

The Victoria Rhododendron Society

Newsletter



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May 2013 Thirty-Third Year of Publication

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MEETING 7:30

MONDAY, May 13, 2013

GARTH HOMER CENTRE, 813 DARWIN STREET, VICTORIA, B. C.

Speaker: Lois Blackmore, “Jim Barlup Hybrids”

Lois Blackmore, along with her husband Roy, has a large rhododendron garden on Triangle Mountain in Langford. On the sloped areas, they have planted many species rhododendrons in dappled shade. They showcase many of Jim Barlup’s hybrids which Jim created on Whidbey Island in Washington State.

In This Issue

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| • April’s talk | pg. 1 |
| • Notes from the Board | pg. 3 |
| • Notes on Pruning (part 2) | pg. 3 |
| • Epimediums | pg. 4 |

REFRESHMENTS

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

Dr. R. Clayton Smith, Norm Thomas, Evert and Audrey Van Eerden, Elizabeth and Patrick Von Aderkas and Jackie Walker.

Please wrap your cookies or snacks. Coffee and tea are supplied.

Assistance in setting out the food and helping Betty in the kitchen cleanup is really appreciated.

April’s Talk *By Theresa McMillan*

Sean Rafferty gave us an interesting talk, fully illustrated, of a visit he and his wife Brenda made first to Vietnam, then south central China in May of 2012.

Hanoi at 38 degrees was extremely hot and humid, but the mountains of Vietnam provided welcome relief. The vegetation and scenery were wonderful.

Sean found to his regret that his digital cameras did not do well with all the humidity. He had to buy a simple point and click camera (previously used) in order to get any pictures at all.

On their travels Brenda and Sean found many

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interesting knots of electrical wires hanging from the poles. Power in their accommodations was often iffy.

An interesting indicator of how expensive accommodations could be was all the doilies on the backs and arms of upholstered furniture. In more moderately priced accommodations, there weren't any.

Tourism is a fast growing venture in China. Ethnic tourism featuring groups such as the Yao people has become popular.

The Chinese have also discovered the fine scenery in their many high mountains. Sean especially enjoyed all the many exotic geological features to be seen on the rugged slopes, but wished for someone along to interpret them.

Access to the high mountains of China used to be limited in the past to well-to-do adventurers or foreign plant hunters. Now, many of these areas have become very popular parks.

Sean showed us pictures of thousands of winding staircases leading up through practically vertical Karst landscapes to Buddhist temples. Visibility with rain and fog can be very poor. Adding to the difficulty of using the stairs, there are slippery moss on the steps and poisonous insects crawling on the handrails. However, some better-off tourists can afford to be carried up the stairs in sedan chairs by a few strong men.

The views include great expanses of specialized rhododendrons, like simiarum, bamboo, evergreen maples or pines covering the mountain slopes. In Victoria, most of the species we can grow here are from higher elevations.



The city of Guilin, one of the most popular tourist sites in China, renowned for its dramatic Karst landscapes.

NEWS FROM THE BOARD

Our first Show and Sale will be at Tillicum Mall on Saturday, April 27. Sharon Joseph is making outline pictures of rhododendrons for children to take and colour at our Shows. Theresa and Bill McMillan have set up new forms for the People's Choice Trophy at the Shows. Now people can choose the three best rhododendrons for the prize. Hopefully, visitors will end up liking rhododendrons so much they will buy more and join the VRS!

Show and Garden Information From Lois Blackmore

The planning for the Tillicum Show and Sale is well underway and many volunteers have indicated their willingness to help. We are hoping that we receive the continuing support of our club members for the Westshore Show and Sale on May 27. Sign up sheets for the the Westshore Town Centre Show and Sale will be available at the May meeting. We so appreciate all those who volunteer their time in support of our club. We would be unable to carry out these events without the excellent support of both new and long-time members of the club. A huge thank you to all those who give a helping hand. Those who help with clean up afterwards usually have a meal together to celebrate our hard work.

We are trying something new this year. It is an event called "The Spring Fling". This year it is being held at the Webb's garden on May 18, at 3 pm. Entry to the Spring Fling event is by providing a finger food or appetizer. We will tour the garden and then have some snacks and conversation to finish out the afternoon. Come and support this new event and have the opportunity to see, talk about, and discuss our favorite subject.

IN MEMORIAM: Ruth Trelawny

Ruth passed away in her 90th year on April 5 2013. She and her husband John had a beautiful and extensive garden on waterfront property in Deep Cove. They welcomed international horticultural groups and the public to view their diverse plant collection. We members of the VRS enjoyed our visits to the Trelawnys and their memorable garden. Our sympathies to her friends and family.

TYPES OF PRUNING (part 1 is in April's edition. This is part 2)

By Bill McMillan

Woody pruning of elepidotes

Elepidotes often do not break readily from old wood, or do so unpredictably. Modest annual trimming (immediately after blooming) of all plants helps to control their sizes and shapes. Prune floppy branches back to sturdy lower shoots and take out crossing wood. Remove perhaps 5% to 10% of the superstructure each year. This helps to prevent the superstructure from outgrowing the roots. Do this woody pruning before dead-heading.

Long neglected plants, that have got out of hand or which have been heavily damaged by snow or a falling branch, often benefit by being cut down to the ground (coppiced). Most but not all will quickly regenerate and you can shape the plant as it grows back. Dennis McKiver commented that one plant he cut back severely did not bloom again until it grew back to its original size.

For plants that are not quite out of hand, but nevertheless are too leggy and need shaping, selective strong pruning of old wood can be tried early in the spring. Begin by pruning a few branches one year, a few more the following year, and so on. This procedure sometimes does not work as well as the brutal coppicing. Some elepidote rhododen-

drons that are selectively pruned do not break as readily from old wood as those that have been cut to the ground but others respond well. Try it and see; if it does not work, coppicing remains an alternative.

Woody pruning and deadheading of lepidotes

Lepidotes have smaller and more numerous flowers and leaves than elepidotes, so deadheading of entire plants can be very time consuming. However, they break much more freely from old wood than elepidotes. As a consequence, after blooming, small lepidote varieties can be lightly sheared with hedge clippers, followed by deadheading of the few spent flowers that the shears have missed. The dreary task of deadheading of larger lepidote varieties can be much reduced by modest pruning of last year's wood - cutting back the longer of last year's shoots by perhaps 20%. This removes the spent blooms and much reduces the task of deadheading. After pruning, the rest of the bush can be deadheaded. Ted Irving of the Victoria Rhododendron Society noted that such modest pruning of healthy plants does not significantly reduce blooming the following year. Remove crossing wood. Do all this immediately after blooming, before new leaves appear.

Pruning azaleas

Deciduous azaleas break freely from old wood and so can be pruned in much the same way as lepidotes. Cut back last year's wood (and so remove many spent blooms) after blooming but before new leaves develop. You may also wish to prune back stems that did not bear flowers last year. Deciduous azaleas sometimes throw long irregular shoots which are charming in the woodland setting and which you may wish to retain. If however you wish to contain growth in a more formal setting, then prune them down. They will break freely in a few weeks.

Evergreen azalea flowers are far too numerous to deadhead. Instead shear the entire plant lightly after blooming. After shearing, pick over the plant to remove spent blooms missed by the

shears. By shearing, some early leaves will be lost, but later leaves will soon clothe the bush and the plant will not be weakened. Over several years, you can shape the bush to your taste. Evergreen azaleas, together with small lepidotes, can be the easiest of all rhododendrons to prune.

Epimediums (Epimedia?)

By Brenda Macdonald

reprinted with permission from the March 2013 issue of "The Yak" of the Fraser South Rododendron Society

Already many of the earliest signs of spring are upon us, at least those of us who do not live halfway up a mountain. However, even in our garden we can see the earliest of the crocuses (those sort of washed-out mauve ones that only really look impressive if you have an entire swathe of them, and you stand far enough away) and some smallish patches of snowdrops that I keep hoping will turn into largish patches sooner rather than later. Rhododendrons 'Christmas Cheer' and its doppelgänger 'Rosamundi' are out in many gardens, as well as the species *mu-cronulatum*, *ririei*, and *moupinense*.

Another early riser is the genus *Epimedium*. Even at our shady altitude we noticed that one of our not-yet-planted specimens *E.* 'Black Sea' was showing its curled up flower stem on the surface of the soil. So if you have not been out to shear back last year's now-tatty leaves, it would be a good time to get to it.

From a paleontological perspective epimediums are a temperate zone plant that was probably found all across the northern hemisphere. However several millennia of ice ages reduced its spread to areas of China that were not glaciated, and a few other

pockets. Only its close cousin, the pristine and delicate *Vancouveria*, remains in North America, native to the west coast of Washington, Oregon, and California.

A few of the Chinese species were sent home as part of the enormous booty of the great Victorian hunter-gatherers, but the vast majority of the species only became available after the Cultural Revolution had spun itself out. Of the 44 recognized species of epimediums, 36 were discovered and documented after 1975.

The few specimens and seeds that did survive those earlier voyages home to Britain and other part of Europe were enthusiastically embraced by gardeners. The plants were bullet proof or ironclad or whatever descriptor is appropriate



E. 'Black Sea'

for a plant that can thrive under two of a gardener's obstacles - winter cold and summer shade - and even survive quite nicely under the third - lack of water during the growing season. Moreover, importantly for the modern North American garden, epimediums are deer resistant.

Epimediums have an amazing array of common names, some of which are hard to reconcile. Barrenwort and Anchor plant are easy to deal with, even Rowdy Lamb Herb, but how could those decorous Victorians have recon-

ciled Bishop's Hat with Randy Beef Grass, or Fairy Wings with Horny Goat Weed?

The less salubrious names describe the effect of ingesting epimediums rather than their appearance, and are the result of this plant's long history as part of traditional Chinese medicine. Stories of shepherds noticing the increased frequency and enthusiasm of breeding activities in their herds after grazing in meadows filled with these plants led to a predictable use in humans as the original Viagra. This has, of course, led to over-exploitation of wild populations, which can be considered only slightly less objectionable than killing rhinos for their horns or bears for their gall bladders.

Epimediums are herbaceous perennials; some are evergreen but most die back to the ground each winter. They can be divided into two broad groups: those that spread and those that clump. Various hybrids have now been developed that range in height from only a couple of inches to a good two feet. Their leaves are often attractively heart shaped with deep red



E. 'Bandit'

or maroon edges. The leaves are often tinted bronze or copper when new, and many display very attractive fall colouring. The blossom colours range from maroon and red through orange to yellow and white. Held aloft on thin, wiry stems, the flowers seem to dance about in the slightest breeze.

A moist woodland with dappled shade is an epimedium's domicile of choice. It will sulk in bright sun and in heavy shade. Even then, epimediums are one of the few plants that can survive in the dry shade under conifers, if only as an attractive ground cover. They are care-free, with the caveat that the deciduous types should have their last year's leaves cut off at ground level in December or January, allowing the flower stems and new leaf growth to show to advantage.

Epimediums have a significantly unique flower shape - the cause of at least some of their common names. The flowers are not large but often each flower scape has many blossoms. Usually there are four petal-like inner sepals; the outer sepals are small and quickly shed as the flower opens. The actual petals are often developed into long spurs, giving the flowers a reflexed and delicate appearance. Conversely, sometimes it is the greatly expanded sepals that provide the colour, the petals being much less conspicuous. Either way, the blossoms are most often heavily reflexed, and this, in combination with the tall and wiry flower stems, is what gives the plant its delicate and ethereal appearance.



E. unknown yellow



E. 'Sweetheart'



E. grandiflorum 'Nanum'

Upcoming Events

2013	Event	Place	Fee
Sat, April 27 9 am – 4 pm	VRS Show	Tillicum Mall, Victoria	
Sat, April 27 10 am – 12 pm	Evelyn Weesjes Plant Sale & Garden Open Excellent selection of rhodos, ferns, shrubs and perennials	10629 Derrick Rd, Sidney	
Wed – Sun May 1 - 5	<u>ARS 2013 Convention</u> Hosted by the Olympia Chapter of the ARS	SeaTac Airport Marriott SeaTac, Washington	Variable
Sun, May 5 10 am – 1 pm	Giant Plant Sale New & unusual perennials In support of Finnerty Gardens	UVIC Gym	
Sun, May 5 1 – 4 pm	Agnes Lynn's Garden Visit	3913 Woodhaven Terr, Victo- ria	
Tue, May 7 7 – 9 pm	Victoria Horticultural Society Plant Sale	Garth Homer Centre	
Thur – Sat May 9 – 11	2013 Cowichan Valley Rhodo Society Tour to Washington State	Gardens in Washington State area and one in BC	\$500/p. dbl or \$600/p. sgle occupancy
Sat, May 11 9 am – 12 pm	VRS Rhodo Sale	Abkhazi Garden, 250 598-8096 1964 Fairfield Rd, Victoria	
Sat, May 11 9 am – 1 pm	Peter Vaartnou invites VRS members to take cuttings from his parents' home prior to sale of property	2950 Lansdowne Rd.	
Sat, May 11 10 am – 2 pm	Carmen Varco & Friends Plant Sale & Garden Open woodland perennials, hydrangeas, & Pacif- ic Coast Iris hybrids	5450 Old West Saanich Rd, Victoria Parking available next door at the Gazebo B & B	
Mon, May 13 7:30 pm	VRS meeting Lois Blackmore,'s talk on Jim Barlup hy- brids	Garth Homer Centre, Victoria	
Sat, May 18 3 pm	Spring Fling Tour the garden Social and refreshments	Ken and Madeleine Webb 5008 Old West Saanich Road parking in the yard and on the road	By donation
Sun, May 19 9 am – 12 pm	Plant-a-Holics Sale	Abkhazi Gardens 1964 Fairfield Rd, Victoria Parking at Margaret Jenkins School	Free

Upcoming Events

Thur, May 23 6:30-9 pm	<u>Pursuing the Wild: The Sichuan Botanical Expedition</u> with Sue Milliken and Kelly Dodson	UVIC, David Lam Auditorium, MacLaurin Bldg A144	Free
Sat, May 25 9 am – 4 pm	VRS Show	Westshore Mall, Victoria	
Fri, May 31 9:30 am–9 pm Sat, Jun 1 9:30 am–5:30 pm	Victoria Cactus & Succulent Society Show & Sale	Tillicum Mall	
Sun, June 23 12:00 – 4:00 pm	VRS Potluck Picnic	The Massas' in Sooke	



Epimedium pinnatum, leaves and flowers