

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



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

June 2010 Thirtieth Year of Publication

e-mail: wtmcmillan@telus.net

web page – <http://victoriarhodo.ca>

June PICNIC
12 pm Sunday, June 27, 2010
At Ann and Tom Widdowson's garden
4635 West Saanich Road,
**Close to the Wilkinson Road/
West Saanich Road intersection in a north-west direction**

VRS PICNIC JUNE 27

Our June picnic will be held at the Widdowsons' (the address above) on June 27 at noon. There is parking for about 20 cars on the lawn of the Widdowson property. Extra parking is available on the opposite side of West Saanich Road. The side nearest the house is a bike lane.

You are asked to bring a wrapped savory, salad or dessert. Tags labeling eggs, dairy, nuts or flour for people with allergies will be appreciated.

A fruit punch, tea and coffee are provided. Lunch will be served about 1 p.m. and will feature barbequed salmon grilled to perfection by our volunteer chefs.

Please bring your own cutlery, plates and mugs and don't forget chairs to sit on!

A donation of a rhododendron, companion plant or other plant is welcome for our raffle. Each person will receive a plant.

Trophies from May's Show will be presented to the winners.

In This Issue

- A review of May's talk pg. 1
- Rhubarb for Barbarians pg. 3
- 2010 VRS Show and Sale pg.5
- Trophy Winners, 2010 pg.7
- A Dabbler, out of her Depth pg.8
- In Memoriam pg. 10

For those members who cannot drive, please phone one of the members of the VRS Board (next page) and we will see how we can help you. It would be great if you can come!

This club affair on a summer day in a lovely garden is not to be missed!

A Review of May's Talk by Theresa McMillan

Lloyd Gilmore gave a talk, and slide show on May 1. His plants showing his skills as a hybridizer of rhododendrons were on display at

VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY BOARD

President:

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

1st Vice President:

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

2nd Vice President

Peter Barriscale 250-385-3950
pbarris@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:

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

Lloyd Gilmore 250-642-2256
Llgilmore@shaw.ca

Carolyn Marquardt 250-477.8387
tonymarquardt@shaw.ca

Norma Senn 250-595-7276
Normasgarden@telus.net

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

Newsletter Committee:

Theresa McMillan 250-478-3515

Bill McMillan 250-478-3515

Linda Gilmore 250-642-2256

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

the back of the room.

His goals are to create small scented double calyx (“hose in hose”) indumented rhododendrons. He is also interested in improvements to the flowers, foliage and hardiness of his plants. Lloyd has been working on his hybrids for over 10 years.

He talked to Lofthouse years ago about ideas for hybridizing rhododendrons.

Pollen can be used immediately if needed for a cross, but can be stored for use up to two years later. Place the pollen on a napkin with date collected and plant name. Allow to dry at room temperature for three days to a week. Place dry anthers in a “000” gelatin capsule, label with the date (like April 2010 “Thor”) on a piece of masking tape 1/4” wide and place in a freezer. Get it out as required the next spring or the following spring. The seeds are very small.

Lloyd raises his seedlings in an equal ratio of peat and perlite, in an insulated shed, with 14 hours of light, and 1/4 strength 20/20/20 fertilizer for watering. Fungus gnats are a problem with small rhododendrons.

Lloyd has been using the pollen from ochraceum RSF and trying to improve on Thor in efforts to get a fragrant red rhododendron. He found Rubicon hybrids too tender. Mellotums are used to get good red flowers and good indumentum.

Lloyd uses Jeda, a rhododendron with hose in hose heavily spotted flowers and Dexter’s Spice which is very fragrant.

Crossing Jeda with pachysanthum then gave some variability particularly in truss and indumentum in seedlings. Dexter’s Spice (parentage unknown) has given very variable leaf size and growth habit when crossed with Jeda. Surprisingly Dexter’s Spice cross Malotum has given vigorous seedlings.

Selfing, crossing a plant onto itself and crossing two plants from the same seedlot, can re-

(Continued on page 3)



R. "Jeda"

duce vigour in offspring Lloyd found that while Lofthouse Legacy was beautiful, it had a poor root system. Crossed with pachysanthum improved root systems and hopefully will improve the truss shape.

He has been giving his hybrids local names like

"Parksville Sunset" and "Sooke Clouds".

The plants on display would look good at the edge of a rhodo bed, where their frilly fragrant flowers could be easily admired.

deposited at the end of the glacial period was ideal for growing rhubarb, the resulting deep, damp soil being just what the roots required.



"strawberry rhubarb"

Mill Bay Garden Club Flower Show

Saturday June 12, 2010 – 9:00 am to 2:00 p.m.

2550 Watson Road, Cobble Hill, BC

For any further information, please contact
Brenda Dumont, Toll Free - 1-866-442-0044
Phone: 250 743 1638 email:
me@brendadumont.com

Rhubarb for Barbarians

Oddthoughts 11

By M.J. Harvey

The England into which I was born was riven by north-south rivalries involving class, accent and geography. At Doncaster Grammar School in the north of England my Yorkshire accent was shamed out of me and my vowels elongated slightly. We would have foods such as pikelets, penny ducks, black pudding or brawn followed by stewed rhubarb for tea (dinner was of course at midday). In the south of England they would have strawberry cream teas. I exaggerate, but only slightly. The more hoity-toity southerners regarded the north as inhabited by barbarians, although Scotland was respectable. Canada was a breath of fresh air although I still occasionally crave the food.

On rare bus trips to Leeds we would pass field after field of rhubarb, with long rows of low, dark huts interrupting occasionally. The clay

People can be divided into two groups: those who love rhubarb and those who hate it. I belong to the 'love' group and must have eaten hundreds of pounds over the years. One uncle said he grew "strawberry rhubarb" and I really looked forward to tasting it. Alas, it was a case of childhood disillusionment - it tasted as sour as the rest. The name, if not a joke, I eventually worked out referred to the colour of the stems.

I enjoyed picking rhubarb - it was a joy. I would pull off the stalks from the base then, holding the stalk out horizontally, I would sever the leaf (lamina) portion with one blow of a sharp kitchen knife like a medieval executioner cutting off a head. We need to do more research on what motivates gardeners at different stages in their lives.

So what is rhubarb? I always jokingly refer to it as the first fruit of the season but it is the leaf stalk - the petiole - of the plant that is eaten, so technically it is not a fruit at all. (Oppositely the US Congress once declared that the tomato, which is a fruit, was a vegetable for taxation purposes).

Rhubarb has a long but somewhat obscure history. There are many species of *Rheum*,



R. officinale

to which rhubarb belongs, scattered across northern parts of Asia and since ancient times the Chinese have used *R. officinale* root as a strong purgative but that is not the one we grow. A common ornamental is *R. palmatum* which is a statuesque space filler for large gardens. I notice that Oak Bay has its municipal sign at Oak Bay and Foul Bay supported by two specimens, the red-leaved form to the left and the green form to the right.



R. palmatum

Do I deduce that the gardener sailed?

In Medieval and Renaissance writings in Europe rhubarb is not mentioned nor is it figured in paintings in breviaries or books of hours. Had it been present such a

striking plant would have drawn attention and John Harvey (no relation) in his wonderful and detailed book *Mediaeval Gardens* has no entry for it. The earliest modern accounts of rhubarb cultivation appear in Europe in the seventeenth century and presumably it arrived there as a result of increased trade with eastern Europe and Asia.

However, the ancient Greeks and Latins did know of the existence of rhubarb. It got its name from reports of early explorers of it growing on the banks of the Rha (Volga) River and of it being consumed by the peasants living in the region. The definition of barbarian is, and I am not making this up, anyone not born in Greece or Italy so the Volga peasants were by definition barbarians. Thus this strange plant was called *Rhubarbarum* - Volga barbarian plant, as a hybrid Greek Latin name. From this is derived our name rhubarb.

The wild rhubarb species of eastern Europe and western Asia is *R. rhaponticum* and I gather it is (semi-) edible. In the process of this wild plant being repeatedly dug up and moved to another garden and thus moving towards central Europe it appears to have hybridized with another species; it is not clear which one. So what arrived in western



R. rhaponticum

Europe in the seventeenth century and, not long after, in North America, is a group of hybrids which is now called *R. x cultorum* which means the hybrid rhubarb of cultivation. Of course this provides the ideal excuse for people who on principle do not eat hybrids, to decline a dish of the mouth-

(Continued on page 4)

puckering 'fruit'.

That brings up the main culinary problem but also the advantage of rhubarb - it is high in plant acids. I have seen people eat a raw stick of rhubarb by repeatedly dipping the end in sugar and biting off a portion. Not me! Cooked alone it needs sugar, lots of sugar. I find that a half teaspoonful of bicarbonate ameliorates the tartness. Where rhubarb comes into its own is when it is combined with low-acid fruits, for instance apples or those almost tasteless strawberries imported in the winter and spring from God- only-knows-where (wait for our local crop). But those import strawberries, made into a pie with rhubarb and sugar, combine to produce a heavenly creation (use slightly more strawberries than rhubarb).

So can rhubarb be improved culinarily speaking? Yes, like asparagus and endive it can be blanched by being grown in the dark. I remember being impressed during a visit to Brian Cross' intricate room garden in Ireland by his collection of rhubarb crocks. While the others were wandering through his maze of rooms and admiring the bronze memorial to his little dog, I was off in the kitchen garden. Rhubarb crocks are now antiques and he has collected dozens of them. Made of red earthenware they are bell-shaped with a knob on top for lifting and range in size up to a whopping 3 ft. As the buds of the rhubarb start to swell in the spring the crocks are placed over them. Grown in the dark the stems elongate more than normal and become a bright pink with a small yellowish leaf on top. The result is really tender stalks. This is gourmet rhubarb!

Back to my childhood. Those rhubarb fields south of Leeds are still there. The rows of sheds are still filled each winter with closely stacked roots of rhubarb, kept dark and warm. This hastens sprouting and the production of the tender vivid pink stalks. This product is sold widely, even to the superior southerners and the picky French. In fact the region is so famous for its rhubarb that the European Union Commission has designated Yorkshire rhubarb produced in the 'rhubarb triangle' of Leeds, Bradford and Wakefield, as a protected regional food name thus joining Parmigiano Reg-

giano, champagne and other foods. As an ex-Yorkshire peasant I can drink a glass of Moët to that.

But I now live in Canada where there is a movement towards food independence. The push is on to grow your own food, not all of it, but some. I recommend you start with or include rhubarb. The advantages of rhubarb are many: for instance it is prolific, requires planting only once, needs no care and will live longer than you. It is the ideal plant for the lazy gardener, sorry, I mean ecogardener.

Place your rhizome in a sunny position, in fact flaunt it, be bold, plant it in a conspicuous spot in your garden - after all the six foot inflorescence is as spectacular as *cardiocrinum* so go against convention and don't hide it at the back. Barbarians of the world unite. Rhubarb is back. Rhubarb is respectable. Go rhubarb!

The Victoria Rhododendron Show and Sale 2010 Report

Lois Blackmore

Our show was held at Cadboro Bay United Church again this year with a later date than our usual last Saturday in April. The date chosen this year was May 8. The hours for the show and sale were from 11am to 3pm.

The weather cooperated with us as the day was a mix of cloud and sun. Because of the later date of the show, there were many different rhododendrons on display. Hybrid rhododendrons were the main trusses this year with fewer species because of the later date chosen.

Preparations for the show included advertising in local papers and gardening magazines, preparations of photocopying material with Xeroxing and paper cutting, and

calling for and organizing volunteers. As well, judges and clerks were asked for their expertise and knowledge of rhododendrons and were in place early on. Peter Barriscale produced a beautiful poster which members distributed to garden centers, libraries and other interested places.

The judging took place early Saturday morning starting at 8:30 am. Thank you to Ken Webb, Peter Barriscale, Dave Mackas, Burns Morrison, Dean Goard and Calvin Parsons for doing an outstanding job. Another thank you to the clerks who assisted the judges in making their job easier and the judging run so smoothly. Clerks this year were Keiko Alkire, Betty Gordon, Ann Widdowson, Doug Newton, Linda Gilmore, Don Whittle, Ellen Wellborn and Carolyn Marquardt. A special thanks to Anne Allen and Karen Burns for looking after all the awards and organizing them into categories.

The raffles this year included both individual prizes and a silent auction. Some items from commercial enterprises were donated and many members of our group donated plants. Such support is gratifying. Carol Dancer is sending commercial donators a letter of thanks, but is taking this opportunity to thank the members for their extremely generous donations.

The call for volunteers was great with many taking on multiple roles. Outstanding work in organizing the set up of the show from Ian Duncan, Don Whittle, Archie Brown, Peter Barriscale, Dean Goard, Ann and Tom Widdowson, and Doug Newton; auction duties ably handled by Carol Dancer; Ann Widdowson spearheading accounting; Ena Vandermale doing duty in the kitchen and Anne Allen and Karen Burns dealing readily with the award ribbons and trophies; Keiko Alkire and Norma Buckley arranging the beautiful floral

displays with flowers donated by Finnerty Gardens all contributed to a very well run show and sale. The tasks of setting up, placing entries, arranging signage, cashiering and plant sales, accounting and keeping track of seller tags, contributing goodies and arranging tea and coffee and then the massive job of clean up were beautifully handled by the many volunteers who used their ingenuity and common sense to make the day go extremely smoothly. A debt of gratitude goes to them.

We were able to sign up a new member, thanks to Gareth Shearman.

Thanks to the sellers, we had a very successful sale. As this is a source of major funding for our club, we were pleased to have Firwood Nurseries, Ralf's Nursery, Paul Wurz, the Propagating Group, Carolyn Marquardt's Basketland Baskets and Garry and Lynnette Cook's artful birdhouses. Total sales were \$5478.00 Other revenues included Admissions of \$632.82, Raffle- \$147.00, Silent Auction \$535.00, and Kitchen \$107.

I would like to close this Show Report with thanking again the many volunteers who gave of their time and effort in making the show a success. A special thanks to Madeleine Webb and Carol Dancer for their support on my behalf.

Lois Blackmore, Show Chair



Judging rhododendrons is thought-provoking work, as several VRS members have found.....

**2010 Winners of the Victoria Rhododendron
Society Trophies**

The George Fraser Memorial Trophy
John Hawkins

Best Vancouver Island Hybrid
R. Towner Crest

Herman and Hella Vaartnou Plate
John Hawkins

Best Fragrant Rhododendron Truss
R. Fragrantissimum

Jean and Norman Todd Trophy
Keiko Alkire

Best Lepidote Species in a Container
R. *goreri*

Mary's Memorial Cup
E.E. Dickman

Best Rhododendron Companion Plant
peony

The Jim Calder Memorial Trophy
E.E. Dickman

Best Species Truss or Spray
R. *cinnabarinum* variety roylei

The Mary Henderson Memorial Trophy
Anne Allen

Best Hybrid Rhododendron
R. Hurricane

The de Rothschild Challenge Trophy
Anne Allen

Best Rhododendron in Show
R. Hurricane

The Gibson Memorial Trophy
Johanna and Moe Massa

High Aggregate
90 points

Angus and Mary Boyd Trophy
Archie Brown

Best Entry by a Novice
R. Winsome

Alec McCarter Bowl
Judy Gordon

Best Northwest Hybrid
R. Elsie Watson

The Webb Trophy
Judy Gordon
Johanna and Moe Massa

Peoples' Choice
R. *praetervisum* (virea)
R. Dexter Spice



A Calvin Parsons and Burns Morrison judging red rhododendrons.



Calvin, Dave Mackas, Burns and Dean Goard checking prize rhodo trusses on May 8, our show and sale day.

Dabbler Out of Her Depth

(reprinted with permission from the January 2010 edition of "The Yak", the Fraser South Rhododendron Association Newsletter)

By Ginnie Fearing

She's a dabbler, content to sample and enjoy this and that without delving deeply into much of anything. Her mate, on the other hand, is definitely a diver who is by nature a researcher. Shopping with him is an experi-

ence in well-researched decision-making. Shopping with her is an experience in intuitive decision-making. Somehow they have made this dabble/dive combination work to their combined advantage. However, sometimes even their combined efforts don't get results. Here is the story:

They have HIS and HER gardens. His garden is carefully labeled, artfully arranged, often weeded, and meticulously documented. Her garden is mostly heltery-skeltery with this and that planted wherever. His garden blooms from February to July and then is elegantly green. Her garden blooms from March to October and then is full of weeds. Which brings me to my point.

Her garden has developed a terrible case of



horsetail (*Equisetum*). This affliction began with an outbreak under the sprinkler at the top of the hill, and while she was away for a while, it migrated very, very rapidly. She got on her hands and knees and weeded the horsetail....once, twice, three times....

Clearly weeding wasn't working and to make matters worse, time spent on this affliction meant much less time spent weeding the rest of the garden, which responded by sprouting a magnificent crop of tall grass.

She began to complain to her friends and to gather advice. The advice ranged from: "Ha, Ha, nothing to be done now" to recommendations to douse the stuff with deadly spray. "Put on a rubber glove", she was told, "then a cotton glove and dip your hand into concentrated Roundup and then run your hand up each stalk of horse tail". "Take a paintbrush", she was told, "dip it in Roundup and paint each stalk of horsetail". (hand paint 4 million stalks? Wait, it's now 8 million stalks!). Treat with Casoron. Spray with Later's Creeping Buttercup mixed with Amitrol. Spray with vinegar. Lime it.

It was clearly time to mimic the diver. The diver, of course, does research: consulting the internet to learn more about horsetail and then to find out how toxic the recommended sprays are.

Did you know that.... Horsetail is native to North America and is a survivor from the dinosaur era. It is a perennial with a spreading rhizomatous system that can go six feet deep. Horsetail produces two kinds of stems. In early spring a fertile stem appears to spread spores widely and then die back. Then the sterile, vegetative stems emerge to grow, and spread, until the first freeze. Horsetail, of which there are over 15 varieties in B.C., often grows in moist, disturbed sites but can be found in sand and other inhospitable sites.

The University of Wisconsin gives a reference to the Weed Control Manual 2000 (Curran, et al., 2000), which lists only two herbicides: Casoron, and Telar, for horsetail control in non-crop areas. They report that no

references were found in the Weed Control manual on the long-term effects of these herbicides on horsetail.

(http://128.104.239.6/uv_weeds/extension/articles/conhorsetail.htm)

The BC Government recommends improving drainage and encouraging growth of a healthy grass cover. "Porous landscape fabrics or black plastic mulch effectively prevent horsetail growth". (<http://www.agf.gov.bc.ca/cropprot/hrsetail.htm>)

Clearly the solution is to pounce on that first horsetail that emerges and murder it before it can spread.

Sadly, it is too late for that advice for her garden. Since she takes pride in avoiding toxic chemicals on both her veggies and her heltery-skeltery garden she is loathe to use chemicals. Maybe she will have to make an exception, she thinks, until she reads the side effects of the chemicals and sees how toxic they are.

The combined dabble/dive efforts have generated several experiments. Lime the area, enrich it, lay newspapers covered with mulch over it, all to no avail. Next we will withdraw water to the area, which is sad news to the roses and lilies.

She was shocked to learn that people are buying container plants of horsetail as ornamentals. She would gladly give hers away.

Here is her offer to you, whether you are a dabbler or a diver: Get rid of the horsetail in her garden and she will gift you with a complete batch of really good carrot cake cookies ...with frosting.

Ginny Fearing

IN MEMORIAM

Bill Dale

With sadness we report the passing May 4th, 2010 of long time rhododendron enthusiast, Bill Dale. Bill was 93 years old and was a member of both the Cowichan Valley and Victoria Chapters for years. He spent his working life in the pulp and paper industry on the coast of British Columbia. When he retired to the Saanich Peninsula just north of Victoria, he became interested in gardening, and his passion for rhododendrons was equaled only by his interest in the historical aspect, which also surrounds the genus. Bill became an authority on the life of George Fraser of Ucluelet, one of the first rhododendron hybridizers in British Columbia. In large measure, his efforts led to recognition of Fraser's accomplishments and "George Fraser Day" is now celebrated each May in Ucluelet.



Rhododendron 'Mrs. Jamie Fraser'

Ian McTaggart-Cowan

It is with the appreciation of a life well lived and with the sadness of knowing he's gone that we say goodbye to Ian McTaggart-Cowan, who passed away on Sunday, April 18th, 2010, two months shy of his 100th birthday. Ian was a long time member of the VRS, a great plantsman, a prized rhododendron grower, and a judge at many competitions. After earning his PhD, in 1935 Ian became the biologist at Victoria's Provincial Museum. In 1940 he moved to Vancouver where he taught vertebrate zoology at UBC for 35 years. There, he became head of the department and was renowned for his ground-breaking research. After retirement, from 1979 to 1984, he was a University of Victoria chancellor. In recognition of the excellence of his work, Ian was awarded both the Order of Canada and Order of British Columbia. He was a founding member of the National Research Council of Canada, chairman of the Environment Council of Canada, inaugural chairman of the public advisory board of the B.C. Habitat Conservation Trust Fund and a founding board member of The Nature Trust. He will be remembered as a man who dedicated his life to learning and educating.

Wayne Campbell, who co-wrote the Birds of B.C. with McTaggart-Cowan and others, is gathering 100 stories from former colleagues and students in celebration of what would have been Ian's 100th birthday on June 25, 2010. The book will be published by the non-profit Biodiversity Centre for Wildlife Studies (www.wildlifebc.org) later this year.