

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



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**MEETING 7:30
MONDAY, April 5, 2010
GARTH HOMER CENTRE, 811 DARWIN STREET, VICTORIA, B. C.**

Speaker: Carmen Varcoe, "Plant Expedition to Bhutan".

NOTE: The doors of Garth Homer Centre will not be open until 7:00

Carmen is a retired schoolteacher who is a part-time instructor at the Glendale and Woodlands Horticultural School and a key member of the Finnerty Gardens Advisory Board. Ask her and Carmen would describe herself as a "total plant geek and member of many garden clubs in Victoria and abroad."

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REFRESHMENTS

Please let Johanna Massa know at 250-642-5491 if you are coming to the meeting and bringing goodies:

Leslie Drew, Anne Allen and Ian Duncan, Paul Frost, Joan Gibb, Lloyd and Linda Gilmore, Maureen and Gerry Glaum and Dean and Ann Goard.

Please wrap your cookies or snacks. Coffee and tea are supplied. Assistance in setting out the food, milk and sugar, napkins and helping in the kitchen cleanup is really appreciated.

NOTICES FROM THE VRS BOARD

Show and Sale update---

- We still need two cashiers and one admissions person for the Show and Sale.
- A reminder to last year's trophy winners to bring back the trophies cleaned and polished to the April meeting.
- Posters will be available for members to advertise our show and sale. If you can help in this way by putting up posters in community places you attend, it will be most useful.

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Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary

Oddthoughts 10

By M. J. Harvey

A well-known story is that one day Marie Antoinette was not feeling well and the news went round the palace, 'Marie est malade' - Mary is ill. So one of her physicians had one of her chefs cook up a mixture of oranges, sugar and brandy. When this was presented to her majesty, she consumed some, declared herself cured and from then on the confection was known as 'marmalade' - a corruption of Marie est malade.

The above tale is widely repeated, sincerely believed, utterly charming, utterly unforgettable and utterly untrue. But it makes a good story.

The British, on their way to colour the map pink, would sail past France, along Portugal and call in at Oporto and other ports for essential stores, i.e. wine, especially port. Occasionally the purser would buy fruit, vegetables and any local product that was being hawked, among which was a sweet, honey-tasting, brownish conserve. The sailors would eat this and speculate what it was. It was a puzzle because there were no obvious pieces of skin or seeds although it was obviously of fruit origin. The general opinion was that it was a boiled-down extract of oranges.

The Portuguese called the conserve 'marmalada'. The word is derived from Latin *melimelium* and ultimately from classical Greek *melimelon* translating 'honey apple'. This refers to the fruit of a smallish tree, say 15 ft. in old age, which we call the quince, *Cydonia oblonga*. This tree is probably native to the general region of ancient Persia but has been cultivated round the Mediterranean for probably millennia.

Our former property in Sooke had a good specimen of cultivar 'Champion'. This fruited every year producing large, pear-shaped yellow fruit from spring blossoms of large white flowers. It is a close relative of the pear but

the flesh never softens. Attempts to bite one could end up in a trip to the dentist. It is quite inedible and even our deer and squirrels could not eat them, although they tried.



Cydonia oblonga flowers

Where quince is a winner is in the kitchen.. Boiled, the fruit can be strained through a cloth and the juice cooked with sugar to make a crimson jelly with a heavenly taste of honey. Boiled up but not strained the pulp makes a variety of preserves or fruit leathers.

This fruiting quince, to distinguish it from



Quince - Cydonia oblonga Mill.

the smaller, spiny, flowering-quince bushes, makes an excellent tree for small gardens. It gets very slight attention from amateur gardeners and none from landscapers. Despite this the flowers are ornamental, the fruit decorative and in great demand by those in the know. Unfortunately, such is the current restriction of our food habits that many owners regard the fruit not as an asset but as a 'disposal problem'.

I should add that Victoria BC has a family, originally from Portugal, who run a series of delicatessens (Ambrosio). They generally stock the genuine Portuguese marmalada. Myself? I'm an ex-Brit so most Februaries I buy Seville (bitter) oranges and make a batch of (English) marmalade, but if anyone has quince they don't want let me know.

* * *

So that Mary did not pan out. Try rosemary, the shrubby herb used in soups and meat dishes. The name obviously comes from 'rose of Mary', i.e. mother of Jesus. The French name is '*rosmarin*' and the scientific name is *Rosmarinus*. When you look at those names you could swear they looked like 'marine' and not 'Mary' and that is the case. Classic Greek has 'rhos' - fog, mist, exhalation, perfume. So we get 'scent of the sea. Sorry Mary, this one is not for



Rosmarinus officinalis

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you. Rosemary got its name presumably because it grows, or used to grow, along the shores of islands in the Mediterranean.

The scent of herbs such as lavender, thyme, oregano etc. and most flowers is due to essential oils which are mostly hydrocarbons called terpenes (from turpentine). In flowers they attract pollinators but the ones in leaves are herbivore repellents. Neither deer nor caterpillars chew rosemary.

There are many cultivars of rosemary: tall, short, weeping; white, pink, pale/deep blue flowers; green, silver or gold variegated leaves. Over twenty years ago I brought the golden rosemary 'Joyce Dibaggio' to Victoria. This is one of the most attractive plants for the garden with deep blue flowers contrasting with the golden foliage. Unfortunately it is slightly more tender than the



Rosemary 'Joyce DeBaggio' - Golden Rain Rosemary

green-leaved forms and is killed by the rare cold winter.

* * *

The strangest Mary I ever came across turned out to be male. This happened very early in my plant career about 1950. The previous time I wrote that date it got mis-

typed as 1050 but it really does not make much difference; we had no phone, no TV, no fridge, walked or took the bus, washed dishes and clothes by hand and -this will amaze young people- we ate blackberries.

The little town of Doncaster had a very large Saturday market covering several acres of open stalls and buildings. On market day thousands of people would go for their weekly shopping and a certain amount of entertainment. The latter came from an open area where hucksters sold all sorts of wares. The technique was to give a good entertaining talk for about ten minutes, get everyone intrigued, then try to sell as much as possible before the crowd drifted off elsewhere. Then repeat.

One Saturday a salesman had a cardboard box of semi-dried roots which he was sorting into paper bags, (plastic bags not having been invented). The patter was that he had a rare plant that would produce enormous balloon-shaped blue flowers and it was called 'Star of Mary'. Even as a young teen I was



skeptical of the name.

The plant was *Platycodon mariesii*, the balloon flower, named for Charles Maries the explorer employed by the Veitch Company. There are a number of plants named for Maries but this one unfortunately has been changed to *P. grandiflorum*. The marketplace patter was correct; this is a good plant and the inflated corollas are frequently com-

(Continued on page 5)

mented on by visitors. Nowadays it comes in pink, white, blue and a mauve I have that I am not sure whether I love or hate.

Did I buy 'Star of Mary' that day? Of course not. Teens then had no money and I was on my way to the library - but the occasion sticks in my memory.

And where are the marketplace skills of yesteryear? They can be seen on TV selling cold remedies and onion choppers.

* * *

Henry VIII is the English monarch well known for thinking big. When he wasn't busy arranging weddings, he was ticking off the Pope and variously at peace or war with France, Spain or the Holy Roman Empire. Uncertain times require a strong army and navy. So he ordered the largest battleship ever to be built. At the launch there was great celebrating; then the ship, named



The Mary Rose, a detail from a painting by William Bishop

the Mary Rose, slipped gracefully into the waters of the Solent - and promptly sank. It was one of those historic 'Oops!' moments.

The recovery of the Mary Rose became a major British archaeological project and to commemorate its successful completion David Austin named one of his rose hybrids 'Mary Rose' in 1983. This is a double pink bush rose and according to Phillips and Rix 'produces sweetly scented flowers over a long period on a vigorous, disease-resistant



"Mary Rose" David Austin, England, 1983

bush to 1.3m'. Furthermore in 1987 a shoot produced a red-flowered sport which has been named 'Red Mary Rose'. So there are a couple of Marys that you can take home.

VRS February Talk Review

By Bill McMillan

The speaker, Andree Connell, spoke on cyclamens as an underused companion plant for rhododendrons. Andree highlighted the variability and garden characteristics of various cyclamens by describing the different species that can be grown here. She emphasized the beauty of the leaf patterns and colors, that bloom times vary, and that a number thought to be tender are hardy in the gardens she has established both on Saltspring Island and in Victoria. Many cyclamen species are indigenous to the Mediterranean area

The two species most of us know are *C. hederifolium* and *C. coum*. *Hederifolium* has both green and silver leaf types with an amazing range of patterns on the heart-shaped leaves. *Hederifolium* 'Ruby Glow' and 'Rose Carpet' are darker colored selections and there are white forms. *C. coum* blooms in winter and the flowers are generally magenta although a white form was found in the Galan Heights. It also has green



and silver cultivars and its rounded leaves are patterned. Andree mentioned that she has *C. coum* growing under a cedar tree – so it is definitely hardy! *C. Africanum* is very similar to *C. hederifolium* but is not hardy here. Growing it is not recommended because it can interbreed with *hederifolium* and could produce strains that are not hardy. Some other cyclamens that are less well known are also of interest. *C. cilicium* is also hardy in our climate. Its flowers are pink or white and come later than *hederifolium* blossoms. *C. graecum* is a bit tender here and needs a very sunny spot to flower freely. It leafs out and flowers in the fall. *C. alpinum* is hardy and it flowers in mid-winter. The flowers are scented, propeller-like, and rose to carmine pink. *C. libanoticum* is another hardy species. It has large pink flowers in February. It is lovely but due to its habit will not act as a ground cover, unlike *hederifolium*. Other cyclamens that were mentioned include *mirabile* (very attractive leaves, December flowers), *elegans*, *colchicum*, *purpurescens* (summer bloom), *parviflorum* (needs summer water, small, scented), the Repandum Group (*repandum*, *balearicum*

and creticum), *pseudoibericum*, *cyprium* (November-December flowering) and several others.

Cyclamens are fun to grow from seed. You soak the seeds in a weak Palmolive soap solution overnight (1 drop of soap in 1 cup of hot water), then sow them in a light soil mix or sand. One method to enhance germination then is to keep the seeds in the dark for a month at 60 deg F. It sounds crazy but it works! After a month, check weekly. Once the first leaf appears, move the seedlings into the light. They can be left in the original pot for 2 years. Use a similar light soil mix but cyclamens hate being overpotted. Some sources of plants and seed are the Beaver Creek Greenhouses (www.rockgardenplants.com), Fraser's Thimble Farms Nursery (www.thimblefarms.com) and the Cyclamen Society website (www.cyclamen.org) for members of the Cyclamen Society.

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Plant Sale & Open Garden

Saturday April 17th 10-1- Evelyn Weesjes- Wide selection of ferns, rhododendrons & shrubs-10629 Derrick Road (left off West Saanich Rd. to Downey, left off Downey to Derrick). Come early for best selection.

Plant Sale & Open Garden

Sunday April 25th 10-1 Carmen Varcoe & Friends- Wide selection of perennials-5450 Old West Saanich Rd. (some parking available next door at the Gazebo B & B).

Plantaholics Plant Sale

Sunday May 23rd 9-12 Abkhazi Gardens - 1964 Fairfield Rd. Parking at Margaret Jenkins School.. Abkhazi Gardens open free 9-12.

**COWICHAN VALLEY RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
ANNUAL RHODODENDRON AND
PLANT SALE**

**Free rhododendrons for the first 50
customers**

Saturday, May 1, 2010, 10 a.m. to 1:30.

Queen of Angels School Gym
Maple Bay Road, Duncan

- Doors open at 10 a.m. sharp until 1:30.
- Come early for best selection.
- Free rhododendrons for the first 50 customers.
- More than 2,000 rhodos and plants for sale.
- Unique, special and hard to find rhodos for sale.
- Many different growers and sellers of high quality plants from all over Vancouver Island.
- Free planting, growing, maintenance advice from dedicated rhodoholics
- Truss (flower) display of local rhodos in bloom, from many specialty growers on the Island
- Show of trusses (flowers)
- Refreshments.

Date: April 13, 2010 Time: 7:00 p.m.
Location: Bob Wright Building Room A104

The Tree Collector: The exploits of the Scottish Plant Hunter, David Douglas, in the Pacific Northwest and his subsequent contribution to forestry and horticulture.
Free lecture to be given by
Syd House

VRS - OPEN GARDENS 2010

Please mark your calendars for the following Thursdays in the months of April and May. It has been awhile since we toured other members gardens and it is time to see the updates, as gardens are always a work in progress. We extend an especially warm welcome to our new members.

**April 15, Thursday, 6pm - dusk
Ken and Madeleine Webb
5008 Old West Saanich Road
250-744-1785**

**April 22, Thursday, 6pm - dusk
Norm and Jean Todd
5631 Batu Road
Victoria
250-658-5102**

**April 29, Thursday, 1pm - dusk
Moe and Johanna Massa
5024 Glinz Lake Road, Sooke by
Camp Thunderbird
250-642-5491**

**May 13, Thursday, 1pm - dusk
Roy and Lois Blackmore
758 Walfred Road
Langford
250-478-6615**

The Seattle Rhododendron Society would like to invite your chapter to hear Ken Cox speak on Woodland Gardening. Ken is a renowned plant hunter, author, hybridizer and owner of Glendoick Rhododendron and Azalea Nursery in Perth, Scotland. He will speak at the Center for Urban Horticulture, 3501 NE 41th Street, Seattle, WA 98105 Wednesday April 7 at 7 PM. Hope you can come.
Seattlerhodo@comcast.net or call Jeff Bell 206-363-1417 with any questions.

Some Tips on Exhibiting Rhododendrons

By Theresa McMillan and Alec McCarter

The success of our Show and Sale in April depends on our exhibits. A few hundred blooming rhododendrons add fragrance and colour to the show. Your entry may be just what the judges are looking for to award a trophy or a ribbon.

1. Entries are to be made at the Cadboro Bay United Church, 2625 Arbutus Road (not far from the University of Victoria) on Friday afternoon and evening, May 7, from 3 to 7 p.m.
2. A day or two before the show, go around your garden and make a list of the blooms you will pick on the Friday morning.
3. Organize whatever containers you will be using to transport your blooms to the show. Empty bottles or cans in six-packs work well. Be careful to avoid crushing the blooms. Fill the containers with water almost to the top.
4. Picking blooms always takes more time than you think it will! When choosing trusses (flowers that came from one bud), select ones that have straight stems with the bloom on top. When choosing sprays (flowers that came from more than one bud), look for ones that will present themselves gracefully in a bottle.
5. Prune judiciously if need be to enhance the shape of a spray. Avoid choosing entries with bruises. Sometimes rain or frost damage is inevitable, but avoid it if you can.
6. Look for freshness. In a spray or truss, it is better to have one or more unopened flower buds (for they frequently open after they have been picked) than to choose blooms that are already open and going over.
7. Choose blooms with good-looking foliage. Avoid ones with chewed or otherwise damaged leaves. Some judicious snipping of damaged leaves can be done, but don't go too far because some foliage is needed. Do NOT trim off the bitten parts of a weevil-chewed leaf.
8. After cutting your truss or spray, plunge it deeply into lukewarm water.
9. Later, you can make an oblique cut across the stem leaving the right length to make your exhibit look balanced, and do this under water.
10. This will help the truss to take up water and keep it fresh all day. You may then store your exhibit in its water-filled container in the refrigerator.

When you arrive at the Church, help is available. Green Jamaican Ginger Beer or very small amber bottles filled with water are used for the exhibits. There are alphabetical lists showing the classification of your exhibit.



R. "Transit Gold"