



The Rhodomentum

Nanaimo Rhododendron Society Newsletter

January 2021



President's Message

Happy New Year!

Isn't it wonderful to greet a brand-new year, full of unimaginable possibilities? Yes, it will be a great year! Us gardeners are born with a positive mental attitude, so how could it be anything else?

And just look back on 2020 and what we all accomplished in that year, even with the pandemic in full force! We had a private tour of Milner Gardens; we had work bees at Hailey Grove and Milner Gardens; we replanted our cuttings into larger containers and we started a new bunch. We learned how to have meetings over ZOOM and arranged with District one to have monthly ZOOM presentations in lieu of in-person meetings. We even had an auction via our nanaimorhodos.ca website! And we learned how to get the information for the upcoming events on our website!

Yes, there were also sad times, as we lost three irreplaceable members: Craig Clarke, Don Noakes and Royce Tennant. But they have contributed so much to our club so they will always stay in our hearts.

Of course, nothing would have been possible without all those elves in our midst, all those eager beavers to lend a hand and make the world nicer than they found it. To those elves, my sincere thank-you, as without their help, nothing would have been possible.

Thank you and a very happy New Year!

Rosina



OUR EXECUTIVE

President	Rosina Schmidt	751-3386
Vice President	Chris Southwick	390-3415
Past President	Allen McRae	758-7589
Secretary	Deborah Francis	
Treasurer	Ron Sutton	416 951-1373
Directors	Bryan Jubinville	668-2965
	Art Lightburn	468-7516
	Susan Lightburn	468-7516
	Gayle McRae	758-7589

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Newsletter	June Bouchard / John Deniseger
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Program	by Committee
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Social	vacant
Bargain Table	Reinhold Gorgosolich
Website	Deborah Francis/Rosina Schmidt
Bus Tour	David & Joyce Mitchell
Sunshine	Ann Beamish
Propagation	Rosina Schmidt
Hailey Grove	Bryan Jubinville
Show and Sale	Jan Moles and Brenda Lewis
Nanaimo Rhododendron Society	
Box 241, #101-5170 Dunster Road	
Nanaimo, BC V9T 6M4	
Website: nanaimorhodos.ca	

Next meeting: Friday January 15th, at 7:00pm ~

Location: Zoom online

Linda Gilkeson – Year-Round Organic Gardening

Our January Speaker via Zoom – Linda Gilkeson on Year-Round Organic Gardening

Many of you will know Linda Gilkeson as one of our area's true gardening experts. Her January presentation will focus on taking advantage of our west coast climate to grow food year-round. According to Linda, "Gardeners in the mild climate of the West Coast can enjoy fresh food from their gardens all year round. To do that, you need to choose the right varieties and plant them at the right time."

Linda's talk includes tips on what to grow, planting schedules and simple ways to protect crops from extreme weather. Fitting winter crops in with summer plantings to make the most intensive use of your garden space will also be covered, along with how to avoid common pests and other problems.

Location: Live Zoom connection

Date: Friday, January 15, 2021

Time: 7:00 PM

Invitations and instructions for the ZOOM connection will be emailed.

Dr. Linda Gilkeson earned a Ph.D. in Entomology from McGill University in 1986, then moved to British Columbia, where she has worked in the production of biological controls for the provincial government to reduce and eliminate pesticide use, as head of the provincial State of Environment Reporting Unit, and as the Executive Director of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy. She now devotes her time to writing, teaching and consulting.

Linda's comprehensive gardening book, Backyard Bounty: *The Complete Guide to Year-Round Organic Gardening in the Pacific Northwest*, was a BC best seller and has just been republished in a new, considerably expanded edition. She continues to self-publish books for local gardeners, most recently "Resilient Gardens", "Pollinator Gardens", "Garlic Diseases", and "Pest Update".

As a private consultant, Linda is a regular instructor in the Master Gardener programs in BC and is busy year-round giving workshops on pest management and organic gardening.

Odds and Ends....

- **Your Propagation Team is in need of 2-gallon pots.** Please drop off at Rosina's place, 3196 Merry Men Way, Nanaimo. Many thanks!
- **What's Blooming now?** Our webmaster Rosina has added a page on the webpage showing what's currently in bloom. Please send your photos of rhodos that are blooming now to rosinatschmidt@gmail.com who will put them on the website, unless they're already there. [Click here](#) to see what's in bloom at various times of the year!

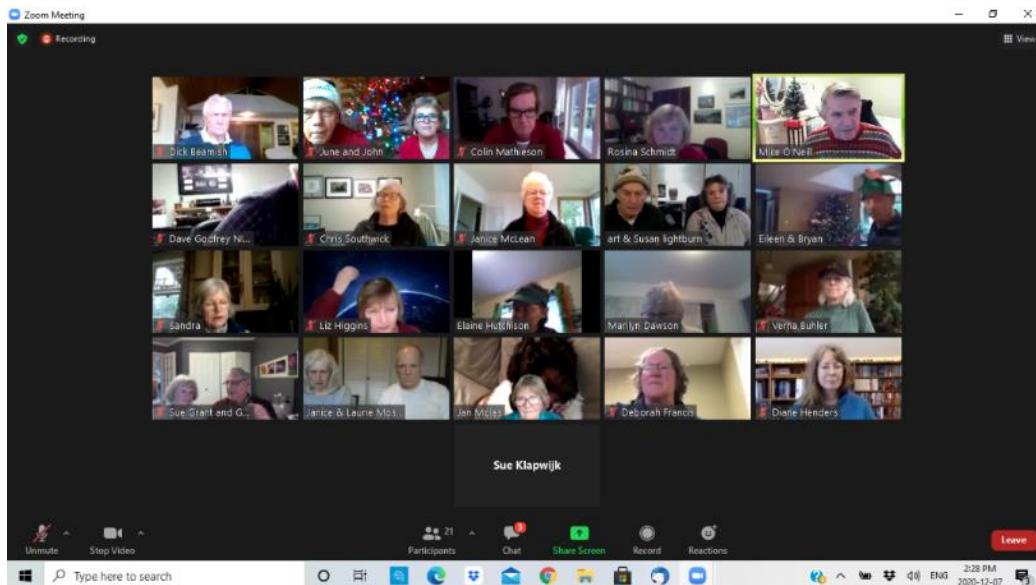


Another Successful Christmas Auction!

Thanks to some creative thinking and a lot of hard work behind the scenes, we had our Christmas auction in 2 parts: a 10-day silent on-line auction and our live auction on December 7th. Between the two events, the NRS brought in a total of \$1420.30!!!

As always, many people were instrumental in making this event such a success! Special thanks go to:

- Rosina Schmidt for being the inspiration behind the idea of an online silent auction and setting it up on the web page;
- Chris Southwick for providing the background on all the plants to be auctioned off;
- Susan Lightburn for contributing the photos;
- Liz and Allan Murray for so generously selling us plants at extremely low prices which Chris and Rosina picked up in Cobble Hill;
- Mike O'Neill for being our Zoom tutor/host and Zoom Santa;
- Jan Moles for handling the on-line bids which she forwarded to Rosina who posted them online;
- Ron Sutton for setting up the payment options and collecting the money;
- Deborah Francis for storing the donated items;
- All the people who donated items to be auctioned off: Joyce Clarke, Ann and Dick Beamish, Chris Southwick, Susan and Art Lightburn, Deborah Francis, Jan Moles, Elaine Hutchison, Gayle McRae, Arlene and John England from MARS, Rosina Schmidt;
- All who participated in the auction – many from other island clubs as we had participants from four of the five Vancouver Island chapters! Well done everyone!



What's Coming Up?



Despite Covid19, we are planning things to do, places to go, events, and work bees... As part of the new normal, all of the usual protocols apply e.g. social distancing, hand sanitizers, masks etc. There will also be more on-line events coming this winter – stay tuned!

Work Bees

- Greig Rhododendron Species Garden at Milner –work bees on hold until further notice – hope to have a mulching bee in January.
- Hailey Grove at Bowen Park – work bees on hold until further notice – hope to have one in January.



Open Gardens



It's still a little early but we live on the west coast. Spring is just around the corner.... this is just the beginning!

- February open garden at Allen and Gayle McRae's: an opportunity to see the early blooming rhododendrons and a plant sale – date yet to be determined.
- March open garden at Art and Susan Lightburn's – as we slip into spring: will include a plant sale – date to be announced.
- Milner Gardens and Woodland – plans to open the garden in early

February. Check their website for current details: <https://www2.viu.ca/milnergardens/>

Zoom based speakers and seminars

Wednesday, **January 13th** at 7:00 pm: Kathy Lintault on Camellias

Friday, **January 15th** at 7 pm: Linda Gilkeson – Year-Round Organic Gardening

Thursday, **January 21st** at 7:00 pm: Peter Adams on Vireyas.

Saturday, **February 6th** at 10 am: Ken Nentwig – Water Efficient Landscape

Saturday, **March 20th** at 7pm: Brian Minter – What's New in Edible Gardening

Steve Hootman's November 18th presentation on North Vietnam is still available on-line at

<https://youtu.be/p3vPPQmA1cM>



Plans are underway to have more Zoom presentations from throughout the ARS shared amongst chapters. While it can't replace in person meetings, it has the potential to allow us to access an amazing range of speakers and topics, while strengthening the ARS community.

Stay connected - check our web-page - new things added regularly! <http://nanaimorhodos.ca/>

Seen in Passing....

- A few blooms beginning to pop up;
- A few rose flowers and buds;
- Early Helleborus niger “Jacob” flowers beginning to appear;
- Christmas lights being taken down;
- Seed catalogues being studied and orders being placed...





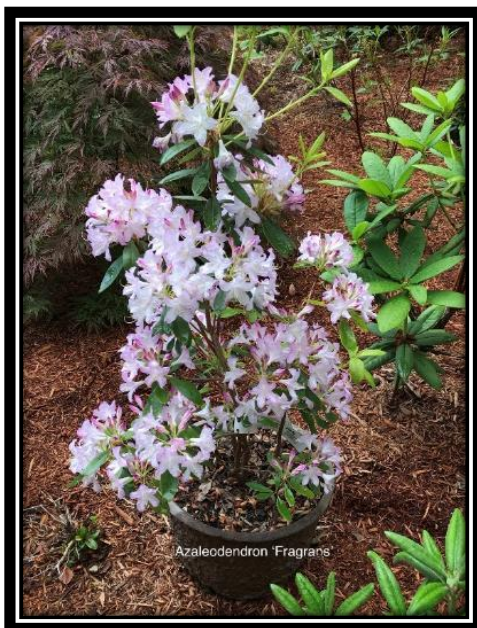
Something to look forward to...

by Chris Southwick

I've attached a photo I took last year of Granny's hybrid "Harry Carter". The cross is *R. strigillosum* x *R. sutchuenense*. Two great species making an early and lovely hybrid. The photo was taken at my place on April 5th, 2020. Something to look forward to!

Plant of the month by Ron Sutton

Azaleodendron 'Fragrans'



For the plant of the month, I chose a unique hybrid called an Azaleodendron. As the name suggests, it is a cross between an elepidote rhododendron and a deciduous azalea. The plant you see in the photo is called Azaleodendron 'Fragrans'. It is a cross of *R. catawbiense* and *R. viscosum* and hardy to 0°F / -18C. It produces light purple fragrant flowers in early June and grows to approximately 6 feet in height. It can take full sun. Due to the deciduous parentage of *R. viscosum*, this plant will shed some of its leaves in the fall. Azaleodendrons are somewhat difficult to find, as so few were created. There are only approximately 12 azaleodendron hybrids.

Photo taken June 13

The Giant Himalayan Lily

By Chris Southwick



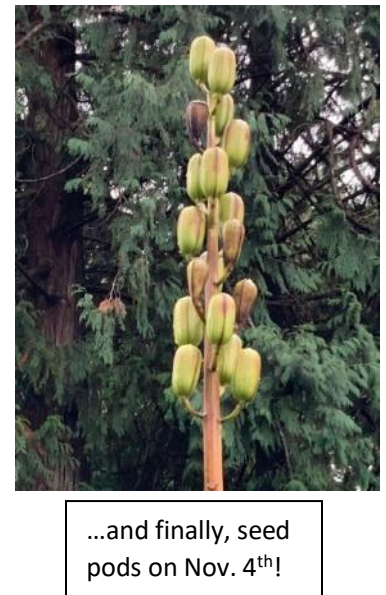
There are many plants that grow happily along with rhododendrons.

A few years ago, I had the pleasure of visiting Velda Rhodes and Dan Schwartz's fabulous garden in Port Alberni. They have all sorts of horticultural treasures in their large property including a huge bed of *meconopsis*, *primula beesiana*, and *cardiocrinum*. They told me that on my own property, I should be able to grow the *cardiocrinum* as my property is fairly shady and has some areas that stay fairly damp even in the summer. I purchased a *cardiocrinum* from them and after approximately five years, this plan decided to bloom. *Cardiocrinum giganteum*, the giant Himalayan lily, is the largest species of any of the lily plants, growing up to 3.5 metres high. It is found in the [Himalayas](#), [China](#) and [Myanmar](#).

I hope you enjoy the photos, and if you're keen to try, I have plenty of seeds!

Happy New Year!

Chris



*"Of winter's lifeless world each tree
Now seems a perfect part;
Yet each one holds summer's secret
Deep down within its heart."
- Charles G. Stater*

New Year's Resolutions for gardeners - (The following was inspired by an article at <https://www.hortmag.com/gardeners/12-new-years-resolutions-gardeners>)

Here are some New Year's resolutions for gardeners to get you thinking. You may wish to borrow some of these or maybe, they'll inspire you to create your own. Use your imagination, get creative!

1. Clean out the shed and go through old materials – we've all got one of those spots where stuff just accumulates. It's time!
2. Plant something new! Try something different. Shake up that flower bed!



3. Add a new native species to your garden: do a little research, plant something that will attract pollinators while thriving in our climate (*but as always, do make sure it's not invasive*).
4. Plant something with a child – share your love of gardening with a younger person. You might just be the catalyst to creating a lifetime passion. (*We really like this one!*)

5. Do some garden volunteering - we have lots of opportunities through our club and beyond. Volunteers are the driving force behind many beautiful gardens. It can be incredibly rewarding!
6. Learn something and teach something – there's always something to learn and knowledge to share.



7. Plant a food that you haven't tried before. There are so many varieties of vegetables, fruit and herbs to experiment with. Try something different.... black tomatoes, purple carrots, Thai basil.... Or... ?
8. Go on a gardening excursion! It's a great way to get new ideas, get re-inspired, learn about new varieties of plants.... As we move forward in 2021, we'll get back to this.
9. Treat yourself to a good gardening book! Great for those rainy (or snowy?...) days....
10. Start plants from seed – you could even get into seed saving. Dare we say rhodos?
11. Invite people over to spend time in your garden; after all, gardens are to be shared!
12. Document your garden: start a journal, take photos, slow down and enjoy your own little oasis!



The Hill That Changed by Ken Gibson (Adapted from the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society; vol. 41; no.1 Winter 1987 – thank you Rosina for suggesting it.)

Editors note: Ken Gibson is a long time MARS and ARS member in Tofino, who with his late wife Dot, created a spectacular, iconic rhododendron garden which became a local landmark. New members may recognize the hill in Tofino, described in this article. Long time members will likely know the garden as we've visited it in past bus tours. It's a rather unique story, to say the least!

At the 1985 Western Regional Conference at Seaside, Oregon, I believe it was Warren Berg who explained the difference between a *gardener* and a *collector*. To borrow his expression, "a *gardener* looks at his garden, determines what plant would look right, goes out and buys it. A *collector* buys a plant, finds a spot, and plants it." By this rule, I am, unquestionably, a collector. My good fortune, however, is that my property is large enough to support my habit. (It has been known for people my age to develop worse habits.)

In 1956, my wife and I purchased an acre of land situated, at that time, on the inland edge of the developed part of the village of Tofino. (Tofino is a snug little fishing village on the west coast of Vancouver Island.) While playing cowboys as a young boy, I had discovered that this particular piece of land was actually a miniature mountain with a spectacular view of the harbour. It didn't seem to matter that the hill, covered with virgin scrub forest, was at least 400' from the main drag and on the other side of a swamp. I had already decided the view would be worth the price of two hundred and fifty dollars, plus all the work needed to clear the property.

Hard as he tried, my father, who was a very practical man, was unable to convince me to develop an easier piece of Tofino. Since the French language had driven me out of high school four years earlier, I had, instead, a few years' experience in construction, logging and blasting behind me. By late 1956, I had acquired a used 440 McCullough chain saw from the logging contractor for whom I worked and, in the short days of winter, took up the challenge of capturing the hill. This early one-man saw weighed about 85 lbs., and was one of the first in private use in this area.

After establishing boundary lines, it was necessary to start draining the four feet of entrapped water on what is now known as Fourth Street. I planted a row of ditching dynamite sticks 14" apart the length of the swamp. How the mud and grass sods flew - 150' into the air, making the surrounding trees look like a chocolate-covered wonderland. It took several rains, I might add, to wash it off.



The following year, a D-7 mud cat bulldozed a right-of-way to the base of the hill, I had already fallen the trees and bucked the old cedar windfalls to help expedite the "cat's" job. Fortunately, the swamp had hard-pan below the mud which allowed the machine a solid footing on which to work. The mud flowed like soup in front of the blade, refusing to be piled up, so another year had to pass before work could continue on the access road.

In the meantime, I cleared the hill top of underbrush and trees, and burned the burnable. One hemlock was fit to remain on the knoll; all the others were cat-faced cedar and poorly-formed hemlock, most of which were growing on windfall cedars - typical of our moss-covered, over-mature west coast rain forest. Many of the trees were two feet in diameter, others four feet, and were locked into rock crevices. Because of this, blasting the stumps was very difficult, and since the bulldozer with a winch could not tolerate the steepness of the hill, I decided to clear the hill by "high-lead" logging.

In exchange for back wages due me from a defunct sawmill, I acquired a donkey (two drum winch) mounted on a 24' wooden sled. I winched it through the draining swamp to the foot of the hill with mud flowing over the sled like waves

over a ship's bow. I then hung the "bull block" sixty feet up in an old cedar snag, creating a spar tree. A one-man logging show was then ready to commence.

After work during the week and on weekends I was, then, married to land-clearing. Often, I would get to the back end to hook a stump and discover the cable choker to be a few feet short of its mark, or that a stump would not let go. The donkey had a gear driven mainline drum so something had to give. When I felt the sled lift off the ground, I would hit the switch to stop the motor. I would, then, climb back up the hill to chop out the roots. With a $\frac{7}{8}$ " mainline as tight as a fiddle string, the stump would suddenly fly free taking most of the soil in its entangled root system to leave the rock bare. What soil that was left was soon either washed away with our annual 140" rainfall, or blown off by the summer's westerly winds.



In 1960 we concentrated on building a house. First, I constructed a 200' tramway with 4" x 4" cedar for tracks, and posts beach combed from Long Beach. A 24" flange-wheeled cart was cabled to the top of the hill with a one HP electric winch. By this method, about 30 tons of building materials were hauled up the grade to a 26' x 44' dirt-free-zone at the top. It was at this time that I learned an average house has 5 tons of gyproc. (Five tons of roofing gravel was another requirement.) Each trip up the hill took about eight minutes and carried approximately 250 lbs.



After the house became livable, I concentrated on a driveway around the hill, which took about five years to complete. A road building contractor had told me to "forget it; it's not possible for a bulldozer to get up there let alone a car". Stubborn as I was (my wife says "am") I literally chipped a circular driveway out of the hillside; blasting rock and moving it by hand to establish the grade.

About this time, the first rubber-tired backhoe arrived in Tofino and I managed to get some use of it on a limited basis. One thing about the use of rock is that once it's placed, it stays placed! Having firm rock under their wheels (and a couple cases of beer) convinced some local truck drivers that this hill was a great place to dump the dirt and mud from the highway ditching projects. Mud, sods, boulders, stumps, roots, and beer and pop bottles flowed over the bank, eventually covering the blasted rock. Later, I purposely rolled the protruding larger pieces, rain washed and sun-bleached, into place at the toe of the hill. Grass, weeds and yellow broom began to grow, resulting in humidity being established, and the hill, ultimately, took a new appearance.

Any further landscaping plans were non-existent now. Besides helping raise a family, I turned to other spare time interests, including tracking down the history of the North West Coast. However, during this period of my life, I rescued a couple of rhododendrons (I now know them to be *R. ponticum*) from the late George Fraser's garden in Ucluelet which was being subdivided into building lots. I planted a piece of one *R. ponticum* near the front door on the north side of the house and it wasn't too many years before people remarked on its appealing symmetrical shape. (Or, perhaps it was because it was the only cultivated plant on the hill!)

At this time, the only thing I knew about rhododendrons was that a couple of hundred were growing on nearby Clayoquot Island. Then, pointing to my *R. ponticum* one day, a close friend and avid gardener mentioned to me "what you and this hill need are rhododendrons; just look at that one! They grow well here and they don't need attention". So inspired, in 1973 I gave my cousin a twenty-dollar bill and asked him if he would pick up some rhododendrons on a return trip from Nanaimo. He managed to get me ten small ones, three of which turned out to be 'Cunningham's

White'. I was surprised to discover these things had names. This led me to read a Sunset book, *Rhododendrons and Azaleas*, and, from then on, I concentrated on names I didn't have. (Except, of course, for favorites like 'Etta Burrows', 'Taurus', etc.) I planted these first hardy rhododendrons in the shade of the north side of the house, protecting them from the wind by driving cedar shakes into the ground around them.

A new challenge was to get rid of a desert-like appearance on the south and west slopes of the hill. This new rhodoholic had an inspiration: COVER this hill in rhododendrons! I first planted several mature *R. ponticum* and 'Fastuosum Flore Pleno' on the upper side of the driveway as a wind-break. On the steeper and more barren areas, I dumped what soil I could scrape together and/or laid sods of grass from nearby ditches like a patch-work quilt. Weeds, wild parsnip and different types of grasses, mowed regularly, at least looked green and half-way respectable. I quickly noticed that fertilizing made a tear-drop pattern of grass on the down side of each little plant, so, one summer, I watered by pumping stagnant water from our backyard creek. Believe me, septic tank effluent and dead tadpoles are great but they sure don't smell like 'Fragrantissimum' does today.

Slowly at first, and with some setbacks, the hill began to change. The humidity became regulated, companionship established, and the plants adapted to our frequent 50 MPH summer westerly winds. Though I had heard 'Unknown Warrior' couldn't be grown under windy conditions, I am proud to say that mine is flourishing very well and is quite compact. My practice is to gradually introduce my plants into our windy environment. Once established, they appear to love it. After all, rhododendrons are mountain plants.

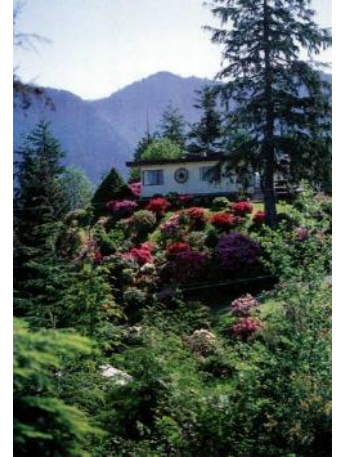


In hindsight, my biggest mistakes were in using too heavy a soil to retain moisture on the rocks, and planting too deeply. The soggiess promoted root rot which I didn't realize could exist on a 45-degree slope. I can now safely advise that rhododendrons should be placed, not planted. This rule also was verified by what I saw in garden culture in Washington and Oregon, a point we "wet" West-coasters must learn. I have lifted the majority of my plants by placing twenty to thirty gallons of sawdust and/or bark mulch under them. Good drainage cannot be over-emphasized and, if I were to start my garden again, I would use all bark mulch because of its aerating and moisture retention qualities. So far, I have found no evidence to substantiate the theory that cedar sawdust is detrimental to rhododendrons. However, I do know gardeners who would disagree with that statement. I probably have one of the lowest rates of failure per capita because I

now know better than to drown my rhododendrons, we do not have a weevil problem, and we have a very temperate climate. My collection is now in excess of twelve hundred plants; just over six hundred names. Thanks to members from as far away as California, my collection of *Maddenii*s alone number over 40.



With Tofino's average temperature of 43.5°F., I am able to grow *Maddenii*s outside all year round. *R. cubittii* and *R. supranubium* require a bit more protection. The temperature rarely drops lower than 20°F. We are often the warmest place in Canada during the winter, though I won't say how wet it is! Moist, warm clouds from Hawaii clear Cape Flattery and strike Tofino. On January 12 of this year, at 10:00 P.M., our temperature reached a near 70°F., but it was soon followed by five or six inches of heavy, warm, rain. The Pacific Ocean's Kuroshio or Japanese Current also keeps us warm. The mountain ridge through the centre of Vancouver Island protects us from the cold front pushing in from the Northwest. The ocean water temperature remains stable at 49°F. to 51°F., summer and winter. Coastal fog is a common summer weather condition. The first blooms, this past season, were on 'Nobleanum Coccineum' Christmas Day. By February, it was a show piece with thirty or forty blooms. However, on Valentine's Day, many blooms were lost to a late frost as were blooms on *R. moupinense* and *R. dauricum*.



Today, people remark about how lucky I am to have the equipment to create a flourishing rhododendron garden. I can assure you that this did not just happen. To borrow another expression, this time from Captain Robert Gray who discovered the Columbia River in May 1792 after wintering at Fort Defiance near Tofino, "determined men can do most anything". In my opinion, determination comes before education, if you are to reach your ultimate goal. We now have visits from rhododendron enthusiasts with a variety of interests, i.e., exploration, history, hybridizing, and many more. I would say that my primary interest is identifying, promoting and propagating the many forgotten varieties such as 'Robin Hood' and 'Karkov'. The *R. strigillosum* crosses of H.L. Larson are among my favorites, along with the fragrant *Maddenii*s.

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Our spring bus tour last visited "The Hill" in May 2009. Here are a few photos, including photos of Ken Gibson, showing us around their amazing garden.



Spring is just Around the Corner (photos taken on December 23rd, 2020)



Hamamelis mollis "Jelena" now in full bloom and wonderfully scented



Helleborus niger "Christmas Darling"
– in full bloom for a few weeks

WINTER...

"There is a privacy about it which no other season gives you In spring, summer and fall people sort of have an open season on each other; only in the winter, in the country, can you have longer, quiet stretches when you can savor belonging to yourself."

- Ruth Stout

