

VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY MAY 2026 NEWSLETTER

IT IS CELEBRATING RHODODENDRONS IN THE MONTH OF MAY

VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

Our purpose is to promote and
educate the public about the
genus RHODODENDRON

We meet on the grounds of the
HCP Gardens
505 Quayle Road
Victoria B. C.

Meetings are held on the first
THURSDAY
of each month
SEPTEMBER - MAY

Meetings begin at 7:30 PM

VISITOR ARE WELCOME



MAY



IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE
...THERESA MCMILLAN...



Theresa Mcmillan passed away peacefully in November of 2025. She is remembered for her thoughtful and kind nature, and for a lifelong love of learning. She is lovingly remembered by her husband of 63 years, Bill, her daughters Sara and Emma and son-in law John.

Theresa had a deep appreciation for many things, including history, nature and a wide range of music and books. She took great pleasure in plants, gardening and birdwatching. She also enjoyed travelling to historical areas and museums, as well as to places where she could explore and appreciate nature.

Theresa taught high school English and math, and through many years of volunteer work at the Royal BC Museum, helped spark curiosity and a love of history in others. She also volunteered with the Rhododendron Society and the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific.

A celebration of her life will be held in April.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Does size really matter? That depends. If you are entering rhodo trusses in a judged show, whether it is a lepidote with little leaves and flowers or an elepidote with large leaves and flowers, a healthy plant in a warmer microclimate will have bigger flowers than an unhealthy plant, grown in a cold spot. And you are more likely to win! The VicRS used to hold judged shows but they require a ton of work and trained judges. The focus was on competition rather on camaraderie and a few folks may have grumbled about having to polish trophies. :) So we changed to a people's choice format for a few years where everyone who came to the show got colored beads to drop into a jar in front of their favorite truss in each category. The next stage in evolution was to have a pure-exhibition-style show, our current favorite. No fuss, no muss (well, a little) and just a few thousand blooms to admire when chatting with friends. And there's a plant sale full of temptation just outside.

In the interest of remembering our history and providing another point of interest at this years Show and Sale on Saturday, May 9 at the HCP, and especially for new and prospective members, we will have a demonstration table with an experienced judge. Jacqie Bradbury, a long-time and experienced member of our Society, from 10 am until noon, will interact and demonstrate what judges look for in a competitive show. That category will be "Pink"... so size does matter.

Please bring a "Pink" for the Show as well a "Pink" for demonstration. The more choices, the better!

...EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT GARDEN TOOL SHARPENING AND MORE...



Sharpening Basics

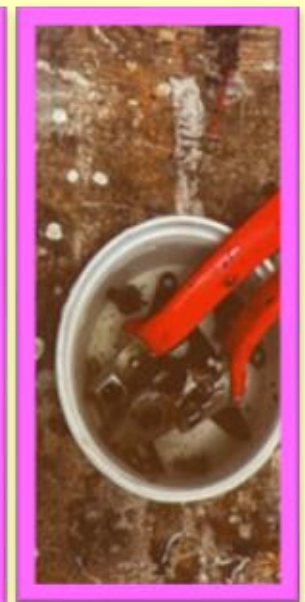
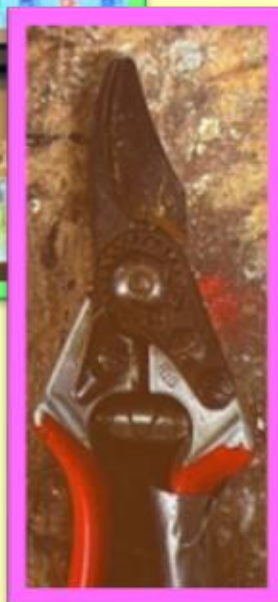
- What type of tool? What is the purpose?
- Digging tools require a more blunt edge.
- shovel, spade, hoe, edger, mattock
- Cutting tools require a finer edge.
- hand pruners, loppers, shears, saws
- Determine type of blade - Bypass, Anvil, or Shears/Snips.



Sean Rustemeyer gave a detailed and comprehensive workshop on how to get your garden tools in tip-top shape for the gardening season. Sean demonstrated some of the basic processes he uses in his work as a landscaper and gave helpful tips on the maintenance of these tools.



Thank you, Nadine, for the photos



WHY ARE RHODODENDRONS SUCH A POPULAR GARDEN ADDITION?...a story



A long time ago, in the high mist-choked valleys of the Himalayas, the rhododendron was not a garden staple, but the guarded secret of the clouds. While other flowers withered in the thin air and biting cold, these "Rose Trees" thrived, erupting in flower clusters of crimson, violet and snow white against the jagged grey peaks.

The story of popularity began with the Victorian "plant hunters" – adventurers who risked frostbite and landslides to bring these exotic giants back to Europe. When the first specimens arrived, they caused a sensation. Here was a plant that looked like a delicate tropical queen but possessed the heart of a mountain warrior.

Gardeners fell in love with their theatricality. For most of the year, the rhododendron is a stoic, architectural presence with evergreen leaves that provide structure even in the dead of winter. But when spring hits, they undergo a total transformation, smothering themselves in so many blooms that the leaves often vanish entirely.

Rhododendrons became the ultimate symbol of prestige and endurance. Because they require specific acidic soil, a thriving rhododendron became a sign of a gardener who truly understood the "soul" of the land. Today, they remain beloved because they offer a rare bargain: they ask for very little once established, yet they pay a massive annual dividend of color that makes even the smallest yard feel like a royal estate.

RHODODENDRONS IN THE GARDEN ... WHY?

RHODODENDRONS HAVE EARNED THEIR PLACE IN OUR PACIFIC NORTHWEST GARDENS

They are highly valuable because they are versatile, long-lived and provide year-round structure

They provide dramatic spring flowers, are low-maintenance and reliable performers

They are versatile in size for any space, as stand-alone elegance or in a container of a variety of sizes

Once established, they are generally pest and disease free

They are long-lived, providing high return on investment

They are easily transplanted if need be as they have shallow, fibrous roots systems

They are pollinator friendly, attracting bees and hummingbirds, adding to the natural habitat

They are a wildlife habitat, providing shelter and privacy for birds



In short, rhododendrons are not just beautiful garden plants - they underpin biodiversity, bolster economies and cultures, offer medicinal promise, and symbolize nature's resilience. Their conservation and appreciation benefit the planet as a whole, reminding us of the intricate connections between flora, fauna and humanity. Whether in wild mountain forests or cultivated landscapes, they enrich our world in ways both visible and profound.

WHY IS COLLECTING RHODODENDRONS BENEFICIAL?

Collecting rhododendrons – whether species or hybrids – is a deeply rewarding hobby that combines beauty, intellectual challenge, personal achievement, and even a touch of conservation value. With over 1000 species in the genus (making it one of the largest and most diverse plant groups on earth) plus countless hybrids, enthusiasts never run out of new forms to pursue.

(holdenfg)

Rhododendrons are the epitome of spring, their large, rose-like flowers come in virtually every color (white, pink, purple, yellow, red, even bi-color), often with fragrance, striking patterns or dramatic trusses. Many are evergreen with handsome, leathery foliage that provides year-round interest. A single specimen or a woodland grouping creates a “drop-dead gorgeous” display unlike anything else in the garden. Collectors get the ongoing thrill of watching plants mature and bloom in new and unexpected ways each season

Collecting rhododendrons turns gardening into a passionate pursuit that beautifies spaces, supports nature, builds community and provides ongoing joy and learning. Many describe it as addictive in the very best of ways!

The sheer diversity – in flower form, leaf size and texture (some with wooly indumentum, others smooth), growth habit (dwarf to tree-like), and hardiness, makes every plant a learning opportunity. Amateurs and experts alike experiment with soil (acidic, organic), propagation, and for some, hybridizing. Many describe it as a never-ending delight and exhilarating experience with fresh challenges every year

It is a relaxing, low-maintenance hobby that rewards patience. Plants are long-lived often blooming more spectacularly with age. Gardening with rhododendrons provides physical activity, stress relief and a deep sense of stewardship. Many enthusiasts call it their most pleasant pastime, with the added joy of seasonal anticipation and the quiet pride of a well-curated collection.



AND HERE WE ARE – “MAY MAJESTY”- PEAK BLOOM TIME



Did you know that May 3 is
Garden Meditation Day?



Roseum Elegans

Welcome to the most spectacular month on the rhododendron calendar...MAY! Across the greater Victoria area is when most of our gardens explode into a riot of color, with massive trusses unfurling in every shade imaginable: vibrant pinks, deep purples, snowy whites, rich reds, yummy yellows and even blues and purples. The month of May delivers the grand crescendo of spring bloom season.

This is the moment when mid-season hybrids truly shine! Classics like ‘Roseum Elegans’ with its bright– pink trusses, ‘Catawbiense Album’ in pristine white or ‘Scintillation’ boasting huge, fragrant light pink blooms.

Then there are the spectacular newer hybrids like ‘Arctic Dreams’ with its white flowers and a rusty brown flare, or Sun Blush, with greenish-yellow flowers, and pale wavy edges or ‘Cody’ a bright pink, with a red dotted flare, and frilled edges. However, we must remember that bloom time is a variable as the weather. A warm sunny spring can push things earlier, while cooler conditions stretch the show delightfully longer.

This newsletter is dedicated to the
rhododendrons of Victoria,
AND THOSE WHO CARE FOR THEM



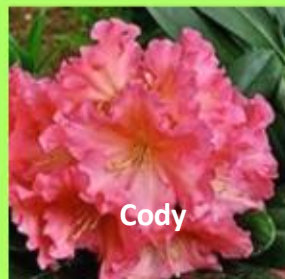
Catawbiense
Album



Scintillation



Arctic Dreams



Cody



Sun Blush

CELEBRATING RHODODENDRONS IN VICTORIA

IN THE MERRY MONTH OF MAY

May is affectionately known as "Rhodo Month" in Victoria, a time when the city's historic gardens transform into a sea of vibrant, blooms of every color imaginable. The month of May is a celebration of private and public gardens throughout the city and the surrounding areas.



ABKHAZI GARDEN



FINNERTY GARDENS



PLAYFAIR PARK



GOVERNMENT HOUSE



HCP RHODODENDRON
GARDEN



BARLUP LEGACY GARDEN



ROYAL ROADS
UNIVERSITY



BEACON HILL PARK



SAXE POINT PARK



DOMINION BROOK
PARK



... ALL ABOUT THE VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY...

Regular activities include monthly meetings from September through to May, where speakers present educational and informative materials; raffles of unusual plants take place; round-table discussions of relevant topics and a social time where friends share knowledge and ideas. Separate propagation meetings cater to members who are interested in growing cuttings and propagating new plants.

Annual events include:

- .Spring truss shows
- .Garden tours
- .Volunteer-hosted garden openings for members and guests
- .A Christmas dinner with proceeds going to local charities
- .Rhododendron sales featuring member-propagated plants
- .An annual picnic to celebrate another successful growing season

A key accomplishment has been the hosting of American Rhododendron Society Spring Conventions. In 1989, the venue for this event was the Empress Hotel, where the largest number of ARS members participated in such an event. Over 1200 guests from around the world took part. In 2005, there was another successful event where proceeds from this convention were shared with other District 1 Chapters, and in 2015, Victoria hosted another convention in Sidney, B.C. The profits were shared equally with other Vancouver Island Chapters for their assistance in creating another successful convention.



Transit Gold...Our logo



Transit Gold...in the Massa Garden



Transit Gold

THE VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY ...IN THE BEGINNING...

The Victoria Rhododendron Society was officially established in 1980 as a chapter of the American Rhododendron Society. While the group formally organized that year, its origins trace back to an interest in rhododendron species that flourished in the late 1970's.

B.C. Living



The Society grew out of an eight-week workshop conducted in 1970 by Norman Todd and Dr. David Ballantyne at the University of Victoria. The workshop was so successful that the participants decided to form a community of like-minded people dedicated to enjoying, growing, and collecting these plants.

In 1974, the university received a massive collection of species rhododendrons from the Buchanan Simpson estate: thus, Finnerty Gardens was born. The core group of people who were experts in rhododendron gardening supported the new society. From the beginning, the society was designed to be inclusive, allowing both ARS members as well as "Friends" who paid a reduced fee.

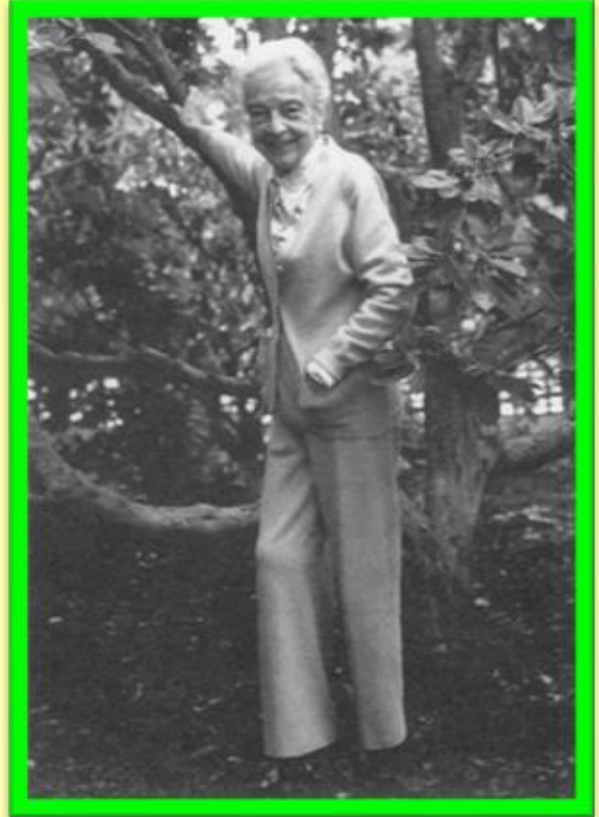


The first formal meetings were held at the Garth Homer Center. In 1985, the first recipient of the Abkhazi trophy was Norman Todd.

The **ABKHAZI TROPHY** is awarded annually for a member's significant contribution to the Society in the prior year. The process involves the current president and the winner of the previous year choosing each new recipient.

Members awarded include:

1985...Norman Todd
1986...Bill Dale
1987...Margaret Buffam
1988 ...Judy Gordon
1989...Herman Vaartnou
1990...Alec McCarter
1991...Evelyn Weesjes
1992...Dave Dougan
1993...Peggy McCarter
1994...Nancy Thompson
1995...Ian Duncan
1996...Norma Buckley
1997...Ken Webb
1998...Bruce Maycock
1999...Karen Morrison
2000..Joe and Linda Harvey
2001...Betty Kennedy
2002...John Gordon
2003...Bill McMillan
2004...Pat and James Fuller
2006...Carol Dancer
2007... Margaret de Weese
2008...Don and Joyce Whittle
2009...Johanna and Moe Massa
2010...Ann and Tom Widdowson
2011...Roy and Lois Blackmore
2012...Madeleine Webb
2013...Bill and Betty Gordon
2014...Dean Gourd
2016...Tony and Carolyn Marquardt
2017...Carrie George
2018...Ian Duncan
2019...Calvin Parsons
2021...Linda Gilmore
2023...Sharon Joseph
2024...Mike Minkler
2025...John Verwolf



Peggy Abkhazi



Nico and Peggy Abkhazi

Photo ...Chris and Pamela Ball

THE HISTORY OF THE ABKHAZI TROPHY

Pamela and Chris Ball



This story began 1981. Christopher Ball had put in two years of restoration at the Prince and Princess Nicholas Abkhazi's garden. The Abkhazi's were elderly and were hopeful that an arrangement with the city of Victoria to take over the garden and its expenses while they lived there; with the city becoming the owners. Coincidentally, that same year, Peggy purchased a membership in the Victoria Rhododendron Society on Chris' behalf.

However, the city refused the gift stating that the expense was not within the city budget. The Abkhazi's then turned to Chris and his wife who continued to work and support the garden. The garden was once again flourishing and attracting international recognition.

On June 19, 1985, Nicholas and Peggy were given honorary life memberships to the Society at the urging of Bill Dale. Peggy, then conferred with Chris as to what he thought would be a most appropriate gift for the membership service trophy. She laid out several silverware items on her table and Chris chose the silver tray.

This Abkhazi Trophy was first presented at the Garth Homer Center where meetings were then being held. Previously, the Society would meet at the University of Victoria. Chris and Pamela transported Peggy to that meeting where the tray was presented by Peggy herself. That special honor was received by Norm Todd.



The ARS Bronze Medal is the highest chapter-level award for effort and dedication to the Victoria Rhododendron Society

1986...Stuart Holland
1990...Evelyn Weesjes, Norm Todd, Alec McCarter, Bill Dale
1992...Leslie Drew, Dave Dougan, Margaret Buffam
1996...Herman Vaartnou
1998...Judy Gordon
2002...Norma Buckley
2003...Dora Kreiss
2004...Joe Harvey
2006...Betty Kennedy, John Gordon
2007...Ian Duncan
2008...Ken Webb, Bill McMillan, Dean Goard
2010...Johann and Moe Massa
2011...Ann Widdowson, Theresa McMillan
2012...Jacqueline Bradbury, Lois Blackmore
2013...Gareth Shearman
2015...Calvin Parsons
2020...Bill Gordon, Betty Gordon

**AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS
TO MEMBERS OF THE
VICTORIA RHODODENDRON
SOCIETY**



The ARS Silver Medal is awarded for significant regional contributions to the American Rhododendron Society or the genus Rhododendron

2003...Norm Todd
2017...Ken Webb
2024...Roy and Lois Blackmore



The ARS Gold Medal is awarded for significant national and international involvement and leadership.

2024...Ken Webb



THE RHODODENDRONS AT ABKHAZI GARDEN

The story of the Rhododendrons at the Abkhazi Garden is deeply entwined with the romantic and resilient history of the garden itself.

It begins in the 1920's in Paris, where a young woman, named Peggy Pemberton-Carter met Prince Nicholas Abkhazi, an exiled nobleman who had lost everything in the Bolshevik Revolution.

They fell in love but were separated by world events. Peggy spent much of World War II in a Japanese internment camp in Shanghai, while Nicholas endured imprisonment in Germany. Both survived many hardships, and after the war, Peggy made her way to Victoria, BC.

In early 1946, Peggy bought a lot of over an acre on Fairfield Road. As gardening had been a source of solace and creativity during the war, she began envisioning a peaceful retreat there.

Miraculously, Nicholas had also survived the war, they were reunited, and married that year. They transformed the site with the hired assistance of local landscapers into their personal sanctuary for healing trauma.

The Garry oaks on the property provided the ideal conditions for rhododendrons. Rhododendrons – both species and hybrids – were introduced after meeting Albert de Mezey, a local rhododendron hybridizer, and Mr. J.G Worth, who was a mentor.

They sourced the finest specimens from the top nurseries of the era, including Lohbrunner, Layritz, as well as hybrid rhododendrons from Albert de Mezey. Today these plants have matured into impressive, tree-sized forms, their trunks becoming sculptured and artistic elements in themselves.

Sharing creativity and destiny, the Abkhazi's met a young couple who were also rhododendron and garden enthusiasts: Christopher and Pamela Ball. Their dedication and hard work transformed the garden. As time and consequences ensued, Chris and Pamela purchased the property, becoming the only other private ownership. The garden is now owned by the Land Conservancy of B.C.



THE RHODODENDRONS AT HATLEY PARK

Nestled within the City of Colwood lies the historic Hatley Park with its vibrant rhododendrons in an elegant Edwardian-era garden. In 1906, James Dunsmuir purchased the 565-acre property with the intent of transforming it into a grand estate inspired by European traditions.

Hatley Castle, a majestic Baronial style mansion began in 1908 and was completed 1910. However, the true magic lay in the gardens that the Dunsmuir's developed. They created a harmonious blend of formal and naturalistic spaces, including Italian terraces with manicured hedges, a rose garden, and woodland trails through ancient Douglas firs and cedars.

Rhododendrons were introduced as key elements, especially in the Japanese garden to add color, texture and exotic appeal.

The now famous gardens were built in two phases. The upper garden featured serene paths, stone lanterns, a tea house, and a traditional Japanese garden. The lower garden encircled a tranquil lake with curved bridges and islands. It is here that rhododendrons took center stage. The now towering Pink Pearls with their clusters of soft pink blooms were planted alongside snowy cherry blossoms, creating a spring spectacle. Other rhododendrons were imported from nurseries and carefully nurtured. Some hundred years later, they stand as living testaments to the estate's opulence .

Today, Hatley Park is a National Historic Site. The rhododendrons remain a highlight, drawing visitors each spring when they erupt in a riot of pinks, purples and whites, set amid the ancient trees and castle backdrop. These flowers tell a story of ambition, beauty and enduring legacy and reminding how nature and human vision can create something timeless.



THE RHODODENDRONS AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE

The rhododendrons at Government House are a standout feature of the estate's renowned 14.6 ha (36 acre) gardens. These gardens, part of a National Historic site of Canada as designated in 2002, are publicly accessible year-round and maintained largely by volunteers from The Friends of Government House Gardens Society.

The estate's history dates back to 1865, when the site became the official residence for the Governor of Vancouver Island, later transitioning to the Lieutenant Governor after Confederation in 1871.

Following two fires, one that destroyed the original home and another, in 1957, that destroyed the replacement Government House, the gardens were updated to reflect traditional English Garden styles.

The property features a dedicated Rhododendron Garden featuring many vintage or heritage specimens, some dating back nearly a century. They include towering examples and are celebrated for their vibrant, showy blooms. They add historical charm and cultural value to the grounds. They sit within a rare Garry oak ecosystem. Subsequent Lieutenant Governors have added accessible paths and woodland trails. A backdrop of tulips, hyacinths, snowdrops and primulas add early spring color.



THE RHODODENDRON GARDEN AT THE HCP

The Rhododendron and Hosta Garden at the HCP tells a tale of humble beginnings, near-disaster and triumphant revival. It all started in 1985, when a once-forested hillside on the HCP grounds was transformed into a budding garden, kicking off with a modest 150 plants. This initial effort aimed to create a serene woodland space dedicated to rhododendrons, drawing on the region's mild climate.

By 1993, challenges arose. The garden faced a major setback due to poor drainage in the underlying glacial till soil. This caused widespread root rot and threatened to wipe out much of the planting. Undeterred, the HCP team and volunteers launched an extensive make over from 1995 to 1998.

They reimagined the layout entirely, installing raised beds to improve drainage, adding welcoming stone steps at the entrance and weaving a network of winding paths that invite visitors for a peaceful, meandering stroll through the greenery.

Today the garden has flourished into a vibrant showcase of around 400 varieties of rhododendrons, blending well-known species, cutting-edge hybrids, unregistered gems and an ever-expanding collection of rhododendron and azaleas.

To compliment the stars of the show, the garden incorporated about 250 varieties of companion plants, including more than 70 hosta species and cultivars that provide lush, textured foliage from spring through fall. The early-blooming magnolias wrap up their display by May. This mixture creates a year-round woodland oasis, where colors pop from mid-winter onwards.



THE RHODODENDRONS AT GORGE PARK

The rhododendrons at Gorge Park tell of passion, international collaboration and community effort. This story is rooted in the efforts of the Victoria Rhododendron Society.

The story begins in 2003, when members of the Victoria Society attended an American Rhododendron Society Convention in Olympia, WA. They acquired cuttings from the renowned American rhododendron hybridizer, Jim Barlup. Barlup was known for creating vibrant, colorful and resilient varieties of hybrid rhododendrons.

Over the years, other cuttings and plants were donated to the Victoria group, which were then nurtured and propagated, until there were many copies of these rhododendrons. There was now the opportunity for public display.

By 2018 and 2019, new ideas about such a largesse of collector rhododendrons, required new thinking and new ideas, as one of the purposes of the Victoria Rhododendron Society is to promote and educate the public about the genus rhododendron.

Members of the Society approached the Township of Esquimalt with a proposal to create a rhododendron garden within the historic grounds of Gorge Park. The township agreed, seeing it as a way to enhance the Japanese Garden, built in 1907.

The first major plantings occurred in 2019. Volunteers from the Society and gardeners from the Township donated time and expertise, carefully selecting areas along the park's pathways. The initial garden continues to expand as new Barlup hybrids are added each year.

Today the Legacy Garden blooms spectacularly each spring as it is a place where gardening history and natural beauty intertwine.



SHOW AND TELL AT THE BARLUP GARDEN



**ON THE PRE-TOUR FOR THE
SPRING CONVENTION
2026**

THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS



**MANY HANDS MAKE LIGHT
WORK**



**SO MUCH COOPERATION FROM
THE ESQUIMALT COUNCIL
WORKING WITH THE VICRS**



VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

RHODODENDRONS AND OAK BAY

Oak Bay, a municipality known for its heritage homes, ocean views and lush gardens has long been a natural home for rhododendrons. The mild, humid climate allows rhododendrons to flourish, often blooming in January and February.

Dr. Stuart Holland lived on Transit Road, where he hybridized rhododendrons. Holland was a founding member of the Victoria Rhododendron Society. It should be noted that Holland created “Transit Gold”, which is the logo for the Victoria Rhododendron Society.

The Victoria Rhododendron Society’s connection to Oak Bay has deepened in recent years. The District reached out to the Victoria Rhododendron Society for expertise in establishing new public rhododendron gardens. Society members provided input on plant selection, design and placement. The Society was able to provide rhododendrons, selling many plants created by the members for their projects and offering ongoing support. This initiative reflects the Victoria Rhododendron Society’s broader vision to enhance community green spaces with these special plants.

The Victoria Rhododendron Society has been the beating heart of rhododendron culture in the region for over four decades.



Beach Drive/ Cadboro Bay Road



Photos by Tyler Withrow



Oak Bay Municipal Hall

THE RHODODENDRONS AT PLAYFAIR PARK

Playfair Park is a hidden gem whose presence is sometimes forgotten. Yet it boasts a remarkable collection of approximately 400 rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias. These plants burst into vibrant colors each spring in this somewhat “Ghost Garden” just off Rock Street near Quadra. It is a story of ambitious dreams, community spirit and a “magnificent failure” that turned into an enduring spectacle.

In 1952, local residents formed a community park committee, clearing stumps and brush for a rocky knoll and by 1994, the land was turned into a basic park with grass and open spaces.

In 1956, the Arboretum Society of the Pacific Northwest was formed, aiming to establish a national arboretum on Vancouver Island. Saanich offered the upper portion of the park. To build public support, the Society decided on specialized gardens, and chose to have a dedicated rhododendron display.

Donations poured in from around the world: hybrids, species, azaleas, mature camellias, heathers and companion plants from Ed Lohbrunner, Royston Nursery, William Godard and Rudolph Williams, and in 1959, the garden was officially opened by the Lieutenant Governor of BC.

However, challenges arose. Harsh winters killed tender species and vandalism was rampant. As a result, The Arboretum Society disbanded in 1980.

Despite this, the parks rhododendrons endured and flourished, some reaching 8 meters, forming tunnels and arches that create a magical display.

Today, the park is maintained by Saanich Parks. It now not only features rhododendrons, but has a camas meadow and is part of the Garry Oak Restoration Project.



THE RHODODENDRONS AT KILDONAN HOUSE

The story of rhododendrons at Kildonan House begins with the estate itself. Designed by Samuel Maclure and built in 1913, it was originally owned by Roderick Sutherland. The property changed hands several times. After being used as a barracks for women in WWII, it was in 1946 when Count Albert de Mezey purchased the now somewhat neglected estate that the true chapter for rhododendrons began.

Albert de Mezey was a passionate horticulturist and a renowned breeder of rhododendrons, orchids and rare alpine plants. He set about transforming the grounds into one of Victoria's premier gardens. He began creating a woodland haven filled with large-leaved rhododendrons, flowering shrubs, rock gardens and alpines.

De Mezey's collection drew from a rich history of rhododendron cultivation on Vancouver Island. Early pioneers like George Fraser, the Buchanan Simpsons and Ted and Mary Greig had introduced species from the Himalayas and had adapted them to local soils. Layritz Nursery and even Reuthe's nursery in England became a source for his ever-expanding garden.

De Mezey shared his knowledge and plants generously, influencing Victoria's gardening community. He was a close friend of Peggy Abkhazi and it is believed the many of the rhododendrons in Abkhazi Garden were gifts of de Mezey.

In 1987, de Mezey had the property designated as a municipal heritage site. In 1990, he donated the estate to the De Mezey Memorial – Abbeyfield Housing Society. It is now a non-profit home for seniors.



THE RHODODENDRONS AT BEACON HILL PARK

Once upon a time in the late 19th century, the bustling young city of Victoria sought to transform a wild expanse of land into a verdant oasis. The land had been set aside as a public reserve in 1882, drawing from the natural beauty of the area, which held significance of the Lekwungen People.

Enter John Blair, a Scottish-born landscape gardener. In 1889, as the park's designer, he ordered a shipment of exotic rhododendrons from the nursery of Thomas Meehan and Sons, in Germantown, Pennsylvania. These were not just any plants – they were hybrids crafted by the famed Waterer firm in Surrey, England.

Supervising the planting was a young Scotsman named George Fraser. Trained at Edinburgh Botanic Gardens, he carefully placed these rhododendrons around Fountain Lake. Among them were large stands of the majestic Cynthia, the deep pink variety that would become the hallmark of the park's springtime splendor.

As the decades unfolded, the rhododendrons flourished in Victoria's mild maritime climate, becoming symbols of the city's gardening prowess. By the 1930's, park advocates added daffodils, cherry trees and other blooms to enhance the rhododendrons.

After his time at Beacon Hill Park, Fraser moved to Ucluelet, becoming Canada's first rhododendron hybridizer



RHODODENDRONS AT DOMINION BROOK PARK

Nestled on the Saanich Peninsula lies Dominion Brook Park, a 10-acre gem with a rich history that intertwines horticultural innovation, global plant exploration and community revival. The story begins in 1912, when the Canadian Department of Agriculture established a park as a public demonstration arboretum and ornamental garden.

Under the guidance of W.T. Macoun, son of renowned botanist John Macoun, the land was swiftly cleared and prepared for planting. Macoun sourced an array of plants from prestigious nurseries across Britain, France, Holland, Germany, Japan and the US, creating a diverse landscape of glades, dells, vistas, ponds, pools and stonework all centered around the gentle flow of Dominion Brook.

At the heart of this tale are the rhododendrons, which have become synonymous with the park's enduring charm. In the early days a notable shipment arrived from the Arnold Arboretum at Harvard: 60 different rhododendrons and ornamentals, many grown from seeds collected in Western China by the legendary plant hunter Ernest "Chinese" Wilson, known for his daring expeditions. Remarkably, some of these original rhododendrons still thrive today. For decades, the park flourished under federal care.

But like so many grand gardens, Dominion Brook's rhododendrons faced adversity. By the early 1980's, federal funding dwindled and the park fell into neglect. Invasive species like ivy and blackberries encroached, smothering the once pristine ravine and threatening the heritage plants.

It seemed the story might end in overgrowth and forgotten glory – until in the late 1990's, when local citizens formed the Friends of Dominion Brook Park Society. Together with North Saanich and the Center for Plant health launched a restoration effort. Over 15,000 volunteer hours later, the weeded, pruned and replanted rhododendrons were breathing life into the park. A milestone came in September 2017 with the reopening of the Rhododendron Ravine, restoring its stone features and ensuring the Wilson-sourced survivors could thrive alongside the newer additions.



RHODODENDRONS AT SAXE POINT PARK ESQUIMALT

Saxe Point Park has a rich history that intertwines with its natural beauty, including how rhododendrons became part of this coastal gem.

Back in the early 20th century Saxe Point Park was a rugged, forested peninsula, jutting into the Strait of Juan de Fuca. In 1934, the area was officially designated as a park, turning it into a public space. It was dense with Douglas and Grand firs, providing a shady retreat.

However, the park's story took a dramatic turn during WW II. As threats of invasion loomed over Canada's west coast, the DND stepped in and the park's trees were cleared to make way for shoreline defenses. The once-thick forest was stripped back, leaving the 7.5 hectare site more open and exposed. The wartime necessity set the stage for renewal.

After the war ended, efforts began to restore and enhance the park. Over decades, paths were laid and the area was replanted with a mix of native and ornamental species to bring back the park's lush appeal. Among these additions were rhododendrons with their showy evergreen leaves and clusters of colorful blooms.

Today the rhododendrons are a highlight, bursting into a multi-colored splendor of pinks, purples, reds and whites mingling against the backdrop of cedars and firs. These large bushes dot the manicured grassy fields and line the forested trails, meshing seamlessly with the park's rocky bluffs.



THE RHODODENDRONS AT THE NORM TODD PROPAGATION CENTER

Within the grounds of the Horticultural Center of the Pacific lies the Norm Todd Propagation Center, a facility focused on rhododendron propagation, particularly on special varieties of rhododendrons. The center is named in honor of Norm Todd, a pivotal figure in Victoria's horticultural community. Norm was a founding member of the Victoria Rhododendron Society. The Society named the compound in his honor.

This specialized facility is dedicated to growing on rare and specialty rhododendrons that are not commonly available to the public. The cuttings used in the center have been originally started by members of the Victoria Rhododendron Society. After approximately three years, the plants are large enough to be offered at spring sales, which support continuing efforts to make the public aware of these special plants; and to help, preserve and promote rhododendrons. The facility is managed by members of the Victoria Rhododendron Society.

The center was completed and became operational around 2020, following construction efforts that involved society members. The center aims to produce between 300 to 400 plants annually to support the society's needs. These are then sold at a spring sale held within the grounds of the HCP Gardens.

Volunteering is a core part of the center's operation. The "Wednesday" group handles maintenance and building projects. In recent years, a new cement patio was installed showcasing how rhododendrons can be grown in containers, showcasing that even in small spaces, rhododendrons can become part of any small garden or even on apartment balconies.

Photos by Calvin Parsons



THE RHODODENDRONS AT THE PLAZA IN COLWOOD

Colwood is an up and coming community on the Westshore where growth and development are occurring at a rapid pace. It is to be noted that there are parks developing along with commercial and residential facilities. These photos are from the Royal Bay Rhododendron Park.



Photos by Ben Mycroft

THE RHODODENDRONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

The story of the UVic rhododendrons is a century-long journey that spans from the misty peaks of the Himalayas to a quiet farm on Vancouver Island.

The tale begins in the early 1900's at Lake Cowichan. Two neighbours, the Simpsons and the Stokers, shared a deep obsession with exotic plants. Dr. Richard Stoker – the brother of Dracula author Bram Stoker – had brought back seeds from his travels in India and Pakistan. Both began subscribing to “plant hunting” expeditions, where explorers would trek through the high-altitude forests of the Himalayas to bring back species never before seen in Canada.

For decades, the Simpsons turned their lakeside property into a private jungle. The rhododendrons grew into giants under the canopy of Lake Cowichan's Douglas firs. By the 1970's, the collection was legendary, featuring rare species.

When Jeanne Simpson passed away in 1973 she left her “children” - hundreds of mature, massive plants - to the University of Victoria.

Today, the gardens are a silent museum of that early 20th century wanderlust. The delicate pinks and reds are living links to Himalayan expeditions of the past, now finding peace in a modern university setting.



ARS Garden Tours 2026

AT THE RAFFERTY/MACDONALD GARDEN



Photos by
Sharon Joseph

WELSH CAKES



Welsh Cakes

3 cups flour
1 ½ tsp baking powder
½ tsp baking soda
1 ¼ tsp salt
1 cup sugar

3 tsp nutmeg
1 cup butter
1 cup currants
2 eggs
6 Tbsp milk

Combine all dry ingredients. Cut in butter and add currants.
Beat eggs with milk and add to dry ingredients, mixing well.
Roll out on floured surface, approx ¼" thick
Cut into rounds with cookie cutter or glass.
Bake in on an electric skillet or frying pan at 300F, or on a heavy skillet on a moderate heat.
Do not grease the pan.
Turn over when deep golden brown.
Each cake takes 3 to 4 minutes on first side, slightly less on second side.

Eat cold with sharp cheese or warm with honey, or just as they are.

The key to this recipe is the use of freshly ground nutmeg. They will taste ever so much better if you buy whole nutmegs and grate them than if you use pre-ground nutmeg. There are dedicated nutmeg graters available, but the best way to handle them is to use one of the fine microplanes often used for zesting citrus peel etc.

This recipe is almost infinitely scalable, either up or down. We routinely make a double recipe with no problems.

Brenda Macdonald
Victoria Rhododendron Society
25 April 2026

ARS Garden Tours 2026

AT THE MOE AND HANNAH MASSA GARDEN



Photos by
Sharon Joseph



ARS Garden Tours 2026
AT THE JAPANESE AND BARLUP GARDENS



**Photos
by
Lois Blackmore**

LUNCH AT THE HCP GARDENS DAY 2



Photos by
Calvin Parsons

**VICTORIA RHODODENDRON
SOCIETY**

SHOW AND SALE

SATURDAY, MAY 9th

9AM – 4PM

HCP GARDENS

505 QUAYLE ROAD

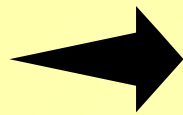
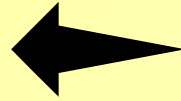


LOCALLY GROWN COLLECTOR PLANTS

IN BLOOM AT THE HCP, APRIL 15, 2026



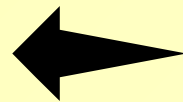
CLAYQUOT WARRIOR



PLOVER

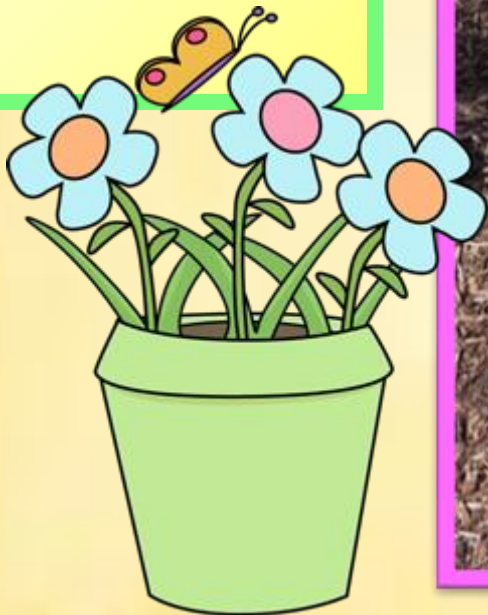


MOONSTONE





The patio garden is coming closer to completion with every visit by the volunteers at the HCP



Photos by Calvin Parsons

JOSEPH HOOKER ...PLANT HUNTER

During his 1847 - 1952 Himalaya expedition, Hooker discovered and described over 25 new rhododendron species in Sikkim and Nepal. Here are some of the most notable. Hooker is remembered throughout Victoria for the many species and resulting hybrids on display in public parks and private gardens.



R. arboreum



R. falconeri

R. arboreum...
Holds record
for largest
rhododendron 65'

R. falconeri...
Prized for massive
leathery leaves 1'
long, grows to 50'

R. grande...
Like a small tree,
known as "Grand
Rhododendron"

R. campylocarpum...
Considered one of
the finest yellows,
grows 6-10'



R. grande



R. campylocarpum



R. thomsonii



R. dalhousiae

R. thomsonii...
Prized for its deep
blood-red, bell-shaped
flowers, 4-5' in 10 years

R. dalhousiae...
large, fragrant
bell-shaped
Flowers, grows 2 to
meters



R. edgeworthii

R. edgeworthii...
Known for its very fragrant white to pink flowers and puckered foliage

R. niveum...
Highly regarded for its purple or magenta flowers, and outstanding indumentum



R. niveum



R. cinnabarinum

R. cinnabarinum...
Known for its unique tubular, bell-shaped flowers and aromatic foliage

R. maddenii...
Known for its fragrant flowers and leathery foliage



R. maddenii



R. griffithianum

R. griffithianum...
Known for its oblong-leaf and its large and fragrant flowers

R. wightii...
This small tree grows high in the Himalayas and is known for its pale to yellow flowers



R. wightii



R. wallichii

R. wallichii...
Known for its hardiness, deep green leaves and indumentum

R. hodgsonii...
Prized for its magenta-purple flowers and peeling cinnamon –brown bark



R. hodgsonii



R. triflorum

R. triflorum

Known for its pale yellow flowers , often with red or green flecks and glossy, dark brown peeling bark

R. candelabrum

A rare and tender hybrid in eastern Himalayas, white or cream, deep pink, dark crimson



R. candelabrum



R. barbatum

R. barbatum...

Known for early spring flowers and peeling bark, grows 6-10 feet

R. lanatum...

Known for its striking woolly foliage and bell-shaped flowers



R. lanatum



R. ciliatum

R. ciliatum...

Known as a compact, evergreen shrub, valued for its early spring blooms

R. hookeri...

Known as a rare and striking rhododendron, with unique "hooked " hair tufts on the leaf veins



R. hookeri



R. fulgens

R. fulgens...

Known for its striking red Flowers and ornamental peeling bark

R. maddenii...

Known as a highly fragrant Plant with large, tubular white flowers



R. maddenii

NOTES AND INFORMATION



1. The picnic this year is at the Brice's garden on Sunday, June 28 starting at noon, more info coming
2. MARS Mothers Days Tour, May 9 and 10 \$20
3. MARS Plant Sale, April 18, 9 – 1, Qualicum Curling Rink
1. PINK RHODODENDRONS...if possible, please bring several pink trusses to the Show and Sale...your best one for the truss-judging demonstration, and others for the display tables
2. THERE IS NO FORMAL MEETING IN MAY. INSTEAD THE PLANT SHOW/SALE TAKES PLACE
8. Contact Ian Duncan 250-479-0820/ Brenda Macdonald 778-528-3647 for further information

VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY BOARD MEMBERS

President...Sharon Joseph...250-383-1756
Vice-President...Ken Webb...2560-744-1785
Past president...Lloyd Gilmore...250-642-2256
Treasurer...Bill Gordon...250-479-0210
Secretary/Newsletter/Producer...250-818-9307
MAL...Ian Duncan...250-479-0210
MAL...Dan Syroid...250-477-9210
MAL...Brenda Macdonald...778-528-3647
MAL...Burns Morrison...250-477-8281
MAL/Newsletter Editor...Michael Tripp...250-477-4407
MAL...Stephen Brice...Ellen Wellborn...250-479-1898
Barlup Garden...Calvin Parsons...250-590-0489

OPEN GARDENS 2026

MACDONALD/RAFERTY

May 3, 11 am – 3 pm

10575 West Coast Road, Shirley
(exactly 2 km west of French Beach Park)

HEATHER DICKMAN

Phone to confirm time: 250-478-9725

730 Tiswilde, Metchosin

HANNAH MASSA

Phone to confirm time: 250-642-5491

5024 Glinz Lake Road, Sooke

THE KUMARS

May 14, 3 - 7 pm

8-year-old gardens, Triangle Mountain
Built on blasted rock
3460 and 3469 Vantage Point, Colwood

THE BLACKMORES

May 14, 3 - 7 pm

Triangle Mountain
758 Walfred Road, Langford

THE PARSONS

May 16, 1- 5 pm

937 Rankin Road, Esquimalt
multiple steps, hillside garden

