

NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



December 2008
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hi Everyone:

December is our Xmas Auction and “Finger Licking Good Potluck”. I hope you will bring something for the auction and food for the Salvation Army. The event starts at 6:30 p.m. and any assistance in setting up for the meeting will be appreciated.

I was outside today and noted that the plants under or near the trees and under the eaves were a bit dry. Now would be a good time to water and lay a couple inches of mulch before the earth cools. The mulch will help keep the ground warm, aid in retaining moisture and add nutrients. We have been fortunate to have a Rhododendron in 1/2 bloom since the end of October. I have tried to identify it without much success (see photo on page 2). I don't know if this is an anomaly or whether this is normal for the plant. It was given to me, last year, when it looked like it was dying so I am not sure if the blooming is due to the odd weather or shock. I also have Lee's Scarlet in full bloom (this may due to my digging it up for the Auction). Regardless of the reason(s) it is nice to see a Rhodo in bloom this time of year.

Paul

PS: Thank you Craig for doing the Newsletter this month.

EXECUTIVE

President	Paul Lawry	390-2370
Vice President	John Deniseger	390-3605
Secretary	June Bouchard	390-3605
Treasurer	Chris Southwick	758-0993
Directors	Glenda Barr	390-2822
	Linda Lawry	390-2370
	Sandra Dorman	390-0136
	Barb Coy	758-8497
	Rosina Schmidt	751-3386

COMMITTEES

Advertising	Michael Miller	758-2879
Library	Ann Beamish	758-2574
	Helene Sullivan	758-7023
Newsletter	Kathryn Grant	245-7879
Membership	Debbie Gaboury & Barb Coy	
Program	Glenda Barr	390-2822
Raffle	Ann Davey & Val Harvey	
Social	Sandra Dorman	390-0136
Dollar Table	Reinhold Gorgosilich	758-6533

Nanaimo Rhododendron Society
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email: nanaimo@rhodos.ca

NEXT MEETING

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

BEBAN PARK SOCIAL CENTRE

6:30 pm

Potluck dinner & Christmas auction

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Ordering from the RSF

By Craig Clarke

In Spring and Fall, the Rhododendron Species Foundation prepares a catalogue of rhodos and companion plants that are available for purchase.

Our club has a membership in the RSF which allows us to order as members. The RSF delivers plants for Canadian members to UBC Botanical Garden, so we are able to avoid the hassle of travelling down to Federal Way and preparing the permits for importation. I picked up the Fall order in October. Five members requested a total of 27 rhodos & companion plants. We received all but 3 of the plants requested.

If you would like to order from the Spring 2009 catalogue, watch for the catalogue to be posted on the RSF web page:

<http://www.rhodygarden.org/catalogs.html>



Mystery Rhodo in Paul's garden

If anyone can identify this Rhodo, contact Paul Lawry.

Twigs AND STEMS



MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE PAST DUE!

Single - \$35
Family - \$45
Associate - \$15

Bring your payment to the December meeting or mail to the club address (on Page 1)

The Quarterly Bulletins of the ARS now available online

As noted in the current issue of the ARS journal, the back issues of the Quarterly Bulletins of the ARS are now available online. There is a new link to them on our main club web page under the main link for the ARS.

A quick scan of Volume 35 number 2 issue (Spring 1981) turned up an article about Mt Kinabalu on Borneo, written by Dr Keith Wade who teaches at Capilano University.

Check it out & perhaps it will whet your appetite for an excursion to Borneo to admire the Vireya rhodos in 2009 with Dr Glen Jamieson of MARS (jamiesong@pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca).

Glen climbed Mt Kinabalu while in Borneo last May and an article describing his experiences will be published in the ARS Journal.

Peter Wharton 1950-2008

Peter Wharton, curator of the David C. Lam Asian Garden at UBC, died on June 30th. He had contracted melanoma, which went undiagnosed until this spring, when it had already spread into his vital organs and at which point treatment was ineffective. A [memorial fund](#) has been created in his honour.

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Nanaimo Rhododendron Society November 13, 2008 General Meeting

1. Meeting called to order at 7:35 PM
 2. Number of people present: about 35.
 3. In the absence of Paul Lawry, vice president John Deniseger welcomed guests and all present. Special welcome to associates Madeleine and Ken Webb who have come all the way from Victoria and donated plants for our raffle. It was also good to see associates Terry & Verna Richmond over from Port Alberni.
 4. **Secretary's Report:** M/S/C to adopt the minutes of the last meeting as printed in the newsletter.
 5. **Correspondence:** from Vancouver Island University Foundation: an invitation to attend the 14th Annual Festival of Trees which will be held from Friday, November 21st to Saturday, November 29th.
 6. **Treasurer's Report:** Bank balance \$2939.11 as of November 1st. Full details of report available for those who wish to see it – see Chris Southwick.
 7. **Committee Reports:**
 - **Program:** January and February are not confirmed yet. December program is our “Annual Christmas Auction and Potluck” on Thursday, December 11th – please note that it will start at 6:30 rather than 7:30. Members are asked to bring donations to be auctioned off, anything from plants to gifts baskets to a bottle of wine to a bird house, or.... 10% of the proceeds will go to a local food bank. If you want to donate a plant from your garden and need help digging it out, let a member of the executive know and someone will come to help. Al McRae has kindly volunteered to pick up items donated by local businesses. Please let Paul or Al know if you can help. A reminder to bring some sweet or savoury finger food to share (coffee, tea and juice will be provided), your own cutlery and plate and a non-perishable item for the food bank.
 - **Membership:** Please renew your membership – it is due at the end of this month. Please note that the mix up with the ARS regarding members lists has been addressed; arrangements have been made so that people who did not receive the ARS Journal this past year will now receive it as well as any back issues.
 - **Social:** A few empty spots for bringing goodies in the new year; Sandra circulated the book for people to volunteer. Karin Schulz has not been well and a card has been sent on behalf of the club.
 - **Dollar Table:** One plant left! ☺ A reminder to bring plants for the dollar table –all proceeds go to purchasing books for the library.
 - **Raffle/Door Prize:** Thank you to the Webbs for donating a lovely selection of rhodos as raffle prizes.
 - **Library:** Ann Beamish sends her regrets – she's battling a bad cold. Please check the library for a wonderful selection of gardening books and related topics.
 8. **New business:**
 - Possible NRS/SPCA garden tour in the spring which would be a fundraiser for the SPCA and a profile raiser for the Nanaimo Rhododendron Society – hopefully in early May. More info to come....
 - Photos from May 17th north Island garden tour brought in by Al McRae – all are doubles so people can help themselves, extras to go into scrap book.
 9. **Raffle/Door prizes winners:**
 - Door prize: Burkhard Dressler
 - Name tag draw: Al McRae
 - Raffle draw: Dorothy Kieser, Reinhold Gorgosilich, Lillian Peters, Mary Hardy, Debbie Gaboury, Sandra Dorman, Baerbel Dressler
 10. **Program for tonight:** A breathtaking slide presentation on trekking through the rhododendron forests of Nepal with Tom Carter.
- Meeting adjourned at 9:30 PM

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Vancouver Island Hybridizers – Dracula and Rhododendrons

By Alan Campbell, Cowichan Chapter

Mythology and symbolism play a rich and wonderful part within the history of China and the rhododendrons has a place within these fables. The rhododendron and the cuckoo share the same Chinese pictogram, derived from the name of an ancient King of Sichuan who was brutally ousted from his throne and palace by his brother. Legend has it that when the heart-broken king died, he was transformed into a cuckoo and his tears of sorrow fell to the ground and became bright red rhododendrons.

Historical legends inspired by rhododendrons are not isolated to China. Stories from ages past tell us of the Greek commander Xenophon leading his army onto Asia Minor in the 5th century BC where they collected local honey produced from the yellow-flowered *Rhododendron luteum*. This natural sweet delight caused the invading host to have “lost their senses.” Luckily for the Greeks, no defenders found them while their honey-induced affliction had them out of sorts.

Not so lucky was Pompey’s Roman army 300 years later. Perhaps these Roman legions missed that day of history class, but they unwittingly followed the Greeks’ footsteps onto the same shores of the Black Sea and into the same *luteum* honey-induced stupor, during which the Colchian “homeland security” forces found them. The outcome was, needless to say, unpleasant. *The Two Thousand Year Curse of the Rhododendron* by **David Leach**, which recounts this story as well as others, was published in the American Rhododendron Society’s book *Rhododendron Information* (1967).

The Cowichan Valley holds claim to a number of “urban legends”, one of which I can now pronounce as documented fact. In 1900, a retired British army medical doctor and his wife, **Richard** and **Susan Stoker**, moved to Duncan and into a house near Quamichan Lake and shortly after built a summer house on Marble Bay at Cowichan Lake. Dr. Stoker was not the only learned member of his family. A brother by the name of **Bram** was a well-

known author. He wrote, among other books, the classic horror tale *Dracula*. Now you’re asking, “How does Dracula connect with rhododendrons?” Let’s continue.

Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society member **Leslie Drew** and her husband **Frank** wrote an exceptional article titled “Furs, Gold, and Rhododendrons,” which was included in the Victoria Rhododendron Society’s publication *Rhododendrons on a Western Shore* (1989). Their article clearly illustrates the early Vancouver Island rhododendron enthusiasts and the interaction between them. I have borrowed some names and dates from it .

George and **Suzanne Buchanan Simpson** settled at Cowichan Lake in 1914 and quickly befriended Dr. and Mrs. Stoker, as people with shared interests naturally will. The Stokers’ and the Buchanan Simpsons’ shared interest in gardening and plants in general swiftly resulted in flourishing gardens and a burgeoning nursery business, nourished with material discovered by plant hunters worldwide. Throughout the 1920s and the early half of the 1930s, their interest turned toward alpine plants and rhododendron species. Eventually, due to personal family matters, the Buchanan Simpsons made the decision to sell their Marble Bay Alpine Plant Nursery business to a Royston couple in 1935.

Ted and **Mary Greig**, originally from Duncan, shared an intense interest in alpine plants, which prompted their decision to purchase the Buchanan Simpsons’ nursery stock and begin their own horticultural endeavors at their new home in Royston. The alpine plants resented being relocated to this low-level seaside environment, but the rhododendrons flourished. Obtaining wild collected seed from the plant hunting expeditions of **Frank Kingdon Ward** and those of the partnership of **Frank Ludlow** and **George Sheriff**, the Greig nursery became well known for propagating the best forms of species *Rhododendra*.

It is not a rare occurrence to be wandering about an established rhododendron garden and find plant labels reading *R. auriculatum* (Greig form) or *R. strigillosum* (Greig form). Somewhat less common is to come across named forms of Greig-propagated species, two of which are ‘Royston

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Blue', a form of *R. augustinii*. and 'Chancellor's Choice', a form of *R. pseudochrysanthum*, so named by **Herman Vaartnou** in honour of **Dr. Ian McTaggart-Cowan**, Chancellor of the University of Victoria from 1979 to 1984.

The Greigs' expertise at propagating species *Rhododendra*, along with the ability to evaluate the best forms, eventually made Royston Nursery a name of distinction throughout the rhodo world. It is thought that at one point the Royston Nursery supplied 10% of the rhododendrons available in North America. For this accomplishment Ted and Mary were sought out as charter members of the newly forming **American Rhododendron Society**. Some 20 years later, they would be recognized by the ARS by becoming joint recipients of the Gold Medal, the highest award that can be bestowed by the society.

During the mid-1960s, a group of ARS members formed a non-profit organization which would become known as the Rhododendron Species Foundation. The purpose of this organization would be to establish a comprehensive collection of authentic forms of rhododendron species that were becoming threatened by the destruction of their natural habitat. A member of the group, **Dr. Milton Walker**, visited the great public and private gardens of Britain requesting propagation material. But there was a snag. American import regulations prohibited the importation of plant material from Europe. Canada did not have the same restrictions, nor was there a restriction on plant material entering the United States from Canada. Dr. Walker contacted the Greigs in Royston to inquire whether the cuttings could be imported and propagated in British Columbia. Mary made further inquiries, and arrangements were made with the University of British Columbia.

Over the next several years, cutting material from the major gardens of Britain arrived at UBC and to the propagating skills of **Evelyn Jack** (now **Weesjes**), who took on much of the correspondence with the British sources. The birth of the Foundation was secured, made possible by the efforts of Ted and Mary Greig of Royston.

Rooting Cuttings in the Winter Months

by Don Hyatt

Winter's ice and snow can often lead to broken branches on your rhododendrons and azaleas. Don't despair, those branches can usually be rooted with relative ease during the winter months, even if they are severely desiccated after lying on the ground for many weeks. Since the branch was a total loss anyway, why not try rooting those cuttings? You don't have much to lose.

To check the viability of cutting material, I make a fresh cut at the base of the stem, put the end in water, and cover the top with a clear plastic bag to increase humidity. If the leaves plump up in a day or two, the cuttings will usually root too. You'll be amazed at how dead and dried up twigs revive!

I make short cuttings, less than two inches long. I wound each side of the stem to expose the cambium and also remove any flower buds. I dip the end of the cutting in a rooting hormone such as *Rootone* or *Dip 'N Grow* and insert the bottom inch into a container filled with my rooting medium, equal parts peat, sand, and perlite. The medium should be moist but not wet since excess moisture is the leading cause of cutting failure due to rotting. If possible, I briefly move containers outside and spray with an insecticide / fungicide mixture, and allow leaves to dry before bringing them back in the house. This reduces potential insect and disease problems. Finally, I enclose containers in clear plastic bags to create a mini-greenhouse and place the containers under fluorescent lights with my seedlings.

Cuttings usually break dormancy and begin to grow in a month or two, and by that time they are usually starting to form new roots as well. I do check the containers regularly to remove any leaves that turn brown or cuttings that might rot, but these mini-greenhouses should require no water or other care until ready to transplant in the spring. Another plus, cuttings rooted during the winter months are often large enough by the next fall to make it through their first winter without cold frame protection.