

The Rhodomentum

Nanaimo Rhododendron Society Newsletter January 2019



Happy New Year!

It's that time of year when we look back at the year that's been and look ahead to the year to come. Looking back at 2018, it's been a good year for our club: interesting speakers, successful plant sale, great bus tour, the opening of the Greig Rhododendron Species Garden, the successful October "Fall into Gardening" event, and more. Looking ahead to 2019, there's lots to look forward to including the ARS Western Regional Fall Conference, just up the road in Parksville.

Now we have to get back to plant catalogues and garden planning as we decide what to move or redesign in the garden. It's a great thing to do while sitting around the fire on a blustery winter day.

June and John

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Next meeting: Thursday, January 10th, at 7:30, Beban Park Social Center

Pruning Simplified: pruning for growth, flowers and health

Presenter: Scott Wiskerke

January program: Scott Wiskerke



Scott moved to Vancouver Island in the fall of 1990 and studied horticulture at VIU. After graduating, he leased Westwood Orchard in Nanaimo for 1 year and continued leasing other local orchards for the next 8 years as well as starting his own orchard in Cassidy. He also began residential pruning. In 2004, with no more orchard responsibilities, Scott began “Roots and Shoots”, focusing on residential pruning. He has considerable experience pruning all types of ornamental trees, shrubs, fruiting trees, vines, berries, and conifers. When pruning, his focus is on promoting flowering and fruiting, while establishing a healthy form within the overall landscape. After the presentation at our meeting, Scott will also conduct a **Pruning Demonstration at Kiesers’ on Saturday February 9 at 10AM**: Turn off Metral to Doumont Road. Follow Doumont Road past the Black Bear Pub for 300 m, & turn right onto Pearce Road. Follow the potholes on Pearce Road for 300 m. Take the driveway on the left, through the gate, past the barn and you will have arrived at Dorothee’s: 6299 Pearce Road.

Useful Links

Victoria Rhododendron Society: victoriarhodo.ca/index.html

Cowichan Rhododendron Society: cowichanrhodos.ca/

Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society: marsrhodos.ca/

North Island Rhododendron Society: nirsrhodos.ca/ws/

The American Rhododendron Society: rhododendron.org/

Linda Gilkeson’s website: lindagilkeson.ca/

Nanoose Bay Garden Club: nanoosegardenclub.ca/

Need a ride to one of our meetings?



Call Chris at 250-390-3415 or 250-616-2742 (cell)

or send her an email at csouthwick@shaw.ca

Twigs and Stems

Calendar of Upcoming Events:

Goodies for January meeting - thank you to the following people:

Linda Moore, Joyce and Craig Clarke, Don Noakes.

Seedy Saturdays:

February 2nd QB Civic Center, 10:00 to 15:30, "Seeding the Future"

February 16th, Victoria Conference Center, 10:00 to 16:30

February 23rd, Tofino Botanical Gardens

March 2nd, Comox Valley at the Florence Filberg Center, 10:00 to 15:00

March 23rd, Campbell River Community Center, 10:00 to 14:00

Milner Gardens and Woodland: closed in January, spring Sunday openings begin February 3rd

Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society: QB Civic Center, 7:30 pm, January 9th, MARS photo night

Nanaimo Horticultural Society: no meeting in January

Nanoose Garden Club: Nanoose Library Center and Event Hall, 1:15 pm, January 4th, "Roundtable and discussion"

North Island Rhododendron Society: United Church in Comox, 7:30 pm, January 15th

Qualicum Beach Garden Club: QB Civic Center, 7:30 pm, January 8th, Laurene Ebbet "Gardens in the Lake District, Wales and Ireland"



We were sorry to hear about Barbara Little's passing on November 6th.

Both Barbara, and her husband Ted who passed away in 2009, were NRS members for many years. Our most sincere sympathies to the family.

We Still need help!

Our meeting Coffee Breaks just wouldn't be the same without someone coordinating it. ... Please consider stepping in to help with this and our two annual potlucks – it might just be the perfect volunteering opportunity to share with a friend – maybe do alternate months? Talk to Susan at our next meeting to find out more – she would be happy to help get you started. And of course, the position of president is still vacant – another opportunity that could be shared with a friend!



December Meeting: Christmas Potluck & Auction

The meeting was well attended, little did we know that it was the calm before a storm the next day. Thanks to all who helped out and donated items for the auction.



Raffle plants for January meeting

Satsuki azalea (synonym - Laciniatum)

Satsuki azalea is a cultivar group of the species *Rhododendron indicum*, a type of azalea extensively cultivated by the Japanese. It is native to the mountains of Japan. Satsuki is a Japanese term, which means "fifth month", or late spring—the time that most Satsuki go into bloom. In addition to being a delight for the eyes, the plant adapts well to container cultivation, trunks up substantially in a relatively short period of time, adapts well to substantial root pruning and easily develops new buds with exceptional vigor on old wood.



Rhododendron calophytum x repens

Unregistered and unnamed cross. Bushy, good looking dwarf plant, wider than tall, very hardy, slow growing. Beautiful pink to reddish bell-shaped flowers and great foliage.

The Rhododendron Species Foundation Spring 2019 Sale

By Craig Clarke

The spring 2019 catalogue is available on the RSF website:

<https://rhodygarden.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2019-Spring-Catalog.pdf>

However, a major change from the past is that the plants will not be delivered to Canada this time; Canadian orders must be picked up in Federal Way on April 27th.

<https://rhodygarden.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2019-Spring-Order-Form-INT.pdf>

First day of allocation is January 16, the week after our January regular meeting.

The pickup date coincides with the 2019 Rhododendron Species Symposium in Federal Way Washington. Details of the symposium program were not available at press time.

If members are interested to place an order, reply to the club email (rhododmentum@nanaimorhodos.ca) and we can ask at the meeting if somebody can pick up the plants at the RSF.



Hybrids by the late Harry Wright

Editor's Note: Building on our theme of *"Gardening in a changing climate"*, which was a common thread at our September roundtable discussion, this is the second in a series of related articles. Gerry Moore started us off in October with a great article on growing rhododendrons in a sunnier, more exposed setting. This month, we're going to focus on mulching.

Linda Chalker-Scott was one of our presenters at last October's "Fall into Gardening" event co-hosted by the NRS and MARS. Here is her take on wood chip mulch, reprinted with her permission – photos were taken at Milner Gardens.

Check out Linda's website which is full of useful information: <https://puyallup.wsu.edu/lcs/>

Wood chip mulch: Landscape boon or bane?

Linda Chalker-Scott, Ph.D. MasterGardener WSU editor
Extension Urban Horticulturist and Associate Professor,
Puyallup Research and Extension Center, Washington
State University Puyallup, Washington

Landscape mulches are increasingly recognized as pivotal components of environmentally sustainable gardens and green spaces. Select the right mulch and you reap the benefits of healthier soils and plants. Choose the wrong mulch and the only plants that thrive are the weeds. Before selecting a landscape mulch material, it's important to reflect on the purpose of the landscape in question. For instance, production agriculture generally requires short term, intensive management of a crop, while the philosophy behind landscape horticulture is the long term, sustainable management of a system. Therefore, those mulches that work best for crop production (including vegetable gardens) are often not the best choices for woody ornamental landscapes, and vice versa.

Direct benefits

The potential, direct benefits of any landscape mulch material can be grouped into four general categories:

Soil benefits

- improve structure
- enhance gas transfer
- enhance water infiltration and retention
- prevent erosion and compaction
- moderate temperature

Plant benefits

- provide nutrients

System benefits

- suppress pathogens and pests
- enhance beneficial organisms
- increase biodiversity
- neutralize pollutants

Human benefits

- economic
- aesthetic

- ease of application

An exhaustive review of the science behind landscape mulches is beyond the scope of this column (though I have just completed such a review for upcoming publication in a scientific journal). Instead, I'm going to address the documented benefits and drawbacks behind the use of arborist wood chips as a landscape mulch.



Perfect choice

In areas where trees are a dominant feature of the landscape, arborist wood chips represent one of the best mulch choices for trees and shrubs. A 1990 study evaluated the landscape mulch potential of 15 organic materials, including grass clippings, leaves, composts, yard wastes, bark, and wood chips. Wood chips were one of the best performers in terms of moisture retention, temperature moderation, weed control, and sustainability. In many urban areas, arborist wood chips are available for free, representing one of the most economically practical choices. Unlike the uniform nature of sawdust and bark mulches, wood chips include bark, wood, and often leaves. The chemical and physical diversity of these materials resists the tendency towards compaction seen in sawdust and bark. Additionally, the materials vary in their size and decomposition rate, creating a more diverse environment

that is subsequently colonized by a diverse soil biota. A biologically diverse soil biota is more resistant to environmental disturbance and will in turn support a diverse and healthy plant population. Wood chips are considered to be slow decomposers, as their tissues are rich in lignin, suberin, tannins, and other decomposition-resistant, natural compounds. Thus, wood chips supply nutrients slowly to the system; at the same time, they absorb significant amounts of water that is slowly released to the soil. It is not surprising that wood chips have been cited as superior mulches for enhanced plant productivity. Wood chips have been especially effective in helping establish trees and native plants in urban and disturbed environments. Arborist wood chips provide incredible weed control in ornamental landscapes. The mechanism(s) by which wood chips prevent weed growth are not fully understood, but probably include light reduction (preventing germination of some seeds and reducing photosynthetic ability of buried leaves), allelopathy (inhibiting seed germination), and reduced nitrogen levels at the soil-mulch interface (reducing seedling survival). While there are imported wood mulches available for purchase at nurseries and home improvement centers, they are not as cost-effective as locally produced wood chips, which are often free. In a society where using locally produced materials is increasingly popular as a measure of sustainability, arborist wood chips are a natural choice. Finally, the re-use of plant materials as mulches keeps them out of the landfill — a benefit with both economic and environmental attributes.



Drawbacks of wood chips — “mulch ado about nothing”: There are a number of concerns surrounding the use of arborist wood chips as a landscape mulch. I have constructed a quick summary here. Relevant references

can be found on the Web site listed in “More Information.” Overall, the commonly expressed concerns about woody mulches are not borne out in research trials.

Concern: Woody mulches will acidify soils.

Evidence: None. In field situations it is difficult to significantly alter soil pH without addition of chemicals. Transient changes in pH may be found in the decomposing mulch layer itself, but these have little effect on underlying soils.

Concern: Woody mulches, such as cedar, leach allelopathic chemicals that kill other plants.

Evidence: Many plant materials contain allelopathic chemicals, which can prevent seeds from germinating or kill young seedlings. Most compounds have no effect upon established plants. Only a few woody materials have been found to contain allelopathic chemicals (e.g. *Juglans nigra*, black walnut). Cedars (*Thuja* spp.) have not been found to have this ability.

Concern: Mulches made from chipping diseased trees can infect healthy trees.

Evidence: Most studies indicate that diseased mulch cannot transmit pathogens to the roots of healthy trees. Under no circumstances should wood mulch be used as backfill. Not only is this a poor installation practice, but a potential mechanism for disease transfer as well. Fungal communities found in wood chip mulches are generally decomposers, not pathogens. Under healthy soil conditions, beneficial and harmless fungi can out-compete pathogens for space on plant roots. Furthermore, healthy plants are not susceptible to opportunistic pathogens such as *Armillaria* and *Phytophthora*, which are often ubiquitous but inactive in well-managed soils.

Concern: Wood chips could be a fire hazard, particularly when they are used on landscapes around structures.

Evidence: Coarse textured organic mulches, like wood chips, are the least flammable of the organic mulches. Fine textured mulches are more likely to combust, and rubber mulch is the most hazardous of all tested landscape mulches

Concern: Wood chip mulches will tie up nitrogen and cause deficiencies in plants.

Evidence: Actually, many studies have demonstrated that woody mulch materials increase

nutrient levels in soils and/or associated plant foliage. My hypothesis is that a zone of nitrogen deficiency exists at the mulch/soil interface, inhibiting weed seed germination while having no influence upon established plant roots below the soil surface. For this reason, it is inadvisable to use high C:N (Carbon/Nitrogen) mulches in annual beds or vegetable gardens where the plants of interest do not have deep, extensive root systems.

Concern: Woody mulches will attract termites, carpenter ants, and other pests.

Evidence: Many wood-based mulches are not attractive to pest insects but are actually insect repellent. For instance, cedar (Thuja) species produce thujone, which repels clothes moths, cockroaches, termites, carpet beetles, Argentine ants, and odorous house ants. In general, termites prefer higher nutrient woody materials, such as cardboard, rather than wood chips.

Application

Let wood chips age before using them if there are concerns about disease. Personally, I have never done this; I happen to love the smell of fresh wood chips and enjoy spreading them out over the landscape. Additionally, some of the nutrient value (particularly nitrogen if the chips contain leaves or needles) will be lost in the composting process. Using fresh chips ensures that some of the foliar nitrogen will feed the landscape rather than the compost pile. **Before installing wood chips, create a thin underlying layer of a more nutrient rich mulch (like compost) if there are concerns about nutrient deficiencies.** This "mulch sandwich" approach is a logical one that mimics what you would see in the mulch layer of a forest ecosystem. It's not required, though, and over time a wood chip mulch will develop this same structure as the lower layers break down. **Begin mulch application before annual weeds are established.** Mulch is most effective in suppressing weeds when weeds are not yet present on site. Therefore, bare soil should be mulched as soon as practical, especially in the spring and fall when weed seed germination is at its peak. If this is not

possible, the most effective, non-chemical way to remove weeds prior to mulching is to mow them as close to the ground as possible, followed immediately by mulching. **Prune or mow perennial weeds at the root crown in early spring when root resources are lowest (generally just as leaf growth begins).** Extensive pulling of perennial weeds from unprotected soil is not recommended, as this disturbance will increase erosion, especially in sandy soils or in sloped areas. It is better to keep unprotected soil undisturbed. However, you can pull resprouting perennial weeds covered in mulch; the mulch layer prevents erosion and facilitates pulling. **Remove all noxious weed materials from site to prevent rerooting or seeding.** Self-explanatory! **Install chips to the desired depth.** A successful wood chip mulch must be deep enough to suppress weeds and promote healthy soils and plants: research has demonstrated that weed control is directly linked to mulch depth, as is enhanced plant performance. A review of the research on coarse organic mulches and weed control reveals that shallow mulch layers will promote weed growth and/or require additional weed control measures. I recommend 4-6 inches for ornamental sites and 8-12 inches for restoration sites and/or perennial weed problems. **Keep mulch away from trunks of trees and shrubs.** Piling mulch against the trunks of shrubs and trees creates a dark, moist, low oxygen environment to which above-ground tissues are not adapted. Fungal diseases require a moist environment to grow and reproduce; piling mulch on the trunk provides exactly the right conditions for fungi to enter the plant. Likewise, opportunistic borers are more likely to invade a plant whose bark is wet due to excessive mulching. Rather than creating mulch volcanoes, instead taper the mulch down to nearly nothing as you approach the trunk. This donut-shaped application will protect the soil environment as well as the above-ground plant tissues. **Replace mulch as needed to maintain desired depth; replacement rate will depend on decomposition rate.** Once mulch is applied, little management needs to be done other than reapplication to maintain minimum depth. High traffic areas are most likely to need replacement.

*"There are two seasonal diversions that can ease the bite of any winter. One is the January thaw. The other is the seed catalogues."
- Hal Borland*

Seen in Passing.....



- Winter Jasmine in bloom.
- A few bulbs peeking out.
- Plant catalogs full of inspiration.
- Witch Hazel ready to bloom
- Herring spawn started in the Gorge near Victoria a month early
- A fierce wind broke 2 of the trunks of the giant **R. 'Cynthia'** in Ladysmith and damaged the other one: [Click here](#) for story in The Times Colonist



R. 'Lee's Scarlet' blooming in Susan & Art Lightburn's garden

NRS Program

Date	Speaker	Topic
January 10, 2019	Scott Wiskerke	Pruning – followed by a demo on February 9 at 10AM
February 14, 2019	Sue Grant and Garth Wedemire	Gardens of Wales Tour
March 14, 2019	Ole Jonny Larsen – all the way from Norway	Growing rhododendrons in Scandinavia
April 11, 2019	Margot Moser	Native Plants
May 9, 2019	Graham Sakaki – Research and Community Engagement Coordinator for the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute (MABRRI).	Mt Arrowsmith Biosphere Reserve and Milner Phenology Project

More Information about Honey Fungus

Submitted by Liisa Rullo.

My Finnish friend has written a more comprehensive blog post on the Honey Fungus, Armillaria, titled: Everything I know about honey fungus. To read it, hit the link at the very bottom, below the Finnish text, and click on 'Read more'. I have identified it in our own woodland and in fact it seems to be everywhere there's rotting plant material. One of the articles below says Douglas fir is immune – which is probably why we don't notice the fungus much as Douglas fir is our premier native tree species, which we keep for shading rhodos. Regards, Liisa

<https://villablakulla.blogspot.com/2018/12/kaikki-mita-tiedan-mesisienesta.html#more>

Here are a couple of UK articles on the fungus and Armillatox (the antifungal that worked), which is not available here (or much of anywhere):

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2004/jan/25/gardens>

... "Armillaria is not a plague. It exists primarily to recycle nutrients in dead wood, making them more accessible to insects to digest and return to the soil. It is also impressive in its own right: the largest living thing on the planet is a single honey fungus (Armillaria lutea) in Michigan that covers nearly 40 acres, weighs more than 100 tons and is around 1,500 years old."

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/gardeningadvice/11377725/Thorny-problems-where-can-I-find-Armillatox.html>

Also, I can't find anything recent in Canadian sources, but I found an article in an old journal online - you can google and then download the pdf copy that comes up as:

JOURNAL OF ARBORICULTURE Vol. 2, No. 9, September 1976. Chemical control of infection by Honey Fungus, Armillia melica: a review. by R.G. Pawsey and M.A. Rahman.

[Click here](#) to read the abstract online.



*Looking forward to seeing you
all at the meeting! Bring your
pruning questions!*