

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



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

November 2010 Thirtieth Year of Publication

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MEETING 7:30

MONDAY, November 1, 2010

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

Speakers: Don Whittle and Dean Goard on growing seeds from the germination to garden-ready stages and Calvin Parsons on Digital Rhododendron resources, for example, [www. hirsutum.com](http://www.hirsutum.com)

Calvin Parsons is first vice president of our chapter, uses technology whenever he can, and will highlight rhodo resources at the following websites: www.hirsutum.info, www.greergardens.com and www.rhododendron.org.

Don Whittle and **Dean Goard** are active members of the VRS Propagation Group.

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REFRESHMENTS

Please let Betty Gordon at 250-479-0210 know if you are coming to the meeting and bringing goodies.

Marg Kavanagh, Judith Kay, Betty Kennedy, Robert and Linda Kreiss, Thurston Lacalli and David and Agnes Lynn.

Please wrap your cookies or snacks.

Coffee and tea are supplied.

Assistance in setting out the food, milk and sugar, napkins and helping Betty Gordon and Heather Dickman in the kitchen cleanup is really appreciated.

NOTICE: Volunteer needed!

Betty Gordon at 250-479-0210 took over REFRESHMENTS from Joanna Massa this spring. The work that Joanna and Betty have done adds a great deal to our meeting nights.

The smell of coffee brewing or fresh tea, along with the sight of the table at the back full of snacks are important for the social aspect of our club.

We would like another volunteer to help with the set up or to do the set up if Betty is unable to attend the meeting.

Please consider helping her - it requires attending the meeting a few minutes earlier than normal. Thank you!

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A Review of October's Talk By Theresa McMillan

Judith Jones, from "Fancy Fronds" nursery, in Gold Bar, Washington State, came up to Victoria to give the VRS and guests from other garden clubs a talk on October 4.

Judith is very knowledgeable about her large collection of ferns. She also has many excellent pictures which illustrate how ferns can provide structure and accents to our rhododendron gardens.

Large ferns like *dryopteris filix-mas* (or Male Ferns) can provide architectural focus to the gardens. Others like our native "licorice fern" (*polypodiums*) are lacy fronds that spring from mossy slopes in early fall.

One form, *bevis*, has braided tips. Others have crested tips, with extra frills on them. Ferns can also form striking pinwheel shapes, large arching fronds, or smaller more flattened forms.

Ferns are mostly shades of green, but some like the familiar Japanese Painted fern are coloured. Other more exotic ferns have tones of



coppery-pink, or cinnamon, or gray ('Ghost').

Judith added many humorous touches to her presentation. At one time, commenting on a fern that eagerly hybridized itself with other

(Continued on page 7)

When Nice Plants Go Bad The New Weeds

Oddthoughts 12 By M.J. Harvey

I was cheered up when an article put together by Pedro Arrais appeared in the local Times Colonist listing some of our noxious and nuisance garden plants. Now weeds have been around since Neolithic humans started agriculture. Weeds co-evolved with us; in fact some weeds later gave rise to crops, oats for instance, but don't tell the Scots, they will na believe ye. Most of our Canadian weeds came as contaminants in seed or hidden in the soil on imported plants.

But the weeds we are concerned with here are different. These are plants that we willingly and deliberately brought to our gardens and carefully planted, watered, fertilised and staked. Then they did the dirty on us – outstayed their welcome and spread. In football/soccer terms they are 'own goals'.

Recently, various municipalities and businesses, with advice from the Ministry of Agriculture have put together a no-no list of plants, which they will no longer use. Let me give you a sample, for instance the ten plants which Gardenworks will no longer stock (there are others of course that they have not sold for some time).

The Maleficent Ten

Goutweed	<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>
Buddleia	<i>Buddleia davidii</i>
Broom	<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>
Spurge laurel	<i>Daphne laureola</i>
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
Ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>
Yellow flag	<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>
Yellow archangel	<i>Lamium galeobdolon</i>
Cherry laurel	<i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>
Periwinkles	<i>Vinca major, minor</i>

Ouch! You may be thinking, I have some of those in my garden. Good, just make sure they stay there. Don't give them away, sell them, dump them in the countryside or allow them to seed. I shall divide them into two groups: those that spread by rhizomes and those that spread by seeds.

The Creeps – spreading by rhizomes

Take gout weed, with its ancient reputation for curing gout (not justified by the way); it is also called "bishopsweed" because in mediaeval times bishops

lived high off the hog and could afford delicacies such as oysters, sweetbreads, liver and kidneys all washed down with red wine. These foods are in the categories that can precipitate gout.



Goutweed is still frequently found in gardens, usually in

the green and white variegated form. The problem is that its rhizomes spread rapidly forming dense patches which exclude anything else. If you allow it to seed, the green-leaved form will appear – it is less decorative but grows faster. And by the way if you do get gout, one cure is *Colchicum*, but don't go chewing on your own bulbs; there is not much difference between an effective dose and a lethal dose. Hobble to your physician and let him or her deal with it.

Tansy, with its yellow, late-summer, button flowers is not on the list because it was banned years ago. Sale of its seed is forbidden in BC. It is also an ancient herb although



Tanacetum vulgare

a bit strong for modern tastes – maybe useful in roadkill stew. Some roadsides are completely dominated by its dense stands.

(Tansy)

Blanketing marshes to the exclusion of most other plants, but alas

not feeding ducks, are purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria* and yellow flag, both purely garden escapes, now serious weeds – but beautiful.



Lythrum salicaria

Then there are numerous less serious seeds. These

include the perforate St. John's wort *Hypericum perforatum* (hold a leaf up to the sky and note the clear spots due to oil glands). Another *Hypericum* is rose of Sharon *H. calycinum*, used as a fill-in for casual areas and to stabilise steep banks. The *Hypericums* in general are very drought tolerant and thrive in our dry summers.

Periwinkles made the list somewhat to my surprise, although thinking back I have forked a lot of them out over the years. In the same nuisance category are sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum*, European wood violet *Viola riviniana* 'labradorica' of nurseries) and, only recently introduced, the celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*, especially in the prized form given the memorable name 'Brazen Hussy' by the late Christopher Lloyd of Great Dixter. It was discovered by a friend of his in a hedge in Kent and has shining yellow flowers and chocolate-

coloured leaves. While it is not quite rhizomatous, gardeners are finding it spreading around their flower beds and into lawns both by seed and the tiny drought-proof tubers that get kicked around after the plants go summer dormant in later spring.

One native I grudgingly like but get fed up with is the Oregon, or redwood sorrel *Oxalis oregana*; it also creeps a bed too far. Talking of *Oxalis* there is the noxious group of yellow flowered species that bounce from pot to path and back (*O. corniculata*). But then they just arrived. No one ever wanted them, so they do not belong in the initial welcome category.

Surprising to see on the list is yellow archangel. It is commonly added to hanging baskets



Oxalis corniculata

for its yellow flowers and silvery leaves. Too rampant, I suppose is the complaint and I have seen it escaped into the wild in shady areas under trees by creeks. The everlasting sweet pea similarly escapes but brightens up hot, dry roadsides with its tangles of pink or white flowers in summer.

Superweed

The Superman of Weeds without doubt is the giant knotweed *Polygonum japonicum* (formerly *cuspidatum*). There is a related, larger, *P. sachalinense*. In the nineteenth century these were greatly prized for their stately appearance, the ability to fill in odd corners and to act as a screen. Large estates across Europe just loved them. But when owners of smaller properties managed to get hold of the prized roots things started to go wrong. The species has acquired many common names in its travels: Japanese, Chinese or Mexican bamboo are commonly used because of the jointed stems

although it is not related to bamboo.



Polygonum japonicum
(formerly *cuspidatum*)

Giant knotweed has been declared Britain's Worst Weed, having spread greatly over the past fifty years, largely as a result of frantic efforts to get rid of it. People dig it up and take it to a dump or leave it in the countryside from where it marches on and on. It is the Genghis Kahn of the plant world – all conquering. It is not on the Gardenworks

list because they stopped selling it long ago but there is plenty around Victoria already.

Giant knotweed dies down for the winter and sprouts each spring from buds, rapidly forming 2-meter tall thickets of stems. The young shoots expand with great force and can punch through up to four inches of asphalt.

Weeds with Seeds

When plants produce abundant seeds and these get around in sufficient numbers, you have a problem. The most infamous example arose from Captain Grant's yearning to see the yellow flowers of broom like he saw in his childhood. He recorded that he got six seeds to germinate in his Sooke garden. When these flowered others admired the brilliant yellow flowers – so cheerful – and grew their own. But broom does not depend entirely on humans to spread. The pods dry out in hot weather and split open suddenly (you can hear them), hurling the seeds some distance. Its relative, gorse, was planted by Metchosin sheep farmers as living barbed-wire hedges and has also spread, al-

beit slower than broom.

It is the wind that blows *Buddleia* seeds around and since these readily germinate on poor quality exposed soils there is a potential for spreading. I must admit I haven't noticed



Buddleia

a nuisance here in Victoria but I do remember it brightening up the bombed sites in London after WW2. (And owners, do cut your plants right down in winter; they

flower much better for it.)

The seeds of giant hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum* are spread by wind and water (Paolo Mantegassi, Italian, 1831-1910). This Caucasus native is a fine example to an 'architectural' plant, prized for its stature and the symmetry of its magnificent metre-wide umbels. The ribs of the umbels resemble the



Heracleum mantegazzianum

vault of a cathedral built in the high Decorative period. Unfortunately its sap is a contact phototoxin – get the juice on your skin and there is severe blistering on sun exposure.

Apart from that I love it.

Another plant with wind-blown seeds is tree of heaven *Ailanthus altissima*. In addition it spreads insidiously via its sub-surface roots which can rapidly put up shoots at up to 30 ft. from the parent. (See U Vic Finnerty Garden Friends newsletter, Monster Tree Devours Victoria, Jan 2010.)

Dry roadsides get colonized by escaped chic-



Ailanthus altissima

ory and fennel. I like these. Chicory with its sky-blue flowers closing in the afternoon keeps flowering no matter how hot the weather. Fennel, green or bronze-leaved, billows from ditches, its thread-like leaves feed-

ing those fascinating swallowtail caterpillars that resemble miniature Chinese parade monsters.



fennel

Bird-Dispersed Seeds

Fruit-eating birds, particularly robins, are responsible for spreading the seeds of blackberries, ivy, holly, spurge laurel, cherry laurel, hawthorn and Cotoneaster. One of my neighbours has what I have to



spurge laurel

admit is a magnificent ivy hedge, all in the physiological flowering stage. He clips it and it produces large crop of seeds each year so I am continually pulling up seedlings. He claims it is the only thing preventing his (invisible) stone wall from collapsing.

Those shrubs mentioned above are a threat to the well-being of our native areas. Volunteers have contributed thousands of hours of labour to clearing some of our local parks of them. It is incumbent on us all to garden in such a way that less strain is put on the natural environment.

So there you have a run down of some of the Nouveau Weeds – insults gardeners

have inflicted on themselves and others, and I didn't even mention Cyclamen. You like them you say; well some people like rabbits (so do I, with carrots, bay leaf and red wine).

Our Victoria Rhododendron Society LOGO, Rhododendron “Transit Gold”.

On the top left page of our Newsletter, on specially ordered clothing, and on our stationery is a rhododendron with oval leaves and flowers of tubular funnel-shapes and a soft gold colour. It is R. “Transit Gold”, a hybrid of cinnabarium ssp. xanthocodon, Royal Flush, cream form, which is a cinnabarimun maddenii hybrid.

Dr. Stuart Holland, one of the founding members of the VRS, made the cross, and Bill Dale,



a friend of Stu's and another founding member, registered it (British Columbia) with the American Rhododendron Society in 1989.

I remember R. “Transit Gold” in Stu's garden on Transit Road in Oak Bay years ago. It was planted in with other rhododendrons with similar leaves and flowers. Looking up into the red and pink and yellow bells, I thought the colours, with sunlight through them, were exquisite.

R. “Transit Gold” is one of many rhododendrons susceptible to powdery mildew. We have found our plants do well with excellent ventilation around them, and good drainage.



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOTICE !!

This year, the Victoria Rhododendron Society's dues must be in by November 15th.

This is particularly important for ARS members. If the dues are not paid by then you will not receive your Winter 2011 ARS Journal.

The Membership form is on the last page, or page 8, of this Newsletter. Please copy/cut out the form, and either mail your dues or bring them along with the form to the next meeting on November 1.

NOTICES FROM THE BOARD

After much discussion, the VRS Board has decided that next Spring's Show and Sale will be changed. The Show will be at Hillside Mall on Saturday, April 30, and the Sale will be on Saturday, May 7, at Abkhazi Gardens.

(Continued from page 2)

ferns nearby, she told us she felt like the Fern Madam of the garden.

I found out that not all athyriums are invasive thugs, unlike like the native Lady Fern, *Athyrium filix-femina*. Some are very fine like athyriums 'Vernoniae cristatum', a crested fern. An English form of *filix-femina* is also well behaved.

Members and guests found Judith's talk so interesting, and Evelyn Weesjes' ferns so attractive that Evelyn's ferns were sold out before the meeting's end!

Propagation Workshop - October 30th.

The Victoria Propagating Group will be holding a hands-on propagating seminar on October 30th. We plan to start around 10 am to let people from up island and the mainland get here. We will have a full day planned with an early group dinner so everyone can still get home that evening.

We will discuss all types of propagating and members of our Group will be there to offer their views about propagating cuttings, growing seeds, and alternative methods. We will have a hands-on session in the garden and the propagator where all attendees will be able to take their own cuttings and stick them in Ken Webb's propagator so they can retrieve (we hope) some of their own "babies" next spring. There will be several lectures about seeds, cuttings and nurse grafting etc.

You should bring warm and dry clothes for working in the garden. There will be a nominal charge for lunch. Due to room constraints we might have to limit or cut off the number of attendees – first come, first serve.

Please contact Ken or Madeleine Webb at kenwebb@live.ca or 250-744-1785.

**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

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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 _____