



VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY MARCH 2026 NEWSLETTER



**OUR PURPOSE IS TO
PROMOTE AND EDUCATE
THE PUBLIC
ABOUT THE GENUS
RHODODENDRON**

**WE MEET AT THE
COUVELIER CENTER
ON THE GROUNDS OF THE
HCP GARDENS
505 QUAYLE ROAD
VICTORIA BC.**

**MEETINGS ARE HELD ON
THE FIRST THURSDAY OF
EACH MONTH
SEPTEMBER – MAY**

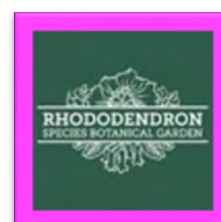
MEETINGS BEGIN AT 7:30 PM.



INTRODUCING OUR SPEAKER FROM THE RHODODENDRON SPECIES FOUNDATION



ATSUKO GIBSON



Atsuko is the Nursery Manager and Assistant Curator at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden in Federal Way, Washington. Originally from Japan, she earned her degree in horticulture from the University of Arkansas and completed an internship at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. At the RSBG, she specializes in propagating species rhododendrons from seed, cuttings, and grafts while managing the garden's two acre nursery.

Atsuko's presentation will focus on azaleas.

Atsuko Gibson will be in person at the Couvelier Center, HCP on March 5, 2026.

For those who cannot attend in person, here is the ZOOM information.

Topic: VicRhodo March 5 meeting

Time: Mar. 5, 2026 07:30 PM Pacific time (US and Canada)

Join ZOOM Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81848860477?pwd=PnXovTXJBPj5Zby3hlLvXuSSXhdX4a.1>

Meeting ID: 818 4886 0477

Passcode: 288345...you may need to use passcode!



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**“If you have a
garden and a library,
you have everything
you need.”**

**Marcus Tullius
Cicero**

I went deep-diving quotations about Spring today. I found a lot of fluff and a few gems. I liked this one from Cicero a lot so naturally I went down a rabbit-hole on Google as well. Considered the master of Latin prose, the successful and revered Roman orator/ statesman/ lawyer eventually met a nasty end.

As plants people, I mean gardeners, not something out of Day of the Triffids, we are always confronted with the Latin versus common names of plants. It's not all Cicero's fault. Linnaeus and other scientists chose Latin because of its standardization and precision. If you've heard of it referred to as a dead language – whoops – another rabbit hole. The latest addition to my library is simply crawling with Latin.

“Trees of Victoria, A Wanderer's Guide by Collin Varner, former horticulturist/arboriculturist at UBC was published in 2024 and it features excellent photos, identification and street addresses (!) of the wondrous variety of trees we are surrounded by. (There's another rabbit hole, ending a sentence with a preposition.) He doesn't mention rhododendrons but it's a good book. And a good gardening book beats a rabbit hole any day. At least it has a beginning, middle, and end, unlike Wikipedia!

OUR FEBRUARY TALK FROM FINLAND WITH KRISTIAN THEQVIST

A visit was in store for us on Thursday evening, February 4, 2026, when we were taken far away to Finland. Kristian showed us the rhododendron parks in Finland, and specifically shared his own vast property filled with our favorite plants, many of which he had hybridized.



Kristian's pond before



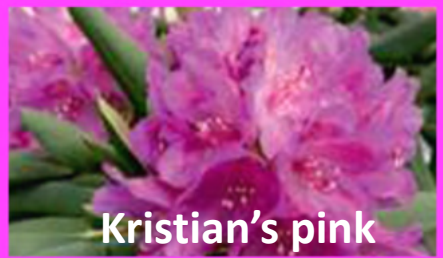
Kristian's pond/ island



Pernilla



R. tomentosum



Kristian's pink





Kristian's Rhododendrons – Finnish Collection
varieties introduced to the market – page 2



'Kyllikki'



'Nikodemus'



'Stina'



'Ritva'



'Kristian's
Sunshine'



'Kristian's
Cute'



'Teuvo'



THE PLANT RAFFLE IS VERY POPULAR



THANKS TO THOSE WHO DONATE

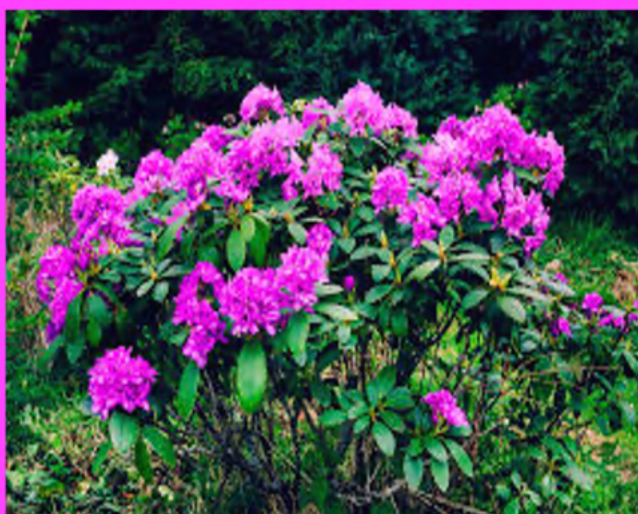


MUCH APPRECIATED

CELEBRATING RHODODENDRONS IN IRELAND



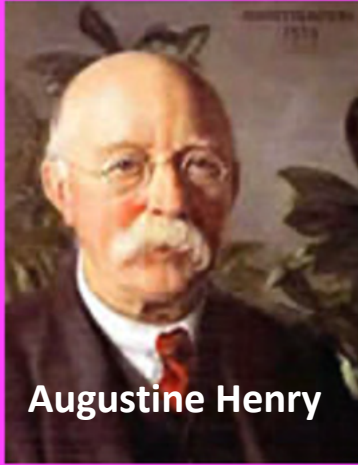
The story of rhododendrons in Ireland is one of ornamental introduction, hybridization and eventual ecological concern. Introduced in the late 1700s as a decorative plant for estates and a cover for hunting grounds, it later flourished through hybridization efforts by notable horticulturists like the Moore family of Glasnevin and became a popular garden feature. However, the invasive *Rhododendron ponticum* has since become a significant problem, dominating landscapes and making areas inaccessible.



Rhododendron ponticum is a common and fast spreading species and has become a significant invasive problem in Ireland. Its dense foliage can block out sunlight and kill off other native vegetation, creating rhododendron forests where little else can grow. The invasive nature of the plant makes eradication difficult as it can resprout from its roots.

IRISH PLANT HUNTERS (*rhododendrons*)

Ireland has a rich history of intrepid plant hunters who braved remote regions – from the mountains of China to the jungles of Burma – to introduce exotic flora to Western gardens.



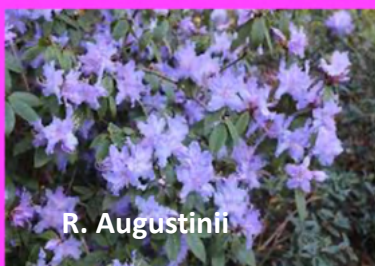
Augustine Henry

Augustine Henry (1857-1930) is often considered to be the most famous Irish plant hunter. Henry was a medical officer in China who sent over 15,000 specimens to Kew Gardens. His discoveries include the *Lilium henri* and *Clematis henri*. His most famous rhododendron discovery was *R. augustinii*, discovered in Szechuan and Hubei provinces from 1882 – 1900.



Charlotte
Wheeler-Cuffe

In 1911, on Mount Victoria, Burma – also called Nat Ma Taung, Lady Charlotte Wheeler - Cuffe discovered two new species rhododendrons. *Rhododendron burmanicum* and *Rhododendron cuffeanum*. *R. burmanicum* is a low shrub with pale yellow flowers. *Rhododendron cuffeanum* has white flowers. It was only collected one time.



R. Augustinii



R. burmanicum



R. cuffeanum

NOTED IRISH HYBRID RHODODENDRONS



Janet Acton

Rhododendron 'Janet Acton', is a arboreum cross, named and registered in 2020, by the National Botanic Gardens of Ireland, Kilmacurragh. It is a large, prolific plant , growing 7-8 metres tall. It is noted for its abundant blooms. It is named in honour of Janet Acton, who, with her brother, established the “wild” garden at Kilmacurragh in the 19th century.



Ashmont

Rhododendron 'Ashmont' is an outstanding scented hybrid by Michael White when he was curator at Mount Congreve, county Waterford. It was named for Jan Ravensberg, a notable Dutch-Irish nurseryman.



Irish Cream

Rhododendron 'Irish Cream' is an evergreen azalea that produces lovely clusters of white blooms featuring chartreuse blotches. It has an upright-spreading habit and grows to about 6 feet in height and spread.



IN IRELAND, “RHODODENDRON TALES” ARE NOT JUST MYTHS; THEY ARE A MIX OF HIGH-STAKES SURVIVAL STORIES AND A CENTURY-LONG BOTANICAL “WAR.”

FROM AI



In Ireland, “rhododendron tales” are less about ancient faeries and more about a real-life monster that has reshaped the landscape. Because the plant was introduced in the late 1700’s, it doesn’t appear in old Celtic mythology. Instead, its lore is defined by harrowing modern survival stories and its reputation as a “terrible beauty”.



The most famous modern tales involve people becoming physically trapped by the plant’s dense growth. In 2014, an experienced couple became trapped in a rhododendron forest in the Knockmealdown Mountains. Rescuers described thickets as “impenetrable jungles” so dense that rescuers had to crawl on their hands and knees. It took two hours to travel just 350 metres to reach them.

In Irish conservation lore, rhododendron forests are often described as “dead zones” or “ghost forests”. Because the waxy leaves block all sunlight, nothing – no moss, no flowers, no native seedlings – can grow beneath them, creating an eerie, silent world where even birds are scarce.



MARCH IN IRELAND

CELEBRATING THE START OF SPRING



March is a vibrant month in Ireland where ancient traditions and modern festivities converge to mark the beginning of spring. Lambing season is throughout March and the countryside is filled with newborn lambs, a core symbol of agricultural renewal. Bright yellow daffodils, primroses and crocuses emerge across the country. Garden visits to world-class estates like Powerscourt and Belfast Botanic Gardens are popular for witnessing early spring blooms.

Then, there is St. Patrick's Day, March 17. St. Patrick was a 5th-century missionary credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. March 17 marks the anniversary of St. Patrick's death in (c. 461 AD). Legend says Patrick used the three-leafed clover to explain the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

Originally St. Patrick's Day was a religious feast day to honour St. Patrick. Today it has evolved into a secular festival known for parades, wearing green and festive "shamrock" symbols. People wear green clothing or accessories to avoid being "pinched" by leprechauns, who, according to folklore, can't see people wearing green.



NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS KILMACURRAGH

The National Botanic Gardens, Kilmacurragh lie within an estate developed extensively during the 19th century. It was a period of great botanical and geographical explorations with numerous plant species from around the world being introduced to Ireland for the first time. The different soil and climatic conditions at Kilmacurragh resulted in many of these specimens succeeding. This garden is famous for its conifers and rhododendron collections.



Kilmacurragh holds the largest collection of Himalayan rhododendron species in Europe. In 1862, seeds sent from the Sikkim Himalaya to the National Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin were transferred to Kilmacurragh in the 1860's, while their "sister seedlings" were being grown by famous contemporaries, including Charles Darwin and Florence Nightingale.





RHODODENDRON falconorí AT KILMACURRAGH
PHOTOS BY THE BIKING GARDENER





THE RHODODENDRON GARDEN AT HOWTH CASTLE



RHODODENDRON WOODLAND



The planting of the Rhododendron Garden was first started in 1854 and is considered the earliest and most famous rhododendron garden in Ireland. The first plantings were the common *Rhododendron ponticum*, which was planted in peat that had been carried up the hill and packed into crevices in the rockface.

Over time they were replaced by newer hybrids and other species. Currently it is estimated that there are over 200 different species and hybrids planted in the garden. From April to late May there is a fountain of color over the hill, completely submerging the visitor in fragrance and shades of all descriptions.



Howth Castle in Dublin, is one of the longest continuously-inhabited private homes in Europe, with a long history stretching back to the 13th Century. The castle itself was the ancestral seat of the St. Lawrence family for 800 years until it was sold in 2019. The castle offers guided tours and is undergoing restoration. The extensive grounds and gardens remain open.



FERNHILL PARK AND GARDENS

Fernhill Park and Gardens is a former substantial family residence on 34 hectares and is Dublin's newest Public Park. It forms an important component of the historic landscape on the fringe of Dublin City.



Fernhill is located in Stepaside, County, Dublin, famous for its large and mature collection of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias. Originally planted by the Darley family in the 1850s, it was later expanded by the Walker family. It now includes the well-known, silver-leaved 'Fernhill Silver' rhododendron. This hybrid rhododendron is believed to have been a gift from the Glasnevin Botanical Gardens.



MOUNT CONGREVE GARDENS



Mount
Congreve
Gardens

Mount Congreve Garden, located in Kilmeaden, County Waterford, in Ireland's Ancient East; is known for one of the finest collections of rhododendrons in the world. Mount Congreve House, built in 1760, is home to six generations of Congreves. The gardens comprise 70 acres of intensively planted woodland, a four-acre walled garden and 16 kilometers of walkways



MARCH BLOOMS AT THE RHODODENDRON SPECIES BOTANICAL GARDEN



R. barbatum.



R. calophytum



R. dauricum



R. lutescens



R. ririeri



R. strigillosum

The RSBG garden has the world's largest collection of Rhododendron species

CREATING BIODIVERSITY IN A RHODODENDRON GARDEN

IDEAS FROM AI

To promote biodiversity in a rhododendron garden, the key is to create a layered, multi-dimensional habitat by integrating diverse plant life and providing essential resources like water and shelter, as well as adopting sustainable gardening practices.



1. Diversify Plant life
2. Provide Food and Shelter
3. Adopt Sustainable Practices

PLANT DIVERSITY

Rhododendrons thrive in dappled shade and acidic soil, making them ideal for woodland style gardens.

Vary Plant Life

Use a mix of trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals in different sizes and forms to replicate the vertical stratification of a natural woodland environment where rhododendrons naturally thrive under a high canopy.



Companion Plants: Select plants that share similar growing conditions, but offer different textures, bloom times, and vertical interest.

Shrubs: Azaleas, *Kalmia latifolia* and *Pieris japonica*

Perennials/Groundcovers: Ferns, hostas, heucheras, and spring-blooming bulbs

Trees: Plant rhododendrons under a canopy of larger trees. Conifers offer excellent shelter for wildlife.

Berry-bearing plants: Incorporate plants like holly or hawthorn to provide food for birds

Vertical Stratification:

Mimic a natural forest by introducing shrubs, herbaceous plants and groundcovers under and around larger trees and rhododendrons. This creates habitats for a wider variety of organisms.



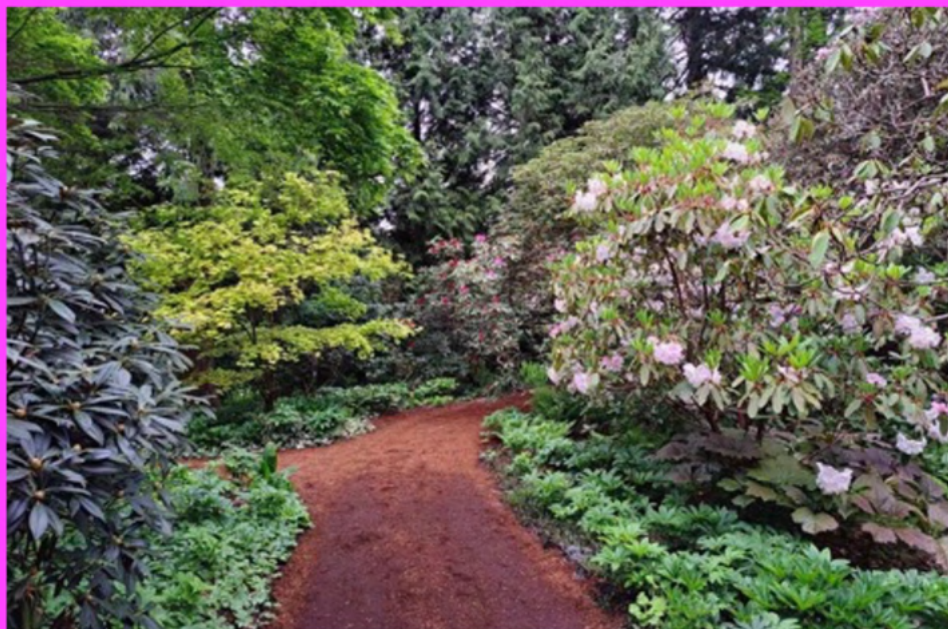
Native Species:

Prioritize native species in your area to best support local ecosystems and wildlife.



Extended bloom times:

Choose plants with different flowering and fruiting seasons to provide a continuous food source for pollinators and birds from spring through autumn.



Avoid Invasive Species:

Be sure not to introduce invasive exotic plants that could harm local ecosystems



THE PACIFIC RHODODENDRON

Pacific Rhododendron's (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*) blooms are a budget friendly way to inject a pop of color into your garden and an inexpensive way to become a rhododendron lover.

One can pair the rosy pinks and occasional whites with plants that have contrasting foliage colors such as the deep greens of ferns or the silvery hues of lamb's ear. Adding echoing colors of the rhododendron will create a spectacular display that will create a harmonious and planned vista.

These large, upright branching evergreen shrubs boast spectacular trusses of 10-20 bell-shaped flowers appearing above large whorls of deep green, egg-shaped to oblong leaves that have a smooth, leathery texture.



The Pacific Rhododendron is found west of the Cascades from southern British Columbia to Northern California. It grows in fairly dry open forests and is commonly found along roadsides in the rain shadow of the Olympic Mountains. The pink, sometimes white, bell-shaped flowers are borne in showy clusters of five lobes with wavy edges.

A PEEK BACK IN RHODODENDRON HISTORY

AI



GEORGE FORREST 1873-1932

MASSIVE COLLECTIONS

Forrest sent back 31,000 herbarium specimens, forming the foundation of the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh

REVOLUTIONIZED GARDENS

His introduction of hardy, vibrant plants significantly expanded the variety and color of European and British Gardens

PERSERVERENCE AND HARDSHIP

He braved perilous conditions, including dangerous terrain, illness and even attacks, thus the 'Indiana Jones' moniker

TAXONOMIC IMPACT

While not being a taxonomist, his massive collections allowed botanists to describe 100s of new species

George Forrest was a prolific Scottish botanist primarily known for his seven major expeditions to southwestern China, particularly in Yunnan province. Often called Scotland's Indiana Jones for his daring adventures, his work significantly transformed Western gardens and botanical science.

PROLIFIC PLANT COLLECTION:

He amassed over 31,000 herbarium specimens and introduced hundreds of new species to Western culture

KING OF RHODODENDRONS

Forrest discovered 260 species of rhododendrons. Most notably, he found the giant Rhododendron (*R. protistum* var. *giganteum*) in 1931, which stood 25 meters tall and was estimated to be 280 years old.

SPECIES NOMENCLATURE

Over 30 genera and 100 species are named in his honor with the epithet *forrestii*, including *Rhododendron forrestii*, *Primula forrestii*, and *Iris forrestii*.

KEY INTRODUCTIONS

He introduced several garden favorites including the winter-flowering *Jasminum polyanthum*, *Gentiana sino-ornata* and numerous species of *Primula* and *Camellia*.



Gentiana sino-ornata



Clematis armandii



R. forrestii



R. griersonianum.



R. forrestii subsp. repens



Primula malacoides



Pieris formosa forrestii



R. rubinosum.



Acer forrestii



R. sinogrande



ARE YOU LOOKING TO ADD SOMETHING NEW TO YOUR GARDEN?

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED JAPANESE MAPLES?

Japanese Maples are a popular addition to any garden but especially suited to rhododendron gardens. They are noted for their delicate, deep lobed leaves, stunning seasonal colors, varied forms (upright, weeping) and unique bark. These are prized focal points throughout the year and they like similar conditions to rhododendrons.



The 'Dancing Peacock' (*Acer japonicum*) or 'Mai kujaku' is a highly sought-after Japanese maple known for its deeply dissected, fern-like leaves that resemble peacock feathers. In Autumn, the leaves turn spectacular shades of orange, red and crimson providing a vibrant display of color.



The red Pygmy Maple (*Acer palmatum*) is a slow-growing, dwarf variety which forms a dense, mounded shape with finely-lobed, strap-like leaves that start red, turn green in summer and offer bright fall color. It is a great container maple.



Aureum maple typically refers to the Golden Full Moon Maple (*Acer shirasawanum*). It is one of the most highly prized yellow-leaved maples. The foliage emerges bright yellow or chartreuse in spring, often with red-tinged margins. They soften to lime-green in summer and transition in fall to spectacular shades of orange, gold and red.

RHODODENDRONS THAT BLOOM IN MARCH IN VICTORIA

R. coeloneurum

R. principis

R. lutescens

R. barbatum

R. Holden

R. PJM



ELEMENTS OF ORGANIC AND POLLINATOR CONSERVATION GARDENS



Biodiversity is a key element of pollinator conservation and one of the principles of organic gardening. Biodiversity, both above and within the soil, promotes healthier ecosystems. In these conditions, gardeners can better exploit naturally occurring pressures. By including native plants, one can create a habitat for native pollinators and increase biodiversity for ecosystem health.

What may seem like a small contribution - a tiny flowerpot or garden patch of native wildflowers – can provide valuable habitat for B.C. pollinators such as hummingbirds, bees and butterflies

The Pacific region, particularly the Pacific Northwest is home to a diverse array of native wildflowers, many of which are vital for local pollinators and ecosystem health. Here are some common and notable wildflowers found in the Pacific region.

1. Arrowleaf balsamroot (*Basamorhiza sagittata*)
2. Camas (*Camassia leichtlinii*)
3. Columbia tiger lily (*lilium columbianum*)
4. Lupine (*Lupinus spp.*)
5. Red columbine (*Aquilegia formosa*)
6. Showy milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*)
7. Monkeyflower (*Mimulus guttatus*)
8. Bleeding heart (*Dicentra formosa*)
9. Chocolate lily (*Fritillaria biflora*)
10. Douglas aster (*Symphotrichum subspicatum*)
11. Western yarrow (*Achillea millefolium var. occidentalis*)





WHITE FAWN LILLY

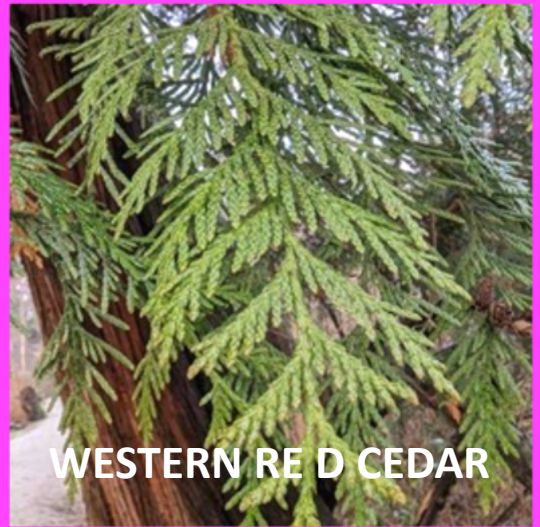


**MOUNTAIN
FORGET-ME-NOT**

NATIVE PLANTS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



PACIFIC DOGWOOD



WESTERN RED CEDAR



SALMON BERRY





Arrowleaf Balsamroot



Camas



Columbian Tiger lily



Lupin



Red Columbine



Monkey flower



Chocolate Lily



Bleeding Heart

THE LAST WEEK OF JANUARY AT THE HCP

THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS FOR YOUR EFFORTS ON OUR BEHALF



There is not much to report on today's activities. Sue and Mike were the workers; they carried us today. Sue weeded all day! Mike organized the pots in the Norm Todd Centre and reports...no rats. Calvin and Ian tidied up the compound. It looks great.

Next to the upper path by the stairs is a rhododendron that's getting crowded and hardly seen. It's 'Fabia' x *R. bureavi*. Two weeks from now it is slated to be moved to where the old path was. By placing it here it can be seen from either path. Viewing from the lower path should give a good view of the indumentum. Think rhododendron in the photo, not models Calvin and Ian.

We moved a small rhododendron that was getting smothered to where the roses were. It was there I found a tag, # 2034. I don't know what it belonged to. The witch-hazel scent is filling the air letting us know spring is on the way.



RIDDING YOUR RHODOS FROM THE DREADED WEEVILS

FROM VICRS 2013 FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER



Weevil



WEEVIL LYSOL FORMULA

In late February early March, apply diluted Lysol every two weeks for for two months to both weevil chewed and adjacent plants. (up to a metre away) . Formula is 1 cup of Lysol in 4 litres of water. Water the whole plant, stems and all.

WEEVIL CYCLE

In October, eggs hatch, larvae feed on roots; most damage is in the fall.

Over winter, the larvae live in the soil.

In spring, the larvae resume feeding and pupate about mid-spring.

Adults emerge in the late spring and start feeding on the leaves through early summer.

In mid-summer, they adults lay their eggs.

IN SEARCH OF A BLUE RHODODENDRON

While a true blue rhododendron does not exist, several popular varieties feature striking violet-blue or lavender-blue flowers that are commonly referred to as “blue” in the trade. These plants offer a near-blue ("horticultural blue") appearance and are excellent choices for gardeners seeking this color palette.





'Blue Admiral'



'Bob's Blue'



'Night Sky'



R. augustinii

'Cerulean Mist'



R. augustinii

'Royston Form'



R. augustinii

'Ocean Lake'



R. augustinii

'Crater Lake'



'Penheale Blue'

First week February at the HCP



Do you know Mike
"the contortionist"?



Foliar spraying





**NO NEED FOR THE GYM
TODAY!**



**GETTING READY FOR THE
GARDEN TOUR**

*Second and third week of
February at the HCP*



R. 'Olive'



R. 'Tabitha'



**VICTORIA
RHODODENDRON
SOCIETY**



PLANT SALE

SATURDAY, MAY 9, 2026

9 AM – 4 PM

HCP GARDENS

505 QUAYLE ROAD



**LOCALLY GROWN
COLLECTOR**



RHODODENDRONS

VANCOUVER ISLAND ROCK AND ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY PRESENTS

ANNUAL SPRING SHOW



Come and enjoy outstanding show entries, including rock and alpine, woodland, bog & succulent plants. There will be displays, vendor & seed sales, door prizes, a silent auction & tea service. Additionally, plants grown by club members will be sold during the event.

SUNDAY APRIL 19, 9AM- 4PM
ADMISSION BY DONATION
MARY WINSPEAR CENTRE
2243 BEACON AVENUE, SIDNEY, BC



Interesting odds and ends "BEES"



Flowers talk to bumblebees using electricity. If a flower hasn't been visited recently by a bee, it gives off static electricity. The static tugs at tiny hairs on a bee's back, letting the insect know which flowers still have nectar.



10 HONEYBEE FACTS

1. THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PRODUCTION AND STORAGE OF HONEY



2. THEY HAVE LARGE COLONIES RULED BY A QUEEN BEE

3. THEIR LIFE CYCLE IS VERY STRUCTURED



4. THEY ARE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT POLLINATORS

5. HUMANS ARE NOT THE ONLY ANIMALS THAT RELY ON HONEYBEES



6. THEY ARE THE REASON WHY WE HAVE BEEKEEPERS

7. THEY PROVIDE MORE THAN JUST HONEY



8. THEIR MAIN FORM OF DEFENSE LIES IN THEIR STINGERS

9. THEY HAVE AN INTERESTING FORM OF COMMUNICATION



10. CURRENTLY, THERE ARE ONLY 8 SURVIVING SPECIES OF HONEYBEES

Meet the Buzzing Trio



1. Honey Bee
The friend who makes wax and lots of honey.



2. Bumblebee
A very fluffy friend who really loves flowers



3. Wasp
The friend who pollinates and eats pests—but needs a little more personal space!



VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY BOARD MEMBERS

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