VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
NOVEMBER 2026
NEWSLETTER

VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

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 B.C.

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

Meetings begin at 7:30 pm.






IT IS EASY TO THINK OF THE NOVEMBER GARDEN AS A PLACE LEFT ENTIRELY TO STICKS AND BONES. THERE IS A DISTINCT SHIFT IN THE AIR THIS MONTH AS THE GARDEN SLOWS DOWN AND PREPARES FOR WINTER REST. FOR GARDENERS, NOVEMBER PROVIDES A WELCOME CHANGE OF PACE. WHILE THE DECIDUOUS TREES DROP THEIR LEAVES, RHODODENDRONS STEP INTO THE SPOTLIGHT PROVIDING A RICH GREEN STRUCTURE AGAINST THE GRAYING AUTUMN SKIES. AS WE WRAP UP OUR FINAL PLANTINGS, TOP UP OUR MULCH AND TUCK OUR GARDENS INTO BED, WE KNOW THAT THIS IS A SEASON OF PATIENCE AND PREPARATION.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

November quotations all seem to be about winding down, sleeping (in snow, brrr) and dreaming of Spring. Hmmm! Here on Vancouver Island we get very little rest when it comes to gardening. The leaves keep falling and falling and falling. Ditto the acorns and branches. Quite a bit of pruning can still be done in Fall and Winter, preferably on a dry day: dead, damaged and diseased woods should all be removed. Herbaceous perennials can be cut to the ground, removing material that will turn mushy and is best not left sinking down into the crown. Some new-wood blooming shrubs can be lightly trimmed. Rhodos should not be shape pruned until spring, except for removing dead wood, etc. By now you should be able to tell flower buds on rhodos from leaf buds. If you enter lots of trusses in the VicRS Spring Flower Show every year, you may even counting the buds.

Knitting little sweaters for them…



MEET THE VIREYA

Adapted from Nursery Management 2025

The vireya is a subgenus of rhododendrons. These are the flamboyant cousins of the common rhododendron and are native to southeast Asia, especially the cloud-kissed mountaintops of Thailand, Borneo, New Guinea and the Philippines. Some species are also found in China, India, Nepal and even Australia. New Guinea has the most Vireya species of any island, with 167 species.

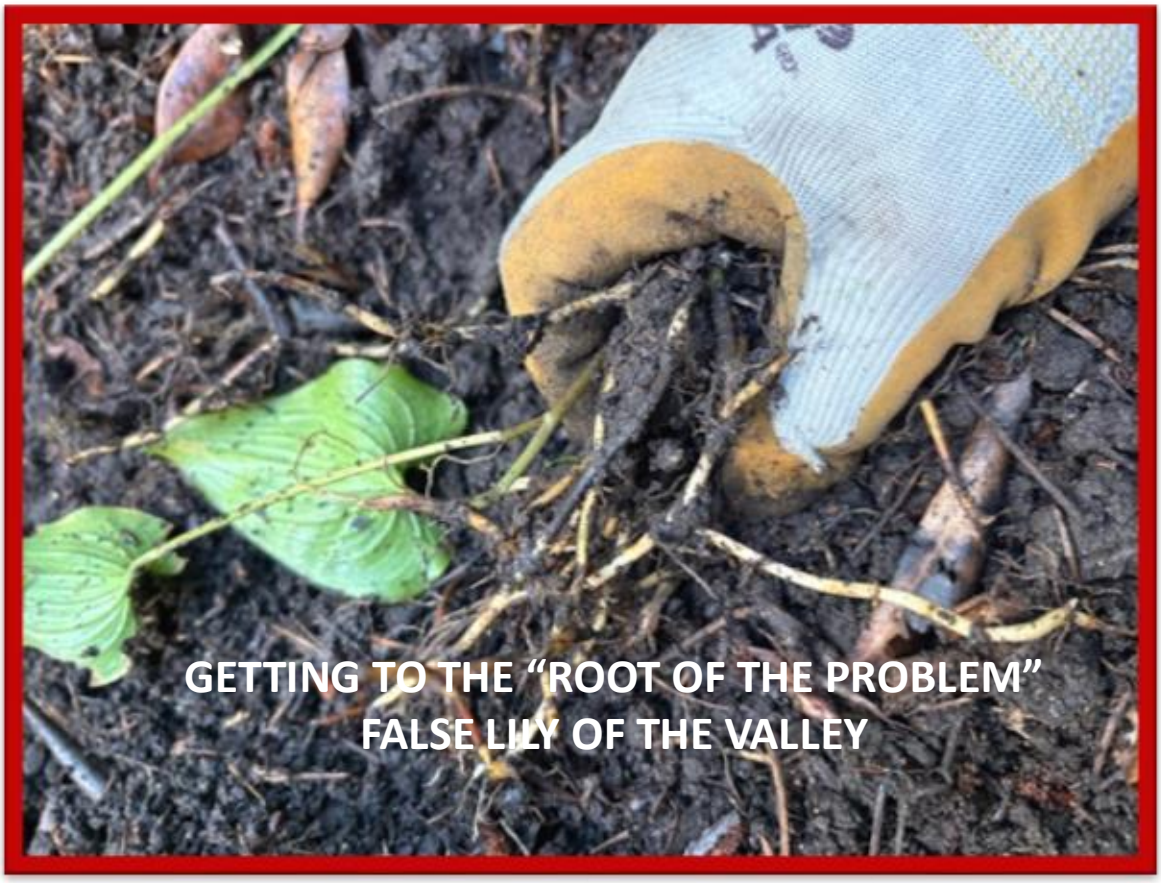
Vireyas are epiphytic by nature, meaning they often grow on trees in the wild. When they bloom with their flaming oranges, canary yellows and shocking pinks, it is like a botanical fashion show. They are the orchids of the rhododendron world.

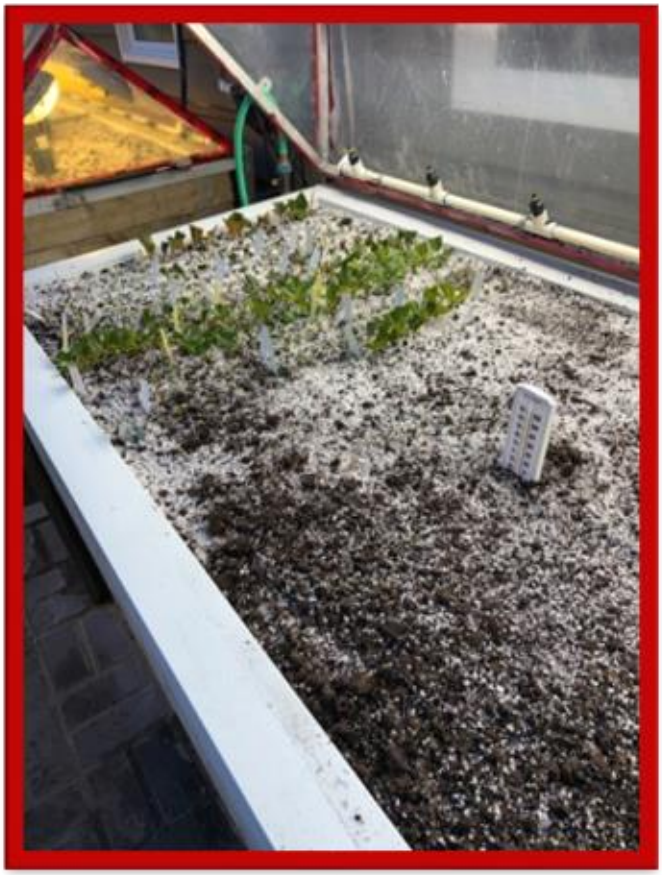
Vireyas have lofty standards. They want great drainage, bright filtered light and air circulation. Water too much and they will sulk. Ignore them and they will pout. They won't tolerate hard frosts, so in our area they need a warm green house to overwinter. These plants are not for the faint of heart or chronically forgetful waterer. But for those who appreciate a high-maintenance plant with Hollywood heartthrob looks, vireyas are the divas worth doting on. Just remember, they live for the applause, lots of love and do not forget to them they are beautiful.





EVERY WEDNESDAY..RAIN OR SHINE







INTERESTED IN PROPAGATION?
HERE'S YOUR CHANCE TO TRY PROPAGATING RHODODENDRONS

The Webb's are once again offering their second propagator to any VicRS members that want to give propagating a try. The second propagator has been rebuilt, new lights installed and filled with growth medium. We have already added some cuttings.
If you are interested, please email CALVIN (gorge.rhodos@gmail.com), IAN (duncani@telus.net) or KEN (ken@mkwebb.ca) to get started

VicRhodo is inviting you to a scheduled ZOOM meeting.

Topic: VicRhodo November 05, Zoom Meeting
Time: Nov.5, 2026 07:30 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)
Join Zoom Meeting
https://us02web.us./j/85176680924?pwd=ymfEJeHRUPwrXVzFfJaLaRXonbSFWS.1

Meeting chat link
https://us02web.zoom.us/launch/jc/851766909124

Meeting ID: 851 7668 0924
Passcode: 313074

THE CORE ELEMENTS OF THE JAPANESE GARDEN

STONE … ISHI

Stone is the most foundational structural element. Large rough boulders symbolize mountains and hills and vertical rocks represent stability. In Zen gardens, white sand or gravel is raked into patterns to mimic waves or flowing rivers.

WATER …MIZU

Water represents life, renewal and calm. It appears as streams, waterfalls, and irregular ponds. Still water acts as a mirror to reflect the surrounding nature and flowing water symbolizes the passage of time.

PLANTS … SHOKUBUTSU

Plants are chosen to celebrate the changing seasons rather than just for bold color. Evergreens like pines represent endurance and form the winter skeleton, while maples provide autumn color, and moss signifies age and tranquility.







ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS TO ENHANCE THE JAPANESE GARDEN FEELING

BRIDGES (hashi): made of wood or stone, crossing water features or dry gravel beds to signify a passage from the everyday world to a sacred place







STONE LANTERNS (toro) Placed by paths or water basins to mark key areas and offer symbolic life or spiritual awakening



STONE BASINS (tsukubai) garden or tea house visit





ALL ABOUT EXBURY AZALEAS

Exbury azaleas are a group of deciduous, hybrid shrubs, celebrated for their exceptionally large, trumpet-shaped flowers, vibrant color palettes and intense fragrances. Unlike common evergreen varieties, they lose their foliage in winter but make up for it with breathtaking, fiery late spring blooms that explode on naked branches before the new leaves appear.







These hybrid azaleas were created by cross-breeding older British “Knap Hill” hybrids with wild species imported from North America, Japan and China. Unveiled publicly in the mid-1930’s, they won “Best in Show” at the 1937 Chelsea Flower Show.







The growing conditions require acidic, humus-rich, organic and perfectly drained soil. They perform beautifully in dappled shade or morning sun with afternoon protection. They require consistent, deep moisture, but will die of root rot in waterlogged soil. Adding a 2 to 3 inch layer of mulch will shield their shallow roots and lock in moisture. They are exceptionally hardy as dropping leaves allows them to tolerate much cooler winter climates. They grow 5 to 8 feet tall and 4 to 6 feet wide. It is their intense colors of vibrant orange, golden yellow, fiery red and rich apricot – colors rarely seen in standard azaleas.

EAST AND WEST COOPERATION IN THE HYBRIDIZING WORLD OF RHODODENDRONS

A celebrated chapter in American horticulture was the quest to merge the brilliant, warm color palette of West Coast rhododendrons with the extreme winter hardiness of East Coast varieties. Jim Barlup spent several years trying to create such a plant.

Barlup, a professional photographer and illustrator began hybridizing because he wanted to find an orange rhododendron to landscape his yard and discovered none existed. Over the next few decades, his sharp eye for color composition helped him breed stunning, complex West Coast cultivars.

However, Barlup realized these delicate, warm-toned varieties quickly succumbed to the harsh, freezing winters of the American Northeast and Midwest. Conversely, East Coast gardeners had incredibly hardy plants, but their color options were limited. Barlup then began to actively cooperate with the East Coast hybridizers. He used pollen and seed exchanges to introduce rugged Eastern genetics to his sophisticated West Coast color lines. He focused heavily on crossing his best visual performers with rock-solid Eastern parents.

One of his most successful crosses was using 'Glenna' as the mother plant with 'Janet Blair' as the pollen parent. Other crosses included 'Amber Touch' x 'Janet Blair' and 'Wind River' x Janet Blair'. Although beautiful new hybrids were introduced to the East Coast, Jim was disappointed that other crosses were not nearly as successful as he had hoped.









BARLUP CROSSES WITH JANET BLAIR



GLENNA

X



JANET BLAIR

=



CHAMPAGNE LACE



WIND RIVER

X



JANET BLAIR

=



CODY



AMBER TOUCH

X



JANET BLAIR

=



AMBER WAVES

RHODIES GO WILD

The special virtues of species rhododendrons
Adapted from GARDEN DESIGN…STEVE HOOTMAN

For diversity of size, form, foliage and flower color, it is hard to imagine any other group of plants that can match rhododendrons and azaleas. Hybrid rhododendrons have spectacular colors and huge flower heads, but the wild plants found growing in the forests and mountains of the world also can make outstanding garden plants.

The appeal of species rhododendrons is that there is an unlimited palette of floral color blooming from late winter into late summer. Some types are fragrant, while the foliage of many species is unusual, attractive and provides year-round interest.

Species are easy to grow in the Pacific Northwest, as we have cooler summers and milder winters, although with climate change happening world-wide, one must consider where the original plants grew.

Most species require a bright, but not too hot area of the garden. Organic matter or bark mulch added to the soil creates an ideal growing medium.

One must water through dry periods. Regular mulching with organic materials usually means that extra fertilizer is usually unnecessary.













RHODODENDRON PROTECTION WITH MAGNOLIAS

Magnolias make excellent overhead cover for rhododendrons because they provide the perfect balance of dappled shade, wind protection and have compatible soil conditions.

DAPPLED SHADE

Large magnolia leaves block intense afternoon sun while allowing filtered light to reach the rhododendrons below

WIND PROTECTION

Dense magnolia branches act as a natural windbreak, shielding fragile rhododendron flowers and brittle stems from damaging gusts

ACID SOIL

Both plants thrive in acidic-rich soil, meaning they happily share the same ground without chemically disrupting each other

SHALLOW COMPATIBILITY

Deciduous magnolias have deep structural roots that won't aggressively compete with the shallow, fibrous root systems of rhododendrons

MOISTURE RETENTION

Falling magnolia leaves create a rich, natural mulch layer that keeps the soil cool in summer and locks in moisture that rhododendrons crave

A TWO--TIER CANOPY

Plant your rhododendrons just outside the main drip line of the magnolia. This ensures that both plants will get plenty of water and nutrients without competing for surface space



GROUNDCOVERS FOR A RHODODENDRON GARDEN IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Because rhododendrons have shallow roots and require moist, well-drained, acidic soil, the ideal companions are non-aggressive, shade-tolerant plants that thrive in woodland settings

Choose native plants, as they naturally adapt to the local climate and support regional biodiversity

WILD GINGER: an ideal woodland companion with glossy, heart-shaped leaves that thrives in deep shade

BUNCHBERRY: a low growing, carpeting, native plant featuring white spring flowers followed by bright red berries

WESTERN BLEEDING HEART: soft, fern-like foliage with pink heart-shaped flowers that compliment the coarse texture of the rhododendrons

EVERGREEN VIOLET: a low spreading choice that brings bright yellow blooms to shady spots in early spring









Miniature daffodils require the same care as standard daffodils. Plant them in full sun, where the foliage will get at least 6 hours of sun after bloom.

The soil needs to have good drainage.

Place the bulbs so that the top sits a depth at least 2 times the height of the bulb.

Water after planting if the soil is dry.

If planting in pots, make sure the container provides at least 2 inches of soil beneath the bottom of the bulb.

Use freely draining potting mix and make certain the container has holes.

Over winter by keeping the pot where the soil will be cold but not freeze.

Rock gardens or containers provide excellent visual appeal for miniature daffodils.

Miniature daffodils pair well with scilla, muscari and chionodoxa.

MINIATURE DAFFODILS AND HOW TO GROW THEM

Adapted from Horticulture Magazine



BULBS IN POTS

Planting pots of bulbs is an easy and fun way to add spring cheer to a sunny doorstep, patio or garden. Potted bulbs look great with a single bulb choice or choose a combination that will either flower at the same time or in succession for a longer-lasting display.

For simultaneous flowering pick a preferred flower time (early, mid or late spring) then choose bulbs that are either contrasting or of a similar hue. For a more long-lasting display, choose bulbs that will flower in succession from early to late spring.

For a successional flowering, the lowest layer should be the largest bulbs (late tulips or a late narcissi). The second layer should be slightly smaller bulbs (early miniature daffodils or mid-season daffodils. The top layer should be the smallest bulbs for the earliest flowers (crocus or snowdrops).

PLANTING

1. **Choose a large pot with drainage holes. Add gravel to stop compost from washing out**
2. **Add compost to the bottom and place bulbs quite closely together pointed side up.**
3. **Cover the bulbs completely, then firm down gently, and add more compost.**
4. **If you still have more room, add more bulbs and cover with a 2-4 inch layer of compost.**
5. **Cover with gravel to deter weeds and water well.**

AFTER CARE

1. **Water regularly once shoots begin to appear.**
2. **Deadhead regularly so plants do not waste energy producing seeds.**
3. **Allow the leaves to die down naturally, so to replenish the bulbs for flowering next year.**



WAKEHURST

Wakehurst is a stunning 535-acre-botanic garden managed by the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew. Spanning a diverse landscape, it is significantly larger and less manicured that its formal site in London, and serves as a dynamic living laboratory for global plant conservation.

The crown jewel of Wakehurst's scientific endeavors is a high-tech facility that houses an underground collection of over 2.4 billion wild plant seeds from across the globe. Visitors can step inside the atrium to observe scientists working directly in the laboratories.

The grounds feature deep woodlands from around the world, an expansive six-acre American Prairie, naturalistic Water Gardens linked by boardwalks, and a vibrant Winter Garden.


PRAIRIE GARDEN




GAP Gardens
WINTER GARDEN




WATER GARDEN



THE GREAT ELECTION FRAUD OF 1892

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While every collector knows that *R. macrophyllum* is the official state flower of Washington State, its ascent to power was fueled by a political battle. Washington needed an official state flower for the upcoming 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Rather than letting the male-dominated legislature decide, an exclusive statewide election was organized where only women could vote. The wild pink rhododendron was pitted against the clover. Suffragists, women's clubs and local newspapers took sides, urging women to cast mail-in ballots. Over 15,000 women voted and the Pacific rhododendron won by a landslide.

However, a botanical scandal followed the political victory. Early, rushed cataloguing mistakenly identified the plant as *Rhododendron californicum*. Pacific Northwest rhododendron collectors spent decades grumbling about the error, but it took until 1959 for the Washington legislature to formally update the law to its true name: *R. macrophyllum,* meaning "rose tree" with big leaves".







***Rhododendron macrophyllum* is an upright multi-stemmed shrub growing 4 to 15 feet, although it can reach up to 26 feet in deeply shaded understories**

It has thick, leathery, oblong to elliptic leaves measuring 3 to 8 inches long, deep matte green on top and lighter green or rust colored underneath

The flowers are showy, bell-shaped blossoms arranged in large terminal trusses, with the petals ranging from vibrant pink to pale-rose purple, often featuring delicate yellow or red spots on the upper petal

SECOND BLOOMING…A CURIOUS EVENT

Hyannis Country Garden

Some rhododendrons get tricked into blooming because autumn weather creates a perfect mirror image of April.







ENVIRONMENTAL TRIGGERS ALIGN

1. DAYLIGHT RATIOS: The exact balance of daylight and darkness in late October / early November perfectly mimics early spring

2. TEMPERATURE SWINGS: Warm autumn afternoons paired with crisp, cool night signal spring-like waking conditions to the plant

3. MOISTURE SHOCK: When heavy autumn rains follow a dry summer, the sudden moisture mimics spring rains.





RHODODENRONS IN NEWFOUNDLAND

Adapted from Bowering Gardens

Rhododendrons are renowned for their lush green foliage and vibrant clusters of flowers. These hardy shrubs come in a kaleidoscope of colors, from rich purples to fiery reds and delicate pinks. They can thrive in many regions, but can they truly thrive in Newfoundland?

Newfoundland's rugged coastal beauty is undeniable, but its unique climate can be a challenge for gardeners. The allure of rhododendrons lies in their ability to add a touch of elegance and color to this picturesque landscape. Thus, their cultivation in this region requires careful consideration and expert care. It is important to choose cold-hardy plants as Newfoundland's zones range from 4 to 5. Zone 4 (-28.9 to -34.4 C) Zone 5 (-23.3 to -28.9 C)

PLANTS TO CONSIDER

P.J.M. Elite…evergreen, vibrant lavender-pink to magenta flowers, dark green foliage

Helsinki University… bears beautiful pink flowers and manages well in snow

Catawabiense Boursault…an ironclad variety with dark rose-lavender flowers

Nova Zembla…known for its large, true-red trusses, functioning well in partial shade, needs wind protection

Ramapo and Purple Gem…these dwarf varieties grow close to the ground which provides shelter against windburn

NOVEMBER INTEREST IN OUR RHODODENDRON GARDENS

To add stunning interest to rhododendron gardens in winter, one must select plants that thrive in acid, well-drained soil without competing with the shallow root systems pf the rhododendrons. Our climate allows for a variety of winter-blooming shrubs, berries and textured perennials.

LILY OF THE VALLEY SHRUB (PIERIS): a perfect botanical cousin to the rhododendron that shares the same soil preference. It carries eye-catching colorful flower buds all through the winter, then bursting into cascading chains of white or pink bell-shaped flowers

JAPANESE SKIMMIA: another acid-loving plant. Female plants display bright red berry clusters all winter, while male plants produce prominent dark red flower buds that remain attractive until opening in spring.

TALL OREGON GRAPE (MAHONIA): a robust evergreen shrub that stands tall, while producing dramatic, architectural sprays of bright yellow flowers right in the middle of winter, which later mature into dusty blue berries.

HELLEBORES: these shade loving perennials bloom from December through March. They feature highly durable evergreen foliage and nodding flowers of white, plum and green that sit beautifully under the canopy of rhododendrons.

WINTER HEATHER: this low-growing acidic soil-loving groundcover blankets the soil in vibrant shades of pink, purple and white from January through April. It acts as a colorful carpet that bridges the gap before spring bulbs emerge.

SWEET BOX (SARCOCOCCA): this is an understated evergreen groundcover that excels in deep shade. While its tiny white flowers are visually subtle, they release an incredibly powerful sweet vanilla perfume from December to February.





RHODODENDRONS IN BC

Adapted from Grower's Guide

In much of the gardening world, rhododendrons are challenging plants that require coddling, special soils and careful site selection. On coastal BC, they are among the easiest and most spectacular flowering shrubs a gardener can grow. Vancouver Island's climate so closely matches the native mountain habitats of Asian rhododendron species that some of the largest rhododendron gardens in North America grow here.

Most rhododendrons species originate from the eastern Himalayas, the mountains of China, Japan and Korea – climates characterized by cool, moist conditions, moderate temperatures and acidic soils derived from granite. Coastal BC. replicates these conditions almost perfectly.

WHAT RHODODENDRONS NEED

- **Mild winters—no prolonged deep freeze**
- **Cool summers—below 28 degrees**
- **High humidity and rainfall**
- **Acidic, well drained but moist soil**
- **Dappled light—not deep shade, not harsh sun**

WHAT COASTAL BC OFFERS

- **Rarely below -8 C on Vancouver Island**
- **Average July high 22 C in Victoria**
- **Natural acidic forest soils in many areas**
- **Mainly, overcast, filtered sunlight conditions**
- **Between 47 and 70 inches of rain each year**



RHODODENDRONS IN ESTONIA

Rhododendrons in Estonia are highly celebrated ornamental shrubs that thrive beautifully despite the country's northern climate. While the region features only one widespread native relative, decades of dedicated cultivation, public collections, and gardening clubs have turned Estonia into a vibrant hub for rhododendron enthusiasts.

Native Wild Species

Wild Rosemary *(R. tomentosum),* known locally as *sookail* is Estonia's only native wild relative of the genus. It grows abundantly in the county's extensive bogs, peatlands and pine swamp forests. It features aromatic narrow leaves and clustered white flowers. In local folklore, its intense, narcotic scent is famous for inducing headaches or dizziness in berry pickers who linger in the bogs too long.



The oldest botanical garden in the Baltic states cultivates a rich variety of cold-hardy cultivars and species engineered to withstand harsh Nordic winters.



Located in the capital city, it features a massive, mature rhododendron collection integrated into oak and pine forests. The collection showcases over 40 distinct species grown from seeds, designed to highlight the varied colors of the genus.



VICTORIA …NOVEMBER 2026…RHODODENDRONS

In November, rhododendrons in Victoria will primarily be in their dormant foliage phase, although accelerating climate change effects are causing unpredictable shifts in their traditional growth and flower times. While autumn is typically a time for routine maintenance, local gardeners are increasingly having to manage the stressors of a changing Pacific Northwest environment.

Historically, November in Victoria is a quiet month, letting us enjoy the foliage and letting root systems settle if planting a new rhododendron. However, last year was certainly not a normal winter month as it was unseasonably warm and, the prediction for this season is a repeat or even warmer winter for Victoria in 2027.

However, what is happening is that some rhododendrons are blooming in November, rather than in the spring. At the Gorge/Barlup garden, Sweet Talk was in full bloom in September. When a climate anomaly appears, it affects bloom times. If this pattern continues, subsequent frosts will kill the flowers entirely.



One variable we can control is temperature around the roots of the plant. By ensuring a thick layer of organic mulch around the dripline, the roots of the plant will be protected from temperature swings.

This is a good time to look for destructive pests that will harm your plant, especially if we have an extended summer drought. Lace bugs are becoming more of a rhododendron pest because of our dry summers.

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IF YOU ARE AFRAID OF SPIDERS … SKIP THIS PAGE

YOUR BIRTHDAY SPIDER

























INTRODUCTION TO VIREYA RHODODENDRONS

ATSUKO GIBSON













Interest in Vireya rhododendrons has been growing steadily in recent years. This presentation will introduce the fascinating world of Vireyas, including their taxonomy, cultivation, and common pests and diseases. We will also take a look at the Vireya collection at the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden and highlight some of the unique species in cultivation.

LOOKING BACK…BC LIVING…
MARCH 2003

Rhododendrons: A Labor of Love
Barbara Chernick

Norman Todd's love affair with rhododendrons reaches back well over 20 years and so does his nursery near Victoria, which offers over 300 species and three times as many hybrids. I first became aware that Norman was an authority on rhododendrons in the 1980's, after reading the many knowledgeable articles he was contributing to The Island Grower.



Norm's interest in rhododendrons led to an eight-week workshop that he conducted with Dr. Dave Ballantyne at the University of Victoria in 1979, and out of it was born the Victoria Rhododendron Society, which became a member of the American Rhododendron Society. When I heard about his unorthodox approach to the feeding of rhododendrons, I introduced myself to Norman, who kindly took time out from his enormous nursery to fill me in on the details.



First of all, Norman divulged that if rhodos already reside in soil that is black, fertile, and rich in humus, they may never need supplementary feeding at all. But those that are not do lucky, he's developed a regimen that is no doubt responsible, at least in part, for the well-being of his own thriving collection.



Although most of us feed our rhododendrons only before and after flowering, they really need constant nourishment. During our winter rains, vital nutrients soon leach out of reach of the plant's shallow roots, so Norman recommends a feeding every two months, beginning in November and ending on July 1.

The fertilizer that Norman favours breaks with tradition in that it offers extra nitrogen, for he asserts that the notion rhodos don't need much nitrogen is a myth. He uses the 10-8-6 formula developed at the University of British Columbia; in fact, he helped test it before its release. The formulation contains all 13 of the elements rhododendrons require and 50 per cent of its nitrogen is offered as sulphur-coated urea which is released slowly over a long period.



The most common reason for the yellowing of rhododendron leaves is insufficient nitrogen, and if they remain yellow after this feeding, more nitrogen can be applied using such acidic preparations as fish fertilizer 5-2-3 or Miracid 30-10-10. Or yellowing can indicate a shortage of magnesium, which can be supplemented with epsom salts (magnesium sulphate,) 15 millilitres in 4 litres of water. Epsom salts won't alter the pH, which should register around 5.5.



If extra nitrogen and magnesium fail to green up the leaves, it may be that they are not getting enough iron. Iron chelate is in order; the chelate chaperones the iron so that it won't enter into *mesalliances* with other substances before being absorbed by the plant.



For those who'd rather use an organic fertilizer, Norman recommends the following mix developed by Allan and Liz Murray of Cobble Hill: 4 parts each of alfalfa, canola and blood meal, 2 parts each of rock phosphate, bone meal, kelp meal and green sand. Apply the mixture once year and mulch the plants heavily with ground bark.



Norman warns that although this organic preparation offers the advantage of ongoing sustenance, it does take time to break down and release its nutrients. If you are switching to organic feeding, do so gradually by overlapping applications of both kinds of fertilizer.



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Stephen Brice…250-658-1850





KEY CONTRIBUTORS

Librarian…Ellen Wellborn…250-479-1898
Gorge Garden…Calvin Parsons…250-590-0489
Propagation…John Verwolf…250-896-6952
Newsletter…Lois Blackmore…250-818-9307



Dr. Seuss



"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

From: *I CAN READ WITH MY EYES SHUT"*



