

NANAIMO RHODODENDRON SOCIETY



September 2011



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome back! Hope you've all enjoyed the summer. Let's hope the recent good weather continues well into the fall.

June and I have had a busy summer full of family visits, a hike and travelling. As always, the summer has flown by. It will be good to get back into the garden again. First, it's the food garden – harvesting, canning and preserving.

In many ways, I think the rhodos enjoyed the cooler June and July. Looking around the garden, they seem to have budded up very nicely. Remember that September can be the driest part of the year, when some of our plants need a little extra water, before the fall rains start.

This is going to be a busy year for our club, as we work towards hosting the 2012 ARS fall conference. You'll continue to receive regular updates from our conference committee chairs, Gayle and Chris.

We also, of course, have our regular calendar of events. Like any club, we rely on our executive and membership to coordinate and contribute to our activities. At each of our upcoming fall meetings, we will be looking to create a volunteer team to lead our various committees. Please consider putting your name forward – it's a great opportunity to partner up with a friend!

We'll be kicking off our year with a finger food potluck which will begin at **7 pm** rather than our usual 7:30pm. Hope to see you all at the meeting on Thursday, September 8th.

John

EXECUTIVE

President	John Deniseger	390-3605
Past President	Paul Lawry	806-2370
Vice President	Sandra Dorman	390-0136
Secretary	June Bouchard	390-3605
Treasurer	Gerry Moore	756-1427
Directors	Glenda Allard Barr	390-2822
	Chris Southwick	390-3415
	Debbie Gaboury	758-1204
	Reinhold Gorgosilich	758-6533
	Burkhard Dressler	758-1738

COMMITTEES

Advertising	vacant	
Library	Ann Beamish	758-2574
Newsletter	Kathryn Grant	245-7879
Membership	Debbie Gaboury	
Program	Glenda Allard Barr	390-2822
Raffle	Ann Davey & Val Harvey	
Social	Sandra Dorman	390-0136
Bargain Table	Reinhold Gorgosilich	758-6533

Nanaimo Rhododendron Society
Box 241, #1 – 5765 Turner Road
Nanaimo, BC V9T 6M4
Website: nanaimo.rhodos.ca
email: nanaimo@rhodos.ca

NEXT MEETING

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 8 BEBAN PARK SOCIAL CENTRE 7:00 pm

**SUSAN LIGHTBURN: PHOTOS OF NRS GARDEN TOUR 2011
JOHN DENISEGER: A LOOK BACK ON OUR LAST SEASON**

Potluck finger foods

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TWIGS and STEMS



GOODIES FOR SEPTEMBER MEETING

Please bring a finger food to share.

RSF FALL PLANT ORDER

The catalogue is available online:

<http://www.rsf.citymax.com/f/2011FALLDISTRIBUTIONFINAL.pdf>

Orders must be placed in September for delivery during the first week of October. Reinhold Gorgosilich assisted by Gerry Moore will take your orders.

Harry Wright, with the North Island Rhododendron Society is working on a new edition of Rhododendron hybrids and species being grown in Vancouver Island gardens - he would appreciate a list of what you're growing in your garden. Please contact Harry directly at: haidaau@shaw.ca

Norm Todd and Firwood Nursery

Norm Todd has been a great supporter and friend of the NRS since we started up 19 years ago. He has been a guest speaker many times, provided articles for our newsletter and the ARS journal, and through his Firwood Nursery, he has been a big part of our plant sale and our annual bus tour. Norm's plants are in many of our gardens.

Norm will be selling off his extensive rhodo collection at Firwood Nursery. There are probably close to 10,000 plants available, including rare specimens. You may wish to check it out this fall. Contact Norm directly at: natodd@shaw.ca or 250-658-5102.

In addition, the Victoria Rhododendron Society is putting together a collection of Norm's articles that he has written over the last 25 years. This collection of 73 articles will be aptly titled "The Collected Wit and Wisdom of Norman Todd". The VRS hopes to have it printed in October. Stay tuned....

John

Vireyas

Glen Jamieson is interested in starting up a Vancouver Island Vireya growers group. It is relatively hard to get Vireyas in Canada. The objective is to share resources, plants and to create a catalogue of cultivars and species being grown in our area. If you're interested in joining Glen, please contact him at: glen.ars@gmail.com.



Rhododendron gracilentum

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The History of Vireya Rhododendron Culture

The first published description of a vireya, *Rhododendron malayanum* (pictured right), appeared in 1822 based on material collected by the author, William Jack, on Mt. Bunko (now Bengkoh) in Sumatra, while working for the East India Company. In 1826 a further five species were described by Carl Blume, the director of what is now the Bogor Botanic Garden, who also proposed a new genus *Vireya*, in honour of his friend Julian Joseph Virey. The rank of genus was rejected by Blume's peers however the name continued to be used for this Section (now Subgenus) of the genus *Rhododendron*.



It was not until 1845 that the first live vireyas were introduced into cultivation in Britain by Thomas Lobb, working for the famous Veitch Nurseries. Lobb successfully brought home five species and these were supplemented shortly after by a further two species introduced by Charles Curtis, also working for Messrs. Veitch, bringing the total to seven - *Rr. javanicum*, *jasminiflorum*, *brookeanum*, *longiflorum*, *malayanum*, *multicolor* and *teysmannii*, although *R. brookeanum* and *R. teysmannii* are now considered to be subspecies of *R. javanicum*.

From this group of species, more than 500 hybrids were raised by the nursery including a number of double-flowered 'balsamaeflorum' cultivars, the latter unfortunately since lost. Of the rest, only a handful remain in cultivation today - *Rr.* 'Ne Plus Ultra', 'Clorinda', 'Triumphans', 'Princess Alexandra', 'Princess Royal', 'Pink Delight' (pictured below) and 'Souvenir de J.H. Mangles'.

The latter half of the 19th century saw vireyas at the peak of their popularity as more species were collected, notably by the Italian, Odoardo Beccari, but for many growers their place in the glasshouse became second to that of the new orchid introductions. Their fall from favour was later hastened by the influx of new hardy rhododendron species from China and the Himalayas. With the advent of World War One few people continued to grow vireyas - a heated glasshouse a luxury afforded by only botanic institutions and a few large estate owners. Ironically, despite this decline in cultivation, the number of new species being described at this time increased markedly.



The discovery of gold in New Guinea in 1929 led to the previously uncharted interior of the country being opened up by prospectors and mining companies. This in turn paved the way for enterprising botanists to follow in their footsteps and so the number of known vireya species continued to increase, albeit more slowly than before.

By the 1950s interest in vireyas was again increasing with occasional articles appearing, led by C. R. Stonor's '*Rhododendrons in New Guinea*', published in the RHS Rhododendron Year Book 1951-52, outlining some of the vireyas encountered by the author during a visit to the country. (A copy of the article is available in the [Archive](#)).

Around the same time, Professor Hermann Sleumer, working at the Rijksherbarium in Leiden, Holland, commenced a revision of *Rhododendron* for '*Flora Malesiana*', having a few years earlier published a new classification of the genus organised into subgenera and sections, including Section *Vireya*. Sleumer received large quantities of material collected by several expeditions to New Guinea and in 1961 published descriptions of 122 new species of *Vireya*.

Sleumer's revision was published in '*Flora Malesiana*' in 1966 and an extract of this work entitled '*An Account of Rhododendron in Malesia*' appeared shortly thereafter, detailing a total of 288 species of *Rhododendron* within the region, the vast majority belonging to Section *Vireya*. This account was to remain the standard reference work on *Vireya* for the next 40 years until the publication in 2006 of a further revision by Dr. George Argent of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, '*Rhododendrons of Subgenus Vireya*'. This was the first full account of *Vireya* to be produced, including not only all the Malesian species covered by Sleumer but also all the outlying mainland species, a total of 313 taxa. Dr. Argent also raised the taxonomic rank of *Vireya* from Section to Subgenus, thereby marking the importance of this group, representing as it does around a third of all species within the genus *Rhododendron*.

By the early 1970s, interest in vireyas was once again growing, particularly in Australia, New Zealand and the USA and several dedicated collectors distributed seed freely to enthusiasts as well as botanic gardens, thereby firmly establishing the plants in

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cultivation. This rapid increase in the number of available species duly led to the production of many new hybrids, often growing with great vigour and displaying many of the desirable characteristics of both parents.

Breeding programmes by both enthusiasts and specialist nurseries continue to this day and have resulted in many excellent second- and even third-generation hybrids bearing flowers of great beauty on quite compact plants, making them attractive additions to modern greenhouse and conservatory culture as well as for garden display in areas with a suitably mild climate.

The renaissance in vireya cultivation seems set to continue for the foreseeable future, fired by a growing number of enthusiasts exchanging ideas, information and plant material around the world, backed up by the large plant collections of several botanic institutions. Exploration of some of the more remote regions continues, resulting in the introduction of species not previously seen in cultivation and occasional new species still being discovered, such as *Rhododendron mendumiae* (right), first found in the Philippines in 1998.

An excellent, more detailed, account of the history of vireya culture by Dr. George Argent entitled 'The Vireya Story' can be found in 'The Rhododendron Story', edited by Cynthia Postan (Royal Horticultural Society, London, 1996, pp.86-92).



From www.vireya.net

Rhododendron Basics by Harold E. Greer

WHAT RHODODENDRONS REQUIRE

Rhododendrons are forgiving plants, but there are some things they just won't tolerate. So, it is important to understand their basic requirements.

First: Rhododendrons must have a constant supply of moisture. You may occasionally see a rhododendron that will survive without being watered, but it does so only under protest.

Second: Rhododendrons must never sit in stagnant water. Roots submerged in poorly oxygenated water will likely die, though a plant may survive through better drained surface roots. Hot, wet conditions are more dangerous than cool, wet conditions. That is why a rhododendron will survive in a wet spot in the Northwest during heavy winter rains but would not survive in a wet spot in the Southeast's heavy summer rains.

Third: Rhododendrons must be grown in an acid medium (pH 5-6) that is coarse enough for the roots to have access to needed oxygen.

Understand and provide these three conditions and you will succeed wherever you live. These requirements aren't difficult to provide once you understand rhododendrons' needs relative to your specific soil and climatic conditions.



You too can have a Rhododendron as big as your house

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Next, logically, you will ask: "How can I provide these three basic needs?"

Consider the growing medium and include in your thinking the soil and drainage that is underneath the proposed planting. You must determine whether or not your soil has good drainage. If heavy clay is present you must overcome this barrier. Dig a small hole and run some water into it; if the water does not disappear in a very few minutes, you have poor drainage. This is not a sure test, but it will give you a good indication. Now, examine the soil texture: Is it sandy, or is it composed of fine clay particles? Sometimes the topmost soil layer will drain well, but there will be hardpan underneath it that will not drain. So, watch for this condition.



Now let's talk about the actual planting medium to use. We'll come back to natural soil later. There are a multitude of mediums available and almost any one of them, given the proper amounts of water and fertilizer, will produce healthy plants.

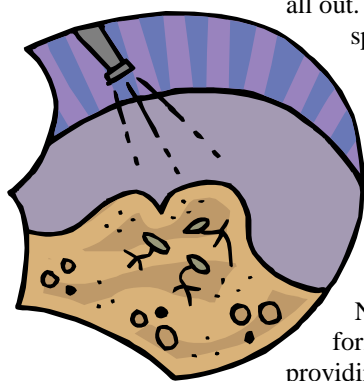
Something is needed that will provide decomposes the better. Second, water so that the plant does not dry out contain both fine and rough textured will not work well for this purpose outside of the tree, constantly exposed to natural preservative which slows their breaking down process of organic breaks down, the more nitrogen it uses.



adequate air spaces in the soil, and the slower this material something is needed that will hold a certain amount of too rapidly. Barks are generally quite good, as they usually materials. However, the much heavier, coarser bark rock although it will work as a mulch. Since they are on the the weather, nature has endowed barks with a sort of break-down and inhibits many root-rot fungi. The material requires nitrogen; consequently, the faster it

Sawdust often breaks down very fast to hold too much free water and can in hot, wet summer areas and probably rhododendron. Leaves and needles of breakdown rather fast and can be a hops, corn husks and a multitude of other things will work well as long as they are not alkaline and do not have toxic materials in them. If you do not know whether or not the material has been used with rhododendrons, try a small quantity for a time before going

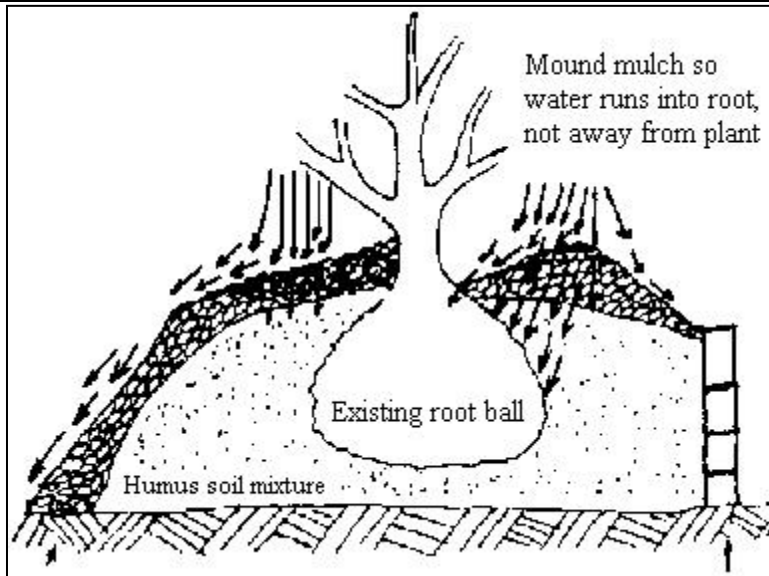
and, therefore, requires a lot of nitrogen. Some types tend cause conditions that are too wet. This is particularly true contributes to the myth that sawdust will kill a most kinds of trees are okay, although some kinds do hiding place for insects and diseases. Nut shells, spent all out. While it is unlikely that anyone has ever used them, even ground-up rubber tires would provide air space in the soil and achieve the same purpose as many organic materials.



For the finer water-holding part of the growing medium, the choice is often peat moss. In some areas good local peat moss is available, but in recent years good peat moss has been difficult to obtain and often the powder that is sold as peat moss is worse than none at all. This is particularly true if you use only this very fine peat moss to mix with clay soil. The result will be a sappy soil that has no ability to hold air. Try to obtain the coarse nursery grind.

Now mix the actual medium (soil) in which you are going to plant your rhododendron. The old formula of one-third sawdust or bark, one-third peat moss, and one third garden loam is all right, providing the humus material (sawdust, etc.) is coarse enough to supply the necessary amount of air in the soil. Up to one-third of the soil volume should be air space, so use common sense to provide a mix that will give you this result. Almost any combination will work as long as it provides the necessary air. Remember: The slower the humus breaks down the better, because the longer those particles of humus are there, the longer the soil is going to contain a lot of needed oxygen.

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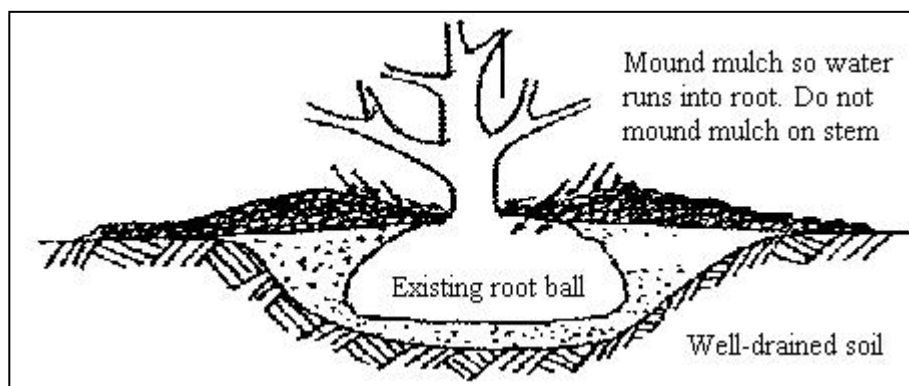


*Shows plant in simple raised bed (left side of drawing),
or raised bed with retaining wall (right side of drawing)*

And, remember that organic material which breaks down too rapidly consumes lots of oxygen, which is going to have to be replaced.

We now have the planting medium figured out, so let's deal with the native soil. We have already determined how to tell if drainage is good or bad. If it is good, you can mix the planting medium into the top six to ten inches of soil and you are ready to plant. We are also assuming that the native soil is acid; if it is not, no matter how good the drainage, you are probably going to have to make a raised bed. If drainage is poor (and this true in many locations), you will need to plant nearly on top of the native soil. The illustrations will help show proper planting procedure.

Mulching is also important. The reasons for mulching are to keep the roots cool in the summer and protect them from sudden soil temperature changes in winter, to prevent drying out and to help keep the weeds down. In their natural environment rhododendrons have a mulch provided from their own leaves and those of the trees around them. The same is true of old plants in the garden; they provide their own mulch from the leaves they drop each year, so don't be over anxious to rake out all of the fallen leaves. However, be aware that they are an excellent hiding place for pests and diseases. As to what to use as a mulch, just about any of those things which were stated earlier as good for providing air in the planting medium will also work as a mulch.

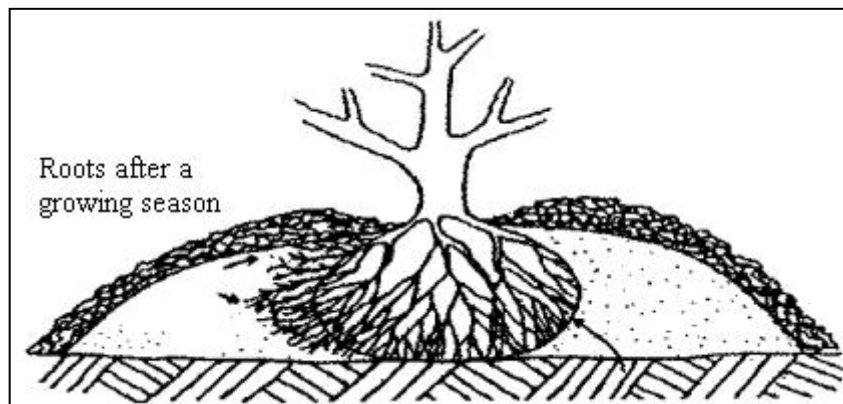


*You may plant in a hole as this drawing shows if you have well drained soil.
In poorly drained soil, if you dig a hole like this and fill it back with light soil,
you may be creating a bucket which will hold stagnant water and kill your plant.*

Be inventive, almost every area has some kind of waste product that can be used for this purpose. Note: Do not use fine peat moss alone as a mulch; it will dry out and shed water like a thatched roof. Similarly, the use of black plastic is a bad substitute for proper mulching.

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We now have the rhododendron planted in a good soil mix; it is well drained and we have mulched the plant properly. The final thing that we must do to be sure that our plant grows well is to water it sufficiently. The method of watering makes little difference and depends on your geographic location and the amount of water available. Drip irrigation is fine and uses the least water. Overhead watering is also good and can be used to advantage to cool the plants and provide lost moisture on a hot day. Don't worry about the old tale that says you can't turn on sprinklers over a plant in the sun; it won't hurt, although once in a great while, you might get a small spot of burn on a leaf due to the magnifying glass effect of a bead of water.



When a rhododendron is newly planted, the roots are only in the existing ball and have not had time to grow out into the surrounding soil. If the ball gets dry, water will not easily be reabsorbed into the ball from the moist adjoining soil. Since no roots have had time to grow into the new soil, they can be dry even though it is sitting in damp soil.

It will actually do much good providing moisture that the plant is not able to bring up fast enough through its own roots. Many commercial rhododendron growers now have watering systems that turn on and off automatically during hot weather for this very reason, enabling them to grow plants in full sun that would otherwise burn badly. However, it is true that during flowering, overhead watering may damage the flowers. Also, in wet climates (particularly hot areas), if the foliage never dries out during the day, you may have more trouble with fungus disease.

The main thing that we must make sure of is that the plant is getting wet. Quite often a plant will get completely dry and then no matter how much water you apply, the rootball will just keep shedding it. The top of the soil may seem wet, and the soil around the plant may even be very wet, but the actual root ball of the plant is bone dry. This is especially true for newly planted rhododendrons, and it is the major reason for failure, or at least less than great success with that new plant. It is hard to believe that a plant can be within mere inches of a sprinkler that has been running for hours and still be dry, yet it can be SO TRUE!

FERTILIZATION

Rhododendrons do require adequate nutrients to grow and flower at their best, and these nutrients are usually provided from some form of fertilizer. Whether you use organic or "chemical" is your choice. Applied in proper amounts, either type will produce healthy plants. A properly fed plant is hardier and will withstand more cold than one that is under-fed. Research done by Dr. Robert Ticknor of Oregon State University indicates that more nitrogen is needed than what was once thought. He now recommends a 10-6-4 (nitrogen, phosphate, potash) formula. While phosphate does promote bud set, apparently the plant can only use a certain amount. Unlike nitrogen, phosphate and potash do not disappear from the soil, but build up little by little with successive fertilizing. Therefore, the old high phosphate formulas do not provide extra help to the plant. For the best growth and flowers on young plants in areas where the soil is not frozen all winter, apply fertilizer after the plant goes dormant sometime between late November and January, a second time in February/March, a third time in April/May and a final time in June/July. For most garden situations the old rule of "once before they bloom" and "once after they bloom" is still a sensible approach. Actually the fertilizer timing has nothing to do with the time the plant flowers, it simply means once in the early spring, probably March/April and a second fertilization about June/July. This timing will vary, depending on your climate, and is not critical.