animal with the biggest burrows, so to speak, is man. We disturb our habitat with anything from digging sticks to spades to backhoes and even high explosives. Most of the plants being discussed originated in the ancient centres of civilization, where prehistoric humans first adopted agriculture. These include China, the Indus Valley, the Golden Crescent and regions of the Americas. Each area has contributed its distinctive suite of weeds to modern agriculture and our gardens.

The habitat pressure on these plants is to hurry up. In other words germinate/flower/seed all in a few weeks or, at the most, a few months. Speed is of the essence. These plants evolved from longer-lived perennials growing in the vicinity but occupying more stable ecosystems

some distance from settlement areas. Many of these short-lived plants are weeds, but some are crop plants; the distinction is slight - one gave rise to the other.

A disturbed habitat is hard to predict in terms of location and time. How do these plants get round the fact that their habitat may not be around next year, or indeed for many years? One strategy is to put their seeds into the soil seed bank. A seed bank is an ecological concept; it is the viable seeds buried in the soil awaiting just the right conditions to germinate and grow.

Gardeners are familiar with the idea that for a seed to germinate it requires water and warmth, but this does not apply to seed-bank weeds. These require an additional factor - light - to trigger germination.

One genus that relies on seed-banking is *Papaver*, the poppies. For millennia farmers in Europe have gone through the seasonal routine of ploughing, sowing and harvesting. The very act of ploughing brings light-sensitive seeds to the surface, ensuring a simultaneous germination of the crop and the weeds. Poppies, only one example, have a shorter life cycle than cereals, so the poppy capsules shed their seed before or during harvest time, to be ploughed under with the stubble. In this way soils accumulate large stores of viable seeds.

I remember one episode of the BBC's *Antiques Roadshow* in which an elderly lady brought in a scrap of paper left by, I think, her mother who had been an army nurse in the first world war. During a lull in the fighting the doctor in charge of the field hospital, John McCrae, sat outside looking at the shell-pocked fields and the poppies growing in them and wrote 'In Flanders fields the poppies grow...' He gave the draft of his now famous poem to a nurse and it was this sheet that turned up over 80 years later at the *Antiques Roadshow*. In the final version the 'grow' was changed to 'blow' for, I guess, poetic reasons. The nurse lived a long life but McCrae died the next year of what would now be a minor infection. As a result of the poem, the poppy *Papaver rhoeas*, was

adopted as the emblem of the Veterans' Associations.

How long does a poppy seed retain its viability? No one knows the maximum, but at least 50 years, maybe over 100. It is a difficult subject to research, considering the time spans involved.

And why black? Many seeds are dark-coloured merely as camouflage from birds and mice, but the seed-bankers have a light-activated cascade system whereby the light absorbed is amplified from a special pigment to - and my mind is fuzzy on the details - mRNA producing enzymes which release sugars from stored starch and trigger germination. I have to confess some of the seed bankers are brown but that would have ruined my title.

Does your garden have any seed-bank seeds in the soil? Oh yes, lots. When I have something precious to pot up, currently *Paeonia rockii*, I tend to buy a bale of commercial potting mix - Sunshine #4 is only one example. These are weed-free formulations which allow seedlings to get a good start.

I should mention one particular vegetable that has retained its ancestral light requirements and that is lettuce cultivar 'Black Seeded Simpson'. I have not seen it in the catalogues for some years but the original advice was 'do not cover the seed deeply'. Now you know why.

Examples of long-lived weed seeds that may be annoying you are:

Snapdragons, <u><i>Antirrhinum</i></u>
Bittercress, <u><i>Cardamine oligosperma</i></u>
Least snapdragon, <u><i>Chaenorrhinum</i></u>
Crabgrasses, <u><i>Digitaria</i></u>
Foxglove, <u><i>Digitalis purpurea</i></u>
Sunspurge, <u><i>Euphorbia helioscopia</i></u>
Wall lettuce, <u><i>Lactuca muralis</i></u>
Nipplewort, <u><i>Lapsana communis</i></u>
Purple toadflax, <i>Linaria purpurea</i>
Poppies, <u><i>Papaver dubium</i></u> etc
Pearlwort, <u><i>Sagina apetala</i></u>



Wall lettuce, *Lactuca muralis*

Photo by Leo Michels -Source: <http://www.imagines-plantarum.de/>



Sunspurge, *Euphorbia helioscopia*

UPCOMING LECTURE

The Victoria Hardy Plant Group is pleased to present

John Massey of the famous **ASHWOOD NURSERY** in the UK

at our 2009 *Elizabeth England Memorial Lecture*

TOPIC: *Seasons in the Garden at Ashwood Nurseries*

DATE: Tuesday November 17, 2009

TIME: 7 PM

VENUE: Salvation Army Citadel
(4030 Douglas just north of
Mackenzie Avenue - Google Map at-
tached)

TICKETS: \$15 Available through all Dig
This stores in the Greater Victoria area,
as well as VHS and Hardy Plant Group
regular meetings

Ashwood Nurseries specializes in Anemone pavonina, camellias, conifers, cyclamens, heliobores, hepaticas, hydrangeas, lewisias, Primula auricular, salvias and snowdrops (www.ashwoodnurseries.co.uk).

Dan Hinkley, famed US West Coast plantsman, is quoted as recently writing: "Ashwood, a nursery I consider to be the best in existence today. Immaculate. Talented. Consumed. I always leave feeling horribly inadequate (suicidal is more appropriate) yet enormously grateful for the time and plants."

FYI - The Salvation Army Citadel, the site of this year's Elizabeth England lecture, has very comfortable padded seating, and multitudes of free parking.

For further information, please contact Margaret Argue at 250-472-0475 or Margaret.argue@argusbioresources.ca

(Continued from page 3)

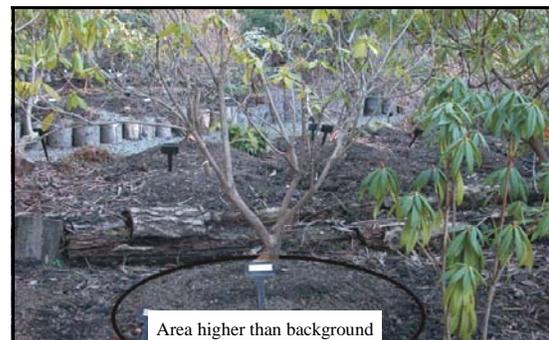
the bottom of the main stem should remain about 10 cm above the general level.

If your soil has been recently cultivated, plant on a low hill to allow for later compaction. The surface may drop more than 15 cm. If your soil is predominantly clay, never just dig a hole and plant your rhodo - it will drown. Instead, thoroughly amend the soil, and then place the new plant on top. Add peripheral loam and mulch as before and be sure there is peripheral drainage.

If you are starting a new garden on unconsolidated fill, remember that it takes 5 years or more for fill to consolidate and your rhododendron may sink 20 cm or more. If this happens, do not then simply fill the hollow and bury the root. Dig out the plant, fill the hollow with loam, replace the plant on top, and mulch the periphery as before (again be sure there is downslope drainage).

If your new plant is in a container, loosen the outside roots and remove it. If the plant is at all pot-bound, make four radial cuts down the sides and across the bottom of the root ball. From the bottom, turn out the four quadrants then plant. This exposes maximum root area to the surrounding medium.

Rhododendrons are easily moved. Begin by digging a trench about one spade deep around the drip line. Push your spade under the root all around the plant. Then pry upward and the flat root ball will pop out of the ground. Shuffle onto a board or tarp and drag to the new location.



Rhododendron at Glendale Gardens raised to improve drainage

THE ULTIMATE RHODODENDRON CONFERENCE

For all gardeners who would like
to learn more about rhododendrons



April 9 – 11, 2010

At Canada's premier rhododendron garden:
The University of British Columbia Botanical Garden
and Centre for Plant Research
Vancouver, BC

The teachers are: Douglas Justice and Ron Knight

CHOOSE FROM 2 LEARNING LEVELS

For details see the website

www.rhodos.ca

**REGISTER
NOW**



**Everyone who registers in 2009 receives a discount and the fee
is \$130.**

Registration is on a first-come-first-served basis and is limited to 100 gardeners. It's easy: Simply print a registration form at www.rhodos.ca and mail it with your Canadian or US cheque (**made out to Ron Knight**) to: Ultimate Rhododendron Conference, 2710 Walpole Crescent, North Vancouver, B.C., V7H 1K8, Canada. (The United States registration fee is for the same dollar amount as the Canadian fee to allow us to recover banking costs associated with foreign currency and checks.)

Editor's Note: registration form will be available soon but is not on the website as of August 23, 2009



**THE
VICTORIA
RHODODENDRON
SOCIETY**

Website:
<http://www.victoriarhodo.ca/>

All meetings of the society are open to the public and visitors are always welcome.

Of particular interest to gardeners is our Annual Show and Sale, held in April or May. The show has spectacular displays of flowers, and there are a great variety of Rhododendrons and other plants for sale.

Monthly meetings generally are held on the first Monday of the month at 7:30 pm (except June, July and August).

**The usual meeting place is the
Garth Homer Centre**

**811 Darwin Street
Victoria, B.C.**

Visits to superb local gardens are an annual Club spring activity.

OUR AIMS

The aims of the Victoria Rhododendron Society are to promote the cultivation, propagation and breeding of Rhododendrons, and also to foster knowledge, fellowship, friendship and enthusiasm concerning Rhododendrons and allied plants.

While the focus is on Rhododendrons, the interests of members as a group are wide. Talks on other shrubs, trees and herbs suitable for over- or under-planting are included, as are landscaping techniques.

MEMBERSHIP

Full membership includes membership in the VRS and the American Rhododendron Society of which we are an affiliated Chapter. This brings the ARS quarterly journal with expert articles and colour photographs. Also included is the right to participate in the ARS annual conventions, and the ARS seed exchange and pollen bank. Members also receive the Newsletter of the VRS.

Local Membership includes the Newsletter and participation in local events, but does not include membership in the ARS.

Associate Membership enables members of other Chapters to participate in the activities of the Victoria Chapter.

cut along dotted line

Mail to: The Victoria Rhododendron Society, P.O. Box 5562 Station B, Victoria, B.C., V8R 6S4

Mr. Mrs. Mr. & Mrs. Dr.

I wish to received my Newsletter by E-mail Agree to be on the circulated club membership list

Last Name: _____

First Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City and Province: _____

Postal Code: _____ Telephone _____

E-mail Address: _____

Circle one of the following: Regular Member \$50 Local: \$25 Associate \$10

If Associate, which chapter do you belong to? _____

Amount Paid by Cash _____ or Cheque _____