

**VICTORIA RHODODENDRON SOCIETY
OCTOBER 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.





PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Well, the acorns have been patoinging off the cars in the parking lot for a month now. And the autumn colours are trooping down the boulevards. I've been wanting a re-blooming azalea for awhile now because I don't usually buy many late blooming annuals. My little collection of rhodos and azaleas do not offer what is sometimes called "precocious bloom" aka rhodos behaving badly. I've seen posts on line from quite a few folks saying it's a fault in a more positive light. I'd rather see a plant bloom twice a year than once a year. I'm strange that way. ☺

If you are similarly strange, consider looking for Cunningham's White and Black Sport, which are known to bloom in both spring and fall. But they are old-ish hybrids and may be difficult to find. And varieties known for this behaviour may not exhibit the behaviour in every climate. Fluctuations in temperature, precipitation and sunlight can be very similar in both seasons and plants are simply responding to mixed messages. But the message varies from time zone to time zone and from year to year. This could be a topic for a future "Round Table" or just a conversation starter at our next club meeting. Which of *your* rhodos are behaving badly?

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1 MEETING 7:30 PM.

" A CURIOUS GARDEN"... CHRIS AND PAMELA BALL



**CONTINUING WORK
AT THE HCP
RHODODENDRON
GARDEN
IN
SEPTEMBER**

OUR CANADIAN THANKSGIVING

Canada chose its Thanksgiving to match its earlier harvest season

January 31, 1957, the Canadian government set the holiday on the second Monday of October



The first recorded European ceremony was held by Martin Frobisher in 1578



Indigenous peoples celebrated a seasonal harvest thankfulness long before European arrival



The Canadian government declared the first annual Thanksgiving on November 6, 1879



THANKSGIVING REGIONS AND NATIVE RHODODENDRONS

Thanksgiving celebrations share a deep overlap with the native habitats North American rhododendron species. In the US and Canada, the Thanksgiving holiday falls within regions where wild rhododendrons have thrived for millennia. Across the misty forests of the Pacific Northwest, the Pacific rhododendron (*R. macrophyllum*) grows natively from BC down through Oregon. Meanwhile, the Appalachian mountain range – stretching from the deep American south up to New England and Eastern Canada – is the historic home of the Great Laurel (*R. maximum*) and the Catawba rhododendron (*R. catawbiense*) which form massive deep thickets beneath the forest canopy. Beyond North America, Japan's Labor Thanksgiving Day is November 23. It takes place in a country that serves as a major evolutionary homeland for the genus, where hundreds of native rhododendron and azalea species carpet the mountainsides.



HAPPY THANKSGIVING

OCTOBER IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Soon misty autumn mornings will settle over the Pacific Northwest and our gardens will be shifting gears. While our main event of the year is months away, October is a critical month for ensuring next year's blooms.

The soil is still warm from the summer, hopefully the rains will have returned and our plants are thinking about tucking themselves in for the winter. While our skies may be turning grey, October can surprise us with dry spells. If this does occur, we need to remember that their root systems need to be thoroughly hydrated before the thermometer drops.

Dehydrated roots cannot pull up moisture when the ground freezes or when cold, winter-like winds blow. This will lead to "winter burn" – those crispy, brown leaf edges we may see in February. If we do get a dry week, give your established shrubs a deep, slow soak. Focus on the drip line where the active roots are drinking.

If there is one thing a rhododendron loves more than acidic soil, is a cozy blanket of mulch. A good 2 – to 3 inch layer helps to regulate the soil temperature and keep weeds at bay.

Hands off the pruners this month. Those fat, round buds at the edges of your branches are next years buds. You may be cutting off your 2027 blooms.

Absolutely do not feed your plants right now. Doing that will allow new tender growth to emerge which will immediately get zapped and ruined by the first frost.

October is actually a great time to plant new rhododendrons. The warm soil allows roots to establish without the stress of summer heat.

October is a good month to "clean". Rake up any fallen, spotted rhododendron leaves. Leaving them on the ground over winter invites fungal diseases like powdery mildew to over winter and return next year.



A VIST TO TREBAH GARDENS CORNWALL



Trebah is a 26 acre sub-tropical garden situated in Cornwall. It has been owned by several families, resulting in a range of influences that perfectly describe a true garden story. It is famous for its towering 100 year-old Himalayan tree rhododendrons.

The Rhododendron Valley features a sub-tropical ravine garden with over four miles of footpaths, winding down the steep ravine sides. The rhododendrons intermingle with giant gunnera, bamboos and Australian tree ferns. The main path leads directly to a secluded beach, made famous during WW II as a landing for American troops on D Day.

There are historic specimens of rhododendrons such as *Rhododendron arboreum*, over 140 years old and 60 feet tall; Richard Gill hybrids such as 'Trebah Gem' and 'Glory of Penjerrick'; delicate lily-like *Rhododendron nuttallii*, and heavenly scented *Rhododendron x loderi* varieties.



Magnolia at Trebah



Palm Grove at Trebah



Toward the beach



The beach at Trebah





THE SAD TALE OF THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY

The Monarch butterfly is an epic multi-generational migration facing steep decline from habitat loss, chemical weed killers and changing weather patterns.

MIRACULOUS JOURNEY

- . Four generations make the long trip north from Mexico or California and back again
- . The final generation lives up to nine months and flies thousands of miles to a place it has never seen

THE HUMAN IMPACT

- . Widespread chemical use in farming destroys milkweed, which is the only food baby caterpillars eat
- . Urban sprawl replaces open fields and native wildflowers with buildings and roads

THE CLIMATE THREAT

- . Unseasonal cold snaps and severe winter storms in Mexico can kill millions of butterflies at once
- . Rising temperatures cause stress and disease across their traditional breeding paths



The Heritage Gardens is located in Sandwich, Massachusetts. Before it became a public museum, it was the estate of Charles Owen Dexter where he began his career as a rhododendron hybridizer. He produced tens of thousands of rhododendron seedlings between 1921 and 1943.

The local woods were dense and very much overgrown. Dexter looked at the rugged landscape and saw a blank canvas. He decided to create a “wild garden” where spectacular flowers grew naturally under the shade of the giant oak trees. His goal was to breed a rhododendron that had the bright, dramatic colors of warm-weather plants, but could still survive the freezing New England winters.

For over twenty years, Dexter cross-pollinated thousands of plants by hand. He collected seeds from all over the world, transferred pollen with tiny brushes and waited years for the seedlings to bloom. If the plant had weak colors or died in the frost, he threw it away. Only the strongest and most beautiful survived.

Dexter succeeded beyond anyone’s expectations. These were not ordinary bushes. They grew into massive, tree-like structures. Every spring his estate exploded into a sea of vibrant pinks, deep purples, and fiery reds and many of which carried a sweet heavy perfume that drifted across the property.

Following his legacy, Jack Cowles, estate superintendent and horticulturist worked on the grounds from 1957 to 1967. He built on Dexter’s foundational work by introducing new traits, most notably developing yellow-flowering rhododendrons. By 1970, only 18 certified Dexter hybrids remained on the grounds. Thanks to extensive preservation and tracking efforts, the collection now boasts over 170 varieties.



MORE DEXTER HYBRIDS



Dexter's Apricot



Dexter's Giant Red



Dexter's Honey Dew



Dexter's Horizon



Dexter's Orange



Dexter's Pink Satin



Dexter's Vanilla



Dexter's Red Velvet



Dexter's Peppermint



**JACK COWLES RHODODENDRONS
HERITAGE GARDENS**



ALPINE DEW



BEA MACDONALD



BERYL CORONET



SHAKER SUNRISE



JACK COWLES



LOOKING AHEAD... HELPING YOUR GARDEN RECOVER FROM HEAVY RAIN...



Heavy rain can arrive at almost any point during the year. In some years rain storms can bring unprecedented amounts of rain. The good news is that gardens are wonderfully resilient and with a little bit of patience, most plants can recover once the soil has dried out again.

BE PATIENT: Plants may look flattened or wilted , but many will perk up as the water drains.

MITIGATE POOLING WATER: Standing water can stress roots if it lingers. Create shallow, temporary drainage channels to guide the water away.

INSPECT FOR STORM DAMAGE: Water torrents can damage plants and garden infrastructure. Look for exposed roots, washed out soil and mulch erosion.

AVOID WALKING ON DRENCHED SOIL: It is better to wait until the soil is moist but no longer sticky or spongy to do any repairs.

TAKE NOTES WHERE DRAINAGE IS A PROBLEM: Where did the water pool? Which beds were well drained?

Living on the west coast, our area can be prone to sudden, heavy rainfalls. As our focus is on rhododendrons, we have learned to plant carefully, preparing the planting hole and making certain that the roots are not blocked by using clay type soils.



WHAT IS THE MOST SOUTHERLY RHODODENDRON GARDEN IN THE WORLD?

The Emu Valley Rhododendron Garden is a private botanical garden, volunteer-run woodland situated in northwest Tasmania. It is located at the 41st S latitude. It features Australia's finest collection of rhododendrons, azaleas, magnolias, camellias and companion plants across 11 hectares of spectacular landscaped gardens. Nestled in a natural amphitheater, it includes mirror-like lakes, geographic themed zones and native wildlife.

Plants are arranged in particular zones, reflecting their origins like China, Japan, North America and the Himalayas. There are three pristine, spring-fed lakes that mirror the surrounding trees and blooms. Visitors frequently spot local fauna including platypus and echidnas along with diverse bird life.



SOMETHING NEW ON THE MARKET COMING OUR WAY

The Groundbreaker Hydrangea Series is the world's first true groundcover hydrangea collection. This innovative series features low-growing, horizontal spreading panicle hydrangeas that grow wider than tall. The key characteristics include: growth habit, long blooming window, color-changing petals and no staking is required.

The Three Main Cultivars

. 'Blush': the original release. Large white flowers 12" open in July and deepen into soft, pastel pink tones by autumn. Grows 12" tall by 24" wide

. 'Greeny': blooms emerge in a vibrant lime-green before softening into an elegant, creamy white. Grows 16" tall by 32" wide

. 'Ruby': Flowers start pure white, shift to blush pink, and mature into a rich, deep ruby red. Grows 16" tall and 28" wide

They perform best in full sun. If you want a seamless carpet effect, space multiple plants roughly 20 – 24 inches apart. They bloom strictly on new wood. Hard-prune in March down to about 8" above the soil line before the buds break. Because of their unique cascading nature, they work beautifully as pathway edgers, front-door masses or spilling over the sides of patio containers and baskets.





RHODODENDRONS AND ALCOHOL IN NEPAL

**ADAPTED FROM MONGAYBAY, MAY 2026
(a non-profit environmental news organization)**

Mongabay found unlicensed rhododendron liquor being sold openly in tourist's shops across Nepal's Tinjure-Milke-Jaljale region, home to at least 26 rhododendron species

- 1. Nepal's conservation laws prohibit commercial harvesting of rhododendrons from community forests without approval**
- 2. Officials say they do not know how that applies to flowers growing in private gardens**
- 3. Some rhododendron species contain grayanotoxins that can be toxic, and even fatal**
- 4. None of the bottles being sold have been tested for safety**
- 5. Local residents say the practice emerged roughly three years ago alongside the post-pandemic tourist rebound as extra income**
- 6. One of the "souvenirs" growing in popularity among visitors is the flower-based alcohol, bottled in reused containers**
- 7. The current law allows local people to brew alcohol up to 10 liters for personal use**

WHAT RHODODENDRONS KNOW ABOUT THEIR ENVIRONMENT

ADAPTED FROM HOLDEN FORESTS & GARDENS

As our world begins to warm, scientists are looking for early detection systems that will tell what is already being affected and help predict what is to come. Plants have been responding to environmental stressors for millions of years. If one knows how to read them, one can understand what they are going through and get a preview of what is coming.

With over 1200 global species growing from tropical mountains to forests in Ohio, the ancestors of today's rhododendrons spent over 65 million years navigating environmental extremes. Today, the plants have proven useful scientific tools as individual plants are sensitive enough to respond to their immediate environment and are widespread enough to make comparisons across climates.

COPING WITH COLOR

When conditions outside are hostile – too cold, too bright, too hot – plants have to find ways to survive. One of their most visible strategies is to produce pigments to protect themselves. In one study, they have found that seedlings exposed to different light conditions accumulate protective compounds called anthocyanins. Under high lights, seedlings appear purple or red rather than green—not because the green chlorophyll disappears, but because the anthocyanins act as a protective sunscreen. Plants that typically grow in the shade accumulate fewer anthocyanins than those from colder regions where they are in full sun.



THE CHEMISTRY OF FRAGRANCE

Within the genus *Rhododendron*, 17 deciduous azalea species are native to North America. Some have a very strong fragrance. The chemicals responsible for that scent are called volatile organic compounds. However, they can also influence pollination, deter pests, help cool the plant and effect the plant's reproductive success. As temperatures rise, there is a chance the function of these systems will be altered.

WATCHING FLOWERS BLOOM

Researchers are tracking how the timing of rhododendron flowering is changing overtime. Volunteers are observing and recording bud formation, flowering and fruiting across collections. They are building a dataset that can eventually reveal climate – driven changes.



HOLDEN
FORESTS &
GARDENS

WEATHER FORECAST FOR VICTORIA FROM NOVEMBER TO MAY 2027

AI

The long-term outlook for Victoria area points to a mild, transitioning winter influenced by emerging El Nino conditions and a broader long-term regional warming trend.

NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 2026

Temperatures: Daytime highs averaging 9C -- 10C in November, dipping to cooler seasonal overnight lows

Precipitation: November remains historically the wettest month, with average rainfall Totals 145—207 mm and daily sunshine 23 – hours

Snow?/Cold Risk: Transitioning to an El Nino pattern increases the odds of a milder overall winter

JANUARY – FEBRUARY

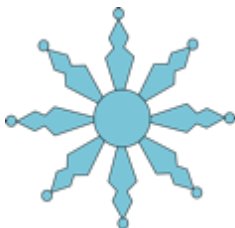
Temperatures: Generally warmer than normal on average, although typically storms bring wet and windy conditions

Precipitation: Lower overall snow predictability with potential for mixed-rain snow Events rather than sustained heavy snowpacks

MARCH -- MAY

Temperatures: Gradual warming trend toward typical spring highs, breaking into milder conditions by late April and May

Precipitation: Decreasing monthly rainfall totals as the region moves toward a drier late - spring and summer season.



THE WILD BOTANICAL WONDER

AI

One of the most unusual rhododendron gardens is right here on Vancouver Island. It is called Rhododendron Lake and is located deep in the dense back country of Vancouver Island. Unlike manicured botanical city parks, this public garden is a wild, hidden ecosystem located at the end of an active logging road.

Hidden roughly 45 minutes from NanOOSE Bay and Nanaimo, it is located on private forestry land owned by Mosaic Forest Management, thus it requires travel down industrial logging roads. The forestry gates are left open on weekends specifically to allow public access to this natural wonder. Visitors must navigate a forest floor built entirely of tangled roots, sphagnum moss and moving bogland that literally shifts.

A narrow path has been cut directly through the towering rhododendrons to let visitors walk through a tunnel of tree-sized rhododendrons. In spring time, it is a tunnel of pink blooms. Rhododendrons usually require canopy shade, but these specimens grow out in the open sun, right to the lakes edge. This is a result of a massive mountain ridge framing the far side of the lake.

The very best time to explore this hidden gem is from late May through early June, when the shoreline around the lake transforms into a wall of vibrant pink blossoms.



BIRTHDAY MONTH PERENNIALS

Birth month flowers are perennials that match each month of the year. They make excellent long-lasting gifts that return every year.



JANUARY



FEBRUARY



MARCH



APRIL



MAY



JUNE



JULY



AUGUST



SEPTEMBER



OCTOBER



NOVEMBER



DECEMBER

CAN YOU NAME YOUR BIRTHDAY FLOWER?

WINTER COLD AND RHODODENDRONS

..... A QUIZ.....

1. When freezing temperatures arrive, what do rhododendron leaves do?

- A. Flatten to maximize sunlight absorption
- B. Curl inward into a tight, drooping tube
- C. Turn yellow and drop off the plant



2. At approximately what temperature does the above process occur?

- A. 15C
- B. Below 7 C
- C. 25 C



3. What is the process rhododendron leaves do in freezing weather?

- A. Phototropism
- B. Thermonasty
- C. Thigmonasty



4. What causes sunscald on rhododendron leaves in winter?

- A. Sudden temperature drop overnight
- B. Icy winds dry out leaf tips and create what looks like sunburn patches
- C. Winter sun heating up leaf tissue on freezing days

5. What is the name for winter burn on rhododendron leaves?

- A. Desiccation
- B. Desussation
- C. Exsiccation



THE CORE ELEMENTS OF THE ENGLISH GARDEN

AI OVERVIEW

The English garden is a blend of informal naturalism, global plant collection and structured romanticism. It evolved from strict geometric layouts into a style that mimics wild nature while deeply reflecting history, empire and emotional connection to the landscape.

- . The Pastoral Lawn: smooth, sweeping green grass that brings open countryside right up to the house
- . The Herbaceous border: dense, multi-layered plantings of mixed perennials that look effortless, but are intensely managed.
- . Borrowed Scenery: Blurring boundaries so the garden flows into the surrounding parkland or horizon
- . Historical Layer: Incorporating classical follies, winding paths and romantic ruins that tell a visual story
- . Formal Beginnings: early gardens relied on rigid geometry, knot gardens and clipped topiary
- . In the 18th Century, designers like William Kent and Capability Brown threw out straight lines to create living stage sets and serpentine waters
- . Global trade and colonial expansion brought exotic foreign species into British soil, shaping a diverse horticultural identity



WHAT IS THE “RED MAX” EFFECT IN RHODODENDRONS?

Idea comes from the Atlantic Rhododendron Society Newsletter
Joe Brusso



In botany and horticulture, the “Red Effect” refers to a rare genetic phenomenon in *Rhododendron maximum* where the entire plant is intensely permeated with deep red pigment (anthocyanin).

While a standard *Rhododendron maximum* produces white or pale pink with green stems, a plant showing the Red Max trait is heavily saturated with red across almost all of its tissues.

The sap is highly concentrated with red pigment.

The stems have a distinct layer of red tissue right beneath the surface.

The leaf stems and the lower interior third of the leaves display a red-wine coloration.

When newly formed leaves are held up to a light source, a bold pool-like blotch is clearly visible right in the center of the leaf.

The flowers range from a deep glowing rosy-red to dark purplish-red.

Because the trait is highly variable a single plant can have dark red, lighter red, and red and white “picotee” simultaneously.



KISSING COUSINS IN THE RHODODENDRON WORLD

AI

Native North American berries like blueberries and cranberries are direct genetic cousins to rhododendrons. They all belong to the exact same botanical lineage known as Ericaceae – or – heath family.

THE TALE OF THE GREAT ERICACEAE CLAN

Long ago, nearly 60 million years before humans ever walked the earth, a massive plant family took roots across the northern hemisphere. This ancestral lineage became known as the Ericaceae clan.

As the Earth's climate shifted over millennia, the clan faced a massive obstacle: the soil in North America became highly acidic, nutrient poor and harsh. Most standard plants withered and died.

However, the resilient Ericaceae family adapted by making a secret alliance with underground fungi (mycorrhizae) to help them absorb nutrients where other plants starved.

With this unique survival trick locked into their DNA, the family eventually split into different branches, each choosing a completely different strategy to conquer the continent.



THE SHOWY ELDER BROTHER: THE RHODODENDRON

One branch of the family decided to pour its energy into an absolute spectacle. They grew thick, leathery evergreen leaves to survive the bitter winters and focused on attracting pollinators from miles away

They became the Rhododendrons. They lit up the Appalachian mountains and the Pacific Northwest with massive, dramatic clusters of pink, purple and white blossoms. They were beautiful, but they held a dangerous secret – their leaves and nectar were loaded with toxic grayanotoxins to prevent animals from eating them.

THE GENEROUS YOUNGER SISTER: THE BLUEBERRY

This branch became the native North American berries – specifically blueberries, huckleberries and cranberries. They shrunk their flowers down into modest, upside-down white bells. Instead of relying strictly on showy petals, they became fruits wrapped in a protective, waxy white gray bloom.

THE FAMILY REUNION

For thousands of years, humans viewed them as completely unrelated. It wasn't until modern botanists began looking past the surface and testing their DNA that the truth came to light. When you flip a blueberry upside down, you will see a tiny, five pointed crown at its base. That crown is the exact structural remnant of the same bell-shaped flower that its older brother, the rhododendron, still proudly wears in the spring. They are children of the same ancient ancestor, perfectly adapted to the very same North American soil.

HALLOWEEN IN THE PLANT WORLD

AI

Did you know there is a Halloween in the plant world and it is year-round. Nature, through a bizarre collection of plants and fungi has created plants that feature unsettling shapes, eerie survival methods and morbid names.



THE BLACK BAT FLOWER

This rare tropical plant looks like a bat in mid-flight. It produces deep purple-black blooms, wing-like bracts and long, whisker like filaments that dangle up to 30 centimeters long.



DOLL'S EYES

This plant produces clusters of white berries in late summer. Each berry sits on a thick red stalk and features a single black dot. This plant resembles a collection of disembodied, staring eyeballs. The entire plant is toxic.



GHOST PLANT

This eerie plant entirely lacks chlorophyll. Because it cannot photosynthesize, it grows a completely translucent, a pearly white stem in dark forest understories.

CANADA'S HIDDEN WATERFRONT GEM

The Brueckner Rhododendron Garden

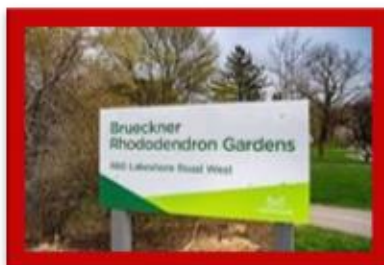
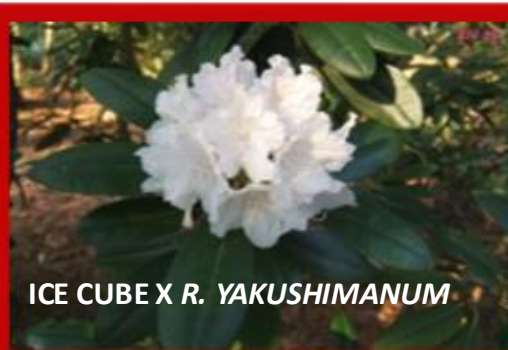
Located on the Waterfront Trail, in Port Credit, Ontario , this 18-acre garden is home to one of Canada's largest publicly owned collections of rhododendrons.

The gardens owe their existence to the late Dr. Joseph Brueckner, a renowned horticulturist and rhododendron hybridizer who donated more than 800 plants from his private collection to the city of Mississauga , Ontario in 1983.

Nestled along the north shore of Lake Ontario, the gardens benefit from a special lakeside microclimate and are sheltered by mature white pines, creating ideal growing conditions for these special shrubs.



SOME BRUECKNER CROSSES



MONTREAL BOTANICAL GARDEN



The Leslie Hancock Garden at the Jardin Botanique de Montreal is a spectacular gem that anchors the institution's premier cold-hardy rhododendrons, azaleas and ericaceous plant collection. Tucked away as a protective woodland "showcase" within the larger arboretum, this specialized space offers fascinating historical and horticultural highlight



THE LESLIE HANCOCK RHODODENDRON GARDEN

MONTREAL BOTANICAL GARDEN

Up until the mid-20th century, no one thought that rhododendrons could thrive in such a harsh climate. It was thanks to rhododendron enthusiast and horticulturist Leslie Hancock (1892-1977) from Ontario that people began growing rhododendrons. Hancock was a pioneering hybridizer who dedicated his life to developing cold-hardy varieties.

The rhododendron garden was intentionally constructed inside a dense surround of mature conifers and white spruces. This design created a critical microclimate, shielding brittle evergreen foliage from Montreal's punishing, desiccating winter winds.

Peak season spans from mid- May through June splashing a canvas of whites, mauves and bright pinks against the forest canopy. Beyond the massive shrubs, the site displays a rich understory of companion plants including Labrador tea, wintergreen, wild primroses and delicate ferns.





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Dr. Seuss
}



HOW DID IT GET SO LATE SO SOON?
IT'S NIGHT BEFORE ITS AFTERNOON.
OCTOBER IS HERE BEFORE ITS JUNE.
MY GOODNESS HOW THE TIME HAS
FLEWN. HOW DID IT GET SO LATE SO
SOON?

