

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



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2012 Thirty-Second Year of Publication

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MEETING 6:30

MONDAY, May 14, 2012

Member's Night at GLENDALE GARDENS, of the Horticultural Center of the Pacific, 505 Quayle Road.

This will be a tour given by Bill McMillan, Curator of the Rhododendron Garden, and volunteers, Calvin Parsons, and Theresa McMillan

Glendale's Rhododendron and Hosta Garden

has been a work in progress for many years. It has been partly funded by the Victoria Rhododendron Society.

The funds have been used to buy new rhododendrons, special soils, and equipment for a watering system that uses less water now than was possible in the past.

Come and see the garden at its prime!

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Two talks on April 2

By Theresa McMillan

Joanna Drewry, Board Member of the H.C.P. spoke to us about the history of the extensive gardens and Conservation Park on Quayle Road in Saanich.

A few years ago, the gardens' name was changed to Glendale Gardens, but with the College and the upcoming expansion, the gardens are now referred to as the Glendale Gardens of the Horticulture Center of the Pacific. Ever since rats chewed on electric wires, and led to a fire which destroyed the tool shed and

a large greenhouse/programs center two years ago, the H.C.P. has been looking at many improvements.

Right now, they are looking for more funding for the building of a beautiful new Center named after Mel Couvelier. Mel was a mayor of Saanich who was instrumental in helping establish the "Hort Center" as we know it today from an old potato and bulb farm and a forested hillside.

In his talk, Bill McMillan focused on the

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latest developments in the Rhododendron and Hosta Garden at H.C.P.

There has been a new micro-spray watering system installed in the Garden. Why did Bill and Calvin Parsons go to all that work?

The basic soil of the Rhododendron garden is clay, which drains poorly and rhododendrons do not do well in it. In the past, Ted Irving and his crew of volunteers established raised beds and dug in 6 inches of coarse sand and added lots of leaf mulch. Ten years later, drainage was poor again. Bill and Calvin and students dug drainage ditches and filled them with coarse gravel but they were not effective and rhodo deaths from root rot continued.

One ongoing project has been to lift rhododendrons showing stress, perch them higher than the surrounding ground, and fill in around the roots with a sand-bark mulch-compost mix that drains well. This treatment has been very effective, but a number of rhododendrons are too big to lift so not all of the plants have been replanted. The watering regime led to over-watering and more drainage problems so funds from VRS were used to buy materials to set up a micro watering system. For months, Bill and Calvin Parsons were to be seen climbing under and around the garden with small hoses. Then they put in small stakes with fine hoses and mini sprinklers on top of them to water specific plants or groups of plants. The results have been excellent.

A side effect has been less water on gravel paths, so fewer weeds on them.

Bill showed pictures of rhodos in bloom in different seasons at Glendale, including early ones like Tessa Bianca, April bloomers like the spectacular red Taurus, and late summer beauties like Old Copper and Golden Bell.

An excerpt from “The Complete Wit and Wisdom of Norman Todd”

By Theresa McMillan

Last year, a group of Victoria Rhododendron Society volunteers, led by our president, Calvin Parsons, collected 74 articles written by Norman Todd, and had “The Complete Wit and Wisdom of Norman Todd” printed. It is a soft-covered book, with several pictures of rhododendrons on its cover and 228 pages. At \$12 for members of any Rhododendron Society, it is a bargain. Why? Because it is full of the most interesting articles! And there are still a few books waiting for buyers and as gifts....

Here I reprint an article which shows Norm at his most thoughtful and amusing.

“Life’s Chosen Few” October 2001
by Norman Todd

Do you recall your years in high school and your sometime strivings for academic and social success? In my recollection, at any rate, it seems that one or two of my contemporaries managed to take everything in stride; they understood the tricks of trigonometry intuitively, could recite Shakespeare’s sonnets after one scanning and never double faulted at tennis. These people, perhaps you were one of them, were destined, it seemed, to be leaders, to flourish, and live beautiful lives.

There are a few rhododendrons that seem to have these same secrets to happy survival stamped into their genetic code. They grow and bloom and look contented and well composed year after year. ‘Nancy Evans’ is one such happy camper. She is a good looker and although of modest stature, wins beauty contests at all the shows. She is consistent in her performance and manages on an every day diet, being neither bulimic nor anorexic. She is at home in almost any garden in these parts. Her equa-

nimity assures her acceptance by the rest of the rhododendron group. Her comportment equates to harmony; a harmony that extends to her being one of the most prolific and nurturing parents in the rhododendron community.

I would also place ‘Rosamundi’ in this easy-going, congenial group. ‘Rosamundi’ will not be the garden’s valedictorian, or medal winner, but will shine in her season and move on smoothly from year to year. I would guess that because she starts to bloom so early in the season and is so popular and ubiquitous, she gets more notice than almost any other rhododendron. I have observed that even visitors to our part of the world who come from inhospitable places (in a horticultural sense I mean) – like Ottawa or Flin Flon – want to know who is this modest but radiant beauty, blooming in January. Furthermore, she enjoys blooming so much that she does it for three or four months. She is always modestly unassuming and unobtrusive but thoroughly reliable.

I also recall from schooldays the new arrival bursting onto the scene and taking the place by storm. A big and brassy and invincible sports jock idolized by half and feared by the rest. You could certainly claim that ‘Point Defiance’ and ‘Horizon Monarch’ fit this caricature. If they were human they would be sent for drug testing. Their stature and strength are suspiciously enhanced. By what? they ask for no special favours. Compare the behaviours of, say, fargessi. Fargessi whimpers at the slightest threat of thirst, rolling its leaves in premature pique. It can barely bear to breed as it may die if its swelling seedpods are not removed. I have noticed the same defect in ‘Chief Paulina’. If the seed capsules are not detached – difficult procedures with the Chief as she is particularly loathe to part with them – it is probable that the twig bearing the pods will die. It has to be admitted

that our super heroes 'Point Defiance' and 'Horizon Monarch' also have the rachis pretty well secured to the end of the branch but a quick snap at the right spot removes the spent blossom and I'm sure it does not hurt all that much. These two giants will grow more than a foot a year and once they start to get hair on their chins they blossom profusely every year. I could speculate that the breeders of corn will be looking at how to use their genes to give metre-long corn cobs. But perhaps the cobs would be on five metre corn plants and therefore hard to harvest.

Another, get-it-right-first-time, shiner is 'Blaney's Blue'. He could be the show-off of the class. What a power bloomer! I don't think that in my garden 'Blaney' will ever be dead-headed. It's a life's career to tackle a full dead-head. But it doesn't make any difference.

There is that old chestnut about an English gardener, Lord 'So-and-So', observing that dead-heading is a foolish practice – it just makes the job more onerous the next year. This does not apply to 'Blaney's Blue'. The creature will carry on showing off with thousands of blossoms no matter how it is neglected. Also, have you noticed that often when someone is not very gifted academically she will be at the top of the heap by having a keen sense of humour? 'In her attire doth show her wit, it doth so well become her.' I am thinking of 'Paprika Spiced'. Here is a seriously freckled blond who stops her audience by evoking simultaneously, mirth and sympathy. She may even elicit a therapeutic response, as she appears to have an advanced case of chickenpox. 'Paprika Spiced' is surely a comic but she is also a cunning commercial success.

Being born with a deformity can be exploited to advantage if it is not too debilitating to one's health. 'Linearifolium' is among the most admired and all because of her genes being really messed up. I suppose some of her popularity

could be due to her striking similarity to marijuana and resulting hop headed response of rhododendron illiterates.

'Linearifolium's' flower is not at all striking; it has been described as strappy. The message here, I suppose, is to use what God-given features one has to the full advantage and bask demurely in the attention generated.

Some of us react very negatively to another's BO; especially so when squeezed in a crowd, shoulder to shoulder, or more accurately, armpit to armpit. However, this is the way I like to grow my rhododendrons and in particular the ones that exude smells. I personally like the BO of almost all rhododendrons and we should remember it is there because it gives some evolutionary advantage. Stripping the leaves of russatum when doing cuttings releases an odor that I hope will be present in the afterworld. Charitopes has a fruity sweet aroma; it will please the nose of an oenophile. I used to have a plant of kongboense (now on the most wanted list) and it was fun to ask little ones to crush a leaf and tell what it smelled of. "Toothpaste", "Bubblegum", "Kool Aid" were some of the responses.

Most of us, of course, are not endowed with film star looks or stratospheric IQs. Rhododendrons, as with people, are unable to defy the laws of statistics. Most are right in the middle of the great giant bell curve. So the 'Anna Kruschkes' and the 'Percy Wisemans' and the 'Dora Amateis' will survive, as will we, contributing our two bits and being content to be among the great silent majority of the populace, paying our taxes and keeping out of trouble. We are with honour but not singularly honoured. We cut the mustard but don't leave a burning sensation. I think O. Henry had it right when he wrote: "I'm not headlined in the bills but I'm the mustard in the salad just the same."

Board News from Calvin Parsons

Photograph Your Garden – Just a reminder to start taking photos of your garden so you can be part of the monthly Garden PowerPoint presentation of members' gardens and/or enter our November Photo Contest.

Photos can be sent to Calvin or Lois (email addresses on page 2).

New Ideas – New ideas are always welcomed from our membership. Perhaps you can find a spot where you can become more involved in the VRS.

Several members have opened their **gardens for tours** this May: Johanna and Moe Massa in Sooke, Agnes and David Lynn and Ann Schau near Cadboro Bay, Ken and Madeleine Webb near Beaver Lake and Lois and Roy Blackmore on Triangle Mountain in Langford.

More details are in the Upcoming Events section on page 7 and 8.

REPORT FOR THE WESTSHORE TOWN CENTRE SHOW AND SALE

We had a very successful show and sale at the Westshore Town Centre on Saturday, April 21, 2012, with much thanks going to the many volunteers who gave of their time and energy to make our first venture into mall sales a huge success. From getting plants from storage, to helping bring plants into the mall and keeping an eye on the process on the Friday before the sale, a huge thank you goes to Dave and Agnes Lynn, Burns Morrison, Ken and Madeleine Webb, Tom and Ann Widdowson, Ian Duncan and Anne Allen, Roy Blackmore, Joyce Parker, and Moe and Johanna Massa.

First thing, at 7 o'clock Saturday morning, the judging and clerking crew arrived fit and ready

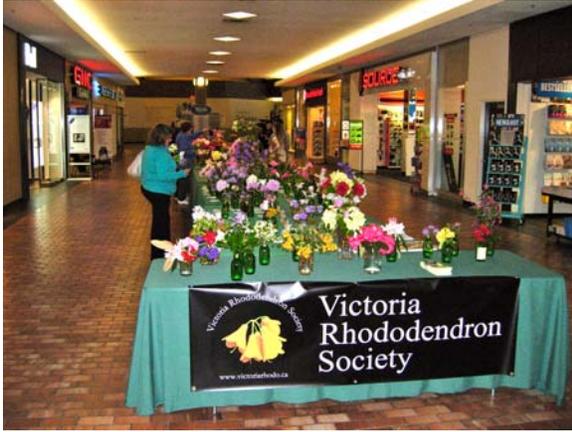
to bring their skills and expertise to the complicated task of choosing the best early trusses and plants of 2012. Thanks goes to the judges: Calvin Parsons, Sharon Joseph, Peter Barriscale, Al Campbell, Burns Morrison, and Dean Goard. Helping the judges, the clerks did a remarkable job of assisting. Thanks goes to Archie Brown, Ellen Wellborn, Norma Buckley, Bonnie Moro, Madeleine Webb, Ken Webb, Anne Allen, Carolyn Marquardt, Gareth Shearman, Carrie George and Jacq Bradbury.

Throughout the day, volunteers helped with sales, advice to customers and onlookers, giving out ballots for people's choice and engaging the public with their knowledge and love of rhododendrons. A sincere thank you to Johanna Massa, Gareth Shearman, Ann Widdowson, Florence Newcombe, Karen Morrison, Lorraine Hoy, Carrie George, Moe Massa, Roy Blackmore, Bonnie Moro and the members of the executive who stayed throughout the day, giving of their time and energy to assist in any way that was needed.

A special thank you goes to Annabelle Suminski of the Bentall-Kennedy Centre for making the whole experience delightful and uncomplicated. A sincere thank you also to Madeleine Webb who has helped with the shows and sales for the past few years; I so appreciate her assistance and her good ideas that have helped make the club's new ventures so successful. If I have inadvertently missed a name or two, my sincere apologies to anyone left out of this report.

Lois Blackmore

Show Chair



UPCOMING SHOWS AND SALES

Our next event for the club is the **“Rhodoholic’s Sale” at Abkhazi garden on Saturday, May 12 from 9 a.m. until noon.**

We need help with sales and service for that morning. Bringing in plants from the road to the garden, giving information to the public about the care and nature of growing rhododendrons, assisting with sales, and cleaning up afterwards are some of the tasks that volunteers are needed for. If you can volunteer for the Abkhazi sale, please contact Lois Blackmore at 250-478-6615 or loisb@shaw.ca.

The final show and sale is on **Saturday, May 26 from 9:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. at the Tillicum Centre.** It is similar to the first show and sale at the West Shore Town Center, but features later blooming rhododendrons and also a plant sale.

To be saved, all trusses must be picked up at the Mall by 5 p.m. that day.

Because our May 14th meeting is at Glendale Gardens for a tour, not in the hall at Garth Homer Centre, signing up to assist at the May 26 show and sale will be more difficult.

For the May 26 show and sale, we again will need help with setting up tables, bringing in plants, judging, giving out information about the growing and care of rhododendrons, sales, and cleanup afterward. If you are able to give your time and effort to help the club in some way, please contact Lois Blackmore at 250-478-6615, Madeleine Webb at 250-744-1785 or Calvin Parsons at 250-590-0489.

Upcoming Events

2012	Event	Place	Fee
Fri – Mon, May 4 – 7	ARS-ASA International Convention Info Contact and registration information	Asheville, North Carolina	~\$515 US
Sat May 5	VRS Garden Tour 11 – 3 pm Johanna & Moe Massa	5024 Glinz Lake Road, Sooke	
Sat May 5	Myths associated with spring gardening Speaker: Dr. Linda Chalker-Scott 1 – 3 pm	Victoria Citadel (corner of Pat Bay & McKenzie) 4030 Douglas St., Victoria	\$10
Sun, May 6	Humungous Plant Sale 10 – 1 pm	University of Victoria Look for 'plant sale' signs	TBA
Fri – Sat, May 11 - 12	Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society Vancouver Garden Tour CVRS Bus Tour	Two-day tour of special gardens of the Vancouver area	\$320
Sat, May 12	VRS Rhodo-holics Sale 9 – 12 pm	Abkhazi Garden 1964 Fairfield Rd, Victoria	Free
Sun, May 13	Plant Sale and Garden Open 10 – 2 pm Large selection of woodland perennials, Pacific Coast Iris hybrids, hydrangeas, ferns, geraniums & fuchsias.	Carmen Varcoe 5450 Old West Saanich Rd, Victoria Some parking available next door at Gazebo B & B. Please note sale and open garden is on a new date this year not in April as in the past.	Free
Sun, May 13	VRS Garden Tour 1 – 4 pm Agnes & David Lynn	3913 Woodhaven Terrace, Victoria	Free
Sun, May 13	VRS Garden Tour 3 – 6 pm Ann Schau	3919 Woodhaven Terrace, Victoria	
Wed, May 16	VRS Garden Tour 3 – 7 pm Ken & Madeleine Webb	5008 Old West Saanich Rd, Victoria	Free
Sat, May 20	Plant-a-Holics Sale and Open Garden 9 – 12 pm Tearoom open: 10 am	Abkhazi Garden (250 598-8096) 1964 Fairfield Rd, Victoria Parking at Margaret Jenkins School	Free

Upcoming Events

2012	Event	Place	Fee
Sat, June 2	Cowichan Valley Garden Club 1 – 4 pm Annual Spring Flower Show and Plant Sale cowichanvalleygardenclub.com/	St. Peter's Anglican Church Hall 5800 Church Rd, (off Maple Bay Rd) Duncan.	Admission
Sun,	Sooke's Secret Garden Tour, sookesecretgardens.com	10 different gardens	\$20
Fri – Sat, June 22 – 23	BC Blooms at Government House	1401 Rockland Avenue, Victoria	Free
Sat – Sun, June 23 – 24	Gardens in Bloom" tour 10:00 - 4:00pm Comox Valley Horticultural Society	10 gardens to visit - map is supplied with the ticket	\$15
Sat – Sun, June 23 – 24	Quadra Island Quilt and Garden Tour 10 am - 4pm Tickets are available from the Tourist Bureau in Campbell River and on Quadra Island. For info contact Joy Bird 250-285-3300 or quadrabirds@gmail.com	Quadra Island	\$12
Sun, June 24	VRS Picnic 12 pm	Webb's Rhododendron Garden 5008 Old West Saanich Rd, Victoria	Free
Sat, Oct 13	Propagating Workshop 9:30 am kenwebb@live.ca or phone 250-744-1785	Madeleine & Ken's house 5008 Old West Saanich Road, Saanich	\$25