



The Rhodomentum

Nanaimo Rhododendron Society Newsletter



September 2023



President's Message

Hello All,
 Well, I hope everyone had a great summer. We wrapped up our 2022-23 season with a wonderful potluck party in Chris Southwick's fabulous garden, which was attended by about 30 members. Art and Susan Lightburn cooked a large delicious turkey, purchased by the club. There was also a plant raffle, with everyone taking home a new plant. The highlight of the event saw Jan Moles & Liz Higgins receive bronze medal awards for their much-appreciated contributions to our club. It was a fun event. Thanks, Chris, for hosting us.

As is typical of our island, we have had another hot dry summer which has kept us all busy watering our plants. Sadly, it was also a rough summer for the NRS with Rosina Schmidt hurt in a vehicle accident and the loss of Sandra Dorman to cancer. Sandra was a wonderful person, who despite her failing health, helped out at club functions. She will be greatly missed.

We are about to start our 33rd NRS season, and our meeting space is booked and paid for this coming year. The committee has some good speakers lined up for the coming months and are actively seeking more. Our annual spring plant sale has been booked for May 11, 2024.

The club executive could use some new members as several positions are expected to be available. I am willing to relinquish the president and treasurer positions, if someone would like to take one or both of them over? (See p.2 for more on available positions.)

This is the time of year we begin to collect membership dues. If you paid after April first this year, you are covered for the coming season. (See p.3 for full details)

Please try to come to our first meeting of the season, which includes our important Annual General Meeting. We need to vote and finalize the committee members. I hope to see you there!

Ron Sutton
 NRS President & Treasurer

OUR EXECUTIVE		
President	Ron Sutton	416-951-1373
Vice President	Chris Southwick	390-3415
Past President	Rosina Schmidt	758-7589
Secretary	Deborah Francis	
Treasurer	Ron Sutton	416-951-1373
Directors:		
Margaret Cadwaladr	585-6046	
Dorothee Kieser	390-4136	
Paul Lawry	816-2370	
Arthur Lightburn	468-7516	
Gaylle McRae	758-7589	
COMMITTEE CHAIRS:		
Advertising	Margaret Cadwaladr	
Library	Ann Beamish / Gaylle McRae	
Newsletter	June Bouchard / John Deniseger	
Membership	Jan Moles	
Program	by Committee	
Raffle	Val Harvey	
Social	Deborah Francis	
Bargain Table	Reinhold Gorgosilich	
Website	Deborah Francis/Rosina Schmidt	
Bus Tour	David & Joyce Mitchell	
Sunshine	Wanda Brenton	
Propagation	Rosina Schmidt	
Hailey Grove	Deborah Francis	
Show and Sale	Jan Moles and Rosina Schmidt	
Nanaimo Rhododendron Society		
Box 241, #101-5170 Dunster Road		
Nanaimo, BC V9T 6M4		
Website: nanaimorhodos.ca		

Our next meeting and AGM – Thursday, September 14th, at 7:30

David McIntosh on “The George Fraser Project”

At Beban Park Social Centre

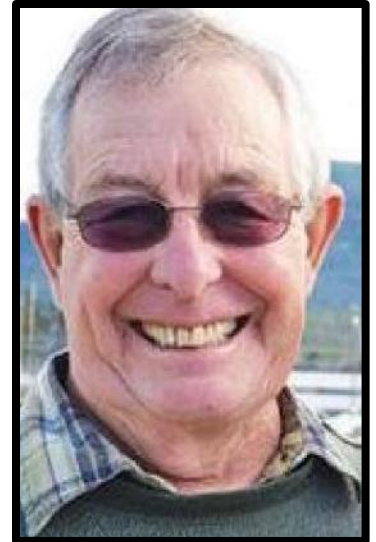
Our Program for September ~ David McIntosh on "The George Fraser Project"

I was born in Victoria but have spent the last 50 or so years in Ucluelet. I taught history at Ucluelet Secondary School for 33 years and local history was my gateway to George Fraser and his work. In the 1990s, I helped with the George Fraser Memorial Project, sponsored by the local Lions Club. I also met Bill Dale at that time and saw his presentations about George. Since then, I have been looking into George Fraser's life. I am not a rhododendron expert but have learned some information about these amazing plants. My Ucluelet garden has about 60 rhodos now.



The presentation starts with George's life in Scotland and then follows his emigration to Canada. It talks about George's work as foreman establishing Beacon Hill Park under the direction of John Blair. It then moves to George's life in Ucluelet and his work as a hybridizer and nurseryman. Finally, it shows George's legacy after 1944.

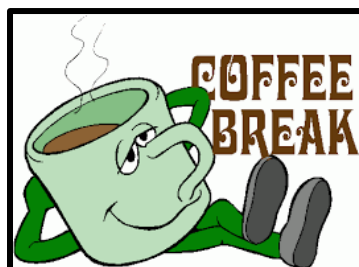
R. fraseri - Unusual free flowering small purple pink flowers in May. An historic low shrub of twiggly habit raised in 1912 by George Fraser in British Columbia (from Millais Nurseries in England)



September is AGM month - please consider joining the NRS Executive!!!



Clubs like ours rely on a strong executive leading an active membership. There are many ways to support and participate in our club's activities. Whether you've been part of our club for many years or have recently joined, think about joining the executive team. Ideally, our directors and executive represent a cross section of our membership. That helps ensure that the needs and interests of all of our members are met. It's also an opportunity to learn and get to know people in a different setting. There are a number of positions available. **Please consider joining!**



Many thanks to Dorothee Keiser and Margaret Cadwaladr for bringing goodies to our upcoming meeting! 😊

Hailey Rhododendron Grove Work Bee ~ Bowen Park

By Deborah Francis, coordinator

We need your help to assist in removing invasive species from Hailey Grove at Bowen Park. Come and be part of the fun! 😊

Next work bee will be on Tuesday, September 12th, 2023 – 9:00 am to noon at Bowen Park in Nanaimo – parking at the tennis courts. Bring good cheer, your gardening gloves, and a snack. The City will provide gardening tools. Hope to see you there!





Dear All,

Subscription renewal time is here again and we hope to be welcoming you all back for the new 2023/2024 year. November meeting at latest is the target.

Full membership: Single \$40, Family \$45

Associate Membership: Single \$10, Family \$15

Student Membership: \$10

Subscriptions can be paid at a meeting with cash or cheque.

Or they can be e-transferred to our treasurer Ron Sutton at this email address:

rondsutton@shaw.ca

Or sent by post to our treasurer at this address:

Ron Sutton, 7310 Cougar Smith Rd., Fanny Bay BC V0R 1W0

Jan Moles

Membership Secretary

*****Please Note: if you were a new member in 2023 AND paid after 1st April 2023, there is no need to pay again.**

**I used to make lots of money clearing leaves from gardens.
I was raking it in.**



Twigs and Stems: Calendar of Other Upcoming Events:

Milner Gardens and Woodland: Open Thursday through Sunday: 11:00 to 5:00.
Check the Milner website for details: [Milner Garden Events](#)

North Island Rhododendron Society: "Iceland: Land of Fire and Ice" with Glen Jamieson;
Comox United Church Hall, Tuesday, September 12th, 7:30 pm.

Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society: ; Qualicum Beach Civic Center, Wednesday, September 13th, 7:30pm

Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society: "Lessons from Ethnobotany" with Dorothy Kennedy. St. John's Anglican Church Hall 486 Jubilee Street, Duncan. Wednesday, September 6th, 7:30 pm

Victoria Rhododendron Society: Glendale Gardens, Thursday, September 7th, 7:30pm

ARS Fall Western Regional Conference: Oct 19-21 in Florence Oregon. For more information: [click here](#)



If you're interested in going, please let us know as you may be able to carpool with someone local. Email us at juneandjohn@shaw.ca



We now are on Facebook as the Nanaimo Rhododendron Society. Upcoming events will be posted there and members will be able to add photographs or items of interest to members. (Thank you, Margaret, for setting that up!)

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

Bronze Medals Awarded at our Year-End Picnic ~ Congratulations to Jan Moles and Liz Higgins

"The Nanaimo Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society is pleased to award its highest honour to Jan Moles.

Jan, as a long-time member of the Nanaimo Rhododendron Society, you have enthusiastically supported and participated in our club's activities and events. You have been a director on our executive for many years, including serving as our club's secretary. You've put considerable time and energy into making our annual Christmas auction a success, as well as advertising, and chairing our membership committee. You've played an integral role in the ongoing success of our club's annual truss show, and creating colour photographs of many of the plants that the club has for sale. During the height of the pandemic, you went one step further in helping to organize a virtual version of our truss show, which was an important activity for our chapter and its members. Your upbeat personality, energy, and commitment to our club have been exemplary. Thank you most sincerely!"



"The Nanaimo Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society is pleased to award its highest honour to Liz Higgins.

Liz, as a long-time member of the Nanaimo Rhododendron Society, you have keenly supported and participated in our club's activities and events. You have been a director on our executive, including serving as our treasurer and looking after our club's finances. Your ongoing commitment to our annual truss show and Christmas auction have been one of the keys to their success. Your contagious enthusiasm brings positive energy to all of our club's activities.

Thank you for all you do for the Nanaimo Rhododendron Society."

A Look Back at our June picnic in Chris's Beautiful Garden



A delicious potluck feast enjoyed by all!



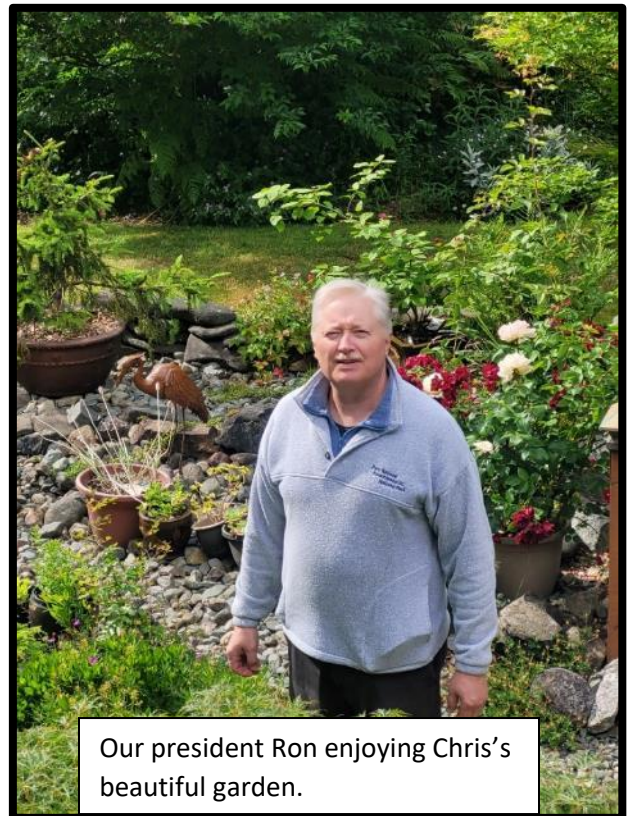
Relaxing in a beautiful friendly setting



Presentation of Truss Show winners and trophies – Congratulations Ann and Dick for getting ALL the awards – a first for the NRS! 😊



Jan and Liz with their Bronze medals!



Our president Ron enjoying Chris's beautiful garden.

Propagation News by Rosina Schmidt

Great news: our 2022 cuttings were repotted into 1-gallon or 2-gallon pots thanks to many helping hands, even a visitor from Germany.

While Mrs. Zimmermann of Germany is taking the notes, Ann and Dick Beamish together with Chris Southwick are busy repotting the 2022 cuttings.

Most of the cuttings found a great new home at the shadehouse at Milner. Hopefully, many of them will be ready for our next *May Truss Show and Plant Sale*. To everyone who participated of raising those cuttings – our warmest thanks!

We hope come September we can start a new batch. Please stay tuned...



All photos by Rosina.



Rosina's Persimmon tree observation

As many of you know, there is a little persimmon tree in my garden. To my surprise it is loaded with fruit, even though our spring was late and no bees were in sight. The persimmon's fruit normally ripens at the end of October, as you can read here: <http://nanaimorhodos.ca/fuyu-japanese-persimmon-tree-diospuros-kakai-fuji/>. Alas, due to current stretch of unusual heat the fruit on my tree is being boiled in their jackets and are falling off in dozens. Besides ending up in the compost, is there anything else that one could do to preserve those fruits?

In Memoriam...

It is with sadness that we report that long time friend and NRS member Sandra Dorman passed away on July 23rd after a long and courageous battle with cancer.

Sandra was a very active member of our club for many years. She served on our executive, and supported every club event with enthusiasm and warmth. Sandra was an important member of the organizing committee for the 2012 ARS conference hosted by the NRS. Sandra was recognized for her contributions to our club with a Bronze Medal in 2013. We will so miss Sandra's smile and cheerful personality.



There will be a Celebration of Life later this fall - full details will be forwarded at a later date.



ARS Fall Conference in
Nanaimo ~ September 2012

*"I like gardening. It's a place where I
find myself when I need to lose myself."
- Alice Sebold*



Sandra with her Bronze Medal
~ June 2013

An Update on our Activities at Milner

Greig Rhododendron Species Garden

Together with other Island chapters, we had a series of work bees over the summer. Amazing how much you can achieve while socializing with other gardeners – weeding, deadheading, a little mulching... Over coffee, we shared garden stories and just caught up with each other. Later this fall, I suspect that we'll have a few more work bees as we mulch some of the beds. **If you'd like to help out, please contact John or Chris.**



As some of you may have noticed, the draft Interpretative signage is in place in the species garden (we've included two examples). The signage explains the story of the species garden using the theme of a library and a curated collection of rhododendrons. Over the winter, the permanent signage will be developed taking into account any potential feedback.

Phase 2 of the species garden will be around and below the old-growth Douglas Fir viewing platform, and will highlight big-leaf and tree-like rhododendrons. With funding already in place, the project continues to move forward. The next species garden advisory group meeting will be in mid-September. Stay tuned for further details!



Shadehouse at Milner

Our partnership with MARS and Milner has paid dividends as the shadehouse is now home to hundreds of plants, largely potted-up rhododendron cuttings. The irrigation system is working well and the plants are thriving. We've set up a weekly maintenance schedule with MARS members – we alternate weeks. **We could use a few more volunteers as we look ahead – if you'd like to help out, see John or Chris.**

In the fall, we'll be building end walls and access doors before covering the shadehouse with plastic. The intention is to provide a little more shelter over the winter as the newer cuttings remain a little more susceptible to the winter winds and cold.





***** Thank you, Ron, for this very funny cartoon – we've all been there! 😊**

Plant of the Month by Ron Sutton

Rhododendron trichostomum

Here is an interesting dwarf lepidote species rhododendron that everyone can find room for. It is one tough small rhododendron that can take -20°C and full sun. I grew one in southern Ontario, and I'm growing one here in Fanny Bay. It, of course, does better here than in Ontario.

This plant belongs to section Pogonanthum and is native to Yunnan and Sichuan China. It is a slow growing dwarf shrub and will only reach 2 feet in height in 10 years. In early May, it will produce small tight trusses made up of 10-12 pink florets that look like Daphne flowers. The flowers are not fragrant, but the leaves when rubbed, give off a faint scent.

This rhododendron is kind of unique, of the many that I grow, with its small dark shiny leaves and small pink pompom flower trusses.

The problem is that it isn't easy to find in the nursery trade. I got my first plant in Ontario from Greer Gardens, and the current one from the now closed Fearing Farm Nursery. A quick check of the nurseries that grow species rhododendrons, the RSBG and Chimacum Woods, show no listing for it.

The posted photo, taken on May 16, is of my plant.





Rhododendron Glossary...



We're building our very own collection of terms related to rhododendrons, one word at a time. Each month, we'll add a new word or term to the glossary. If you have suggestions that you'd like us to add, please let us know.



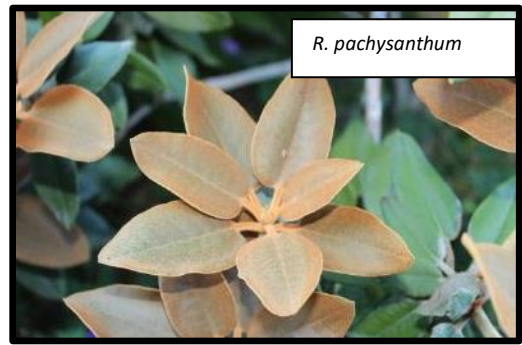
This month's word is: tomentum

Tomentum is a coating of hairs on the top surface of leaves. Stems and flowers can also be hairy, which is generally referred to as "tomentose". Tomentum is often a prized characteristic of rhododendrons as it adds to the year-round interest of the plant. For example, *R. pachysanthum* has significant rusty orange tomentum on the new leaves in spring through summer. *R. 'golfer'*, a Yak hybrid has fuzzy white tomentum on the new leaves in the spring. How much the tomentum persists through the summer varies with the variety and the subsequent rainfall.

R. 'golfer' - (ARS website: Sally and John Perkins photo)



R. pachysanthum



June 2023's word: indumentum

Indumentum (Latin, literally: "garment") is a coating of hairs on the undersides of a leaf. (Generally a prized characteristic which adds to the plants year-round attraction.)

Indumentum forms a protective, woolly layer that sheds water and/or provides leaf protection. During cold, dry weather, the hairy indumentum that covers the leaf's underside becomes an insulating shield. Some of the plant hairs hold water and absorb it to provide the plant with moisture in times of drought. During times of heavy rain, the hairs are used by the plant to transpire excess water from the surface of the leaf. Indumentum also provides some protection from insect damage. (from ARS website)



May 2023's word: truss

"A group of flowers which join one rhachis or flower-stalk. Rhododendrons have trusses of 2 to 40+ flowers, depending on the variety, the trusses varying greatly in shape from upright to loose." (from *Cox's Guide to Choosing Rhododendrons* by Peter and Kenneth Cox, 1990).

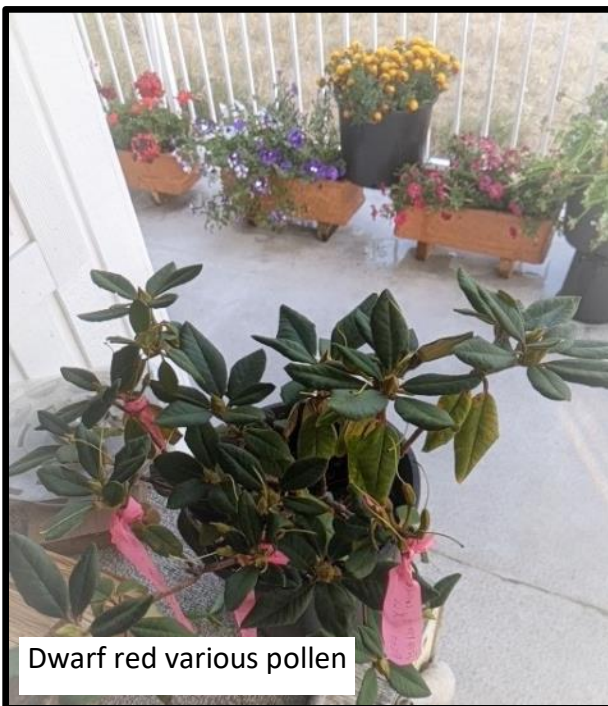


Rhododendron Crosses from Planning to Flowering

By Lloyd Gilmore – Victoria Rhododendron Society, President

I have had only one rhododendron seedling bloom from seed in 30 months in all my time hybridizing. The species *R. yeufengense* is a precocious pale pink flowering species with rounded leaves that has a low growth rate. One seedling out of five from the ARS seed exchange bloomed at 3.5 years after sowing, the rest bloomed this following spring. It holds exciting possibilities for small different plants as a parent. Rhododendron species take up to 20 years, while most hybrids take 4 or 5 years to bloom. They bloom faster in pots than in the ground. The second-year flower is a better qualifier of its potential. Growth habit, leaf structure, cultural stresses, root strength, ease of propagation and size are also important traits. Also, we must remember that most gardeners are not connoisseurs so the plant must be a “good doer”; we do not want to turn off the average gardener.

The crosses are researched back three generations, looking for dominant traits. Seedlings may lean genetically more towards one parent than the other. Community pots may show seedlings with different growth rates, leaf structure and habit. “Unseen traits” are plant hardiness, fertilizer tolerance, sun and drought tolerance. I am indifferent to some plants dying – survival of the fittest. Nature will weed out the unfit over the seasons.



As hybridizer, labeling is most important – this starts with recording the cross in a book and marking the cross somehow. I use flagging tape with the cross recorded twice using a wide sharpie then tied on the base of the truss. The truss only has one type of pollen covering all the truss’s sticky stigmas. All petals and anthers on the truss are removed to reduce unwanted pollen transfer. Plants that are pollinated are given extra fertilizer and water during the summer. Seeds should swell through summer and in the fall go from light green to yellow – at this point weekly checking should occur. When the truss seedhead turns medium brown, the seedhead plus flagging tape should be picked and stored in a paper bag or glass until the seed capsule starts to split. Gentle use of pliers and a small flour sifter helps separate seeds from the chaff. Store in an open tall glass to prevent mold with label included. Use an HB pencil. I write the cross at the top and bottom of the label in case the label breaks. Very special plants get an extra yellow label. I generally start sowing rhododendron seed about late December or early January.

You could also order from the ARS Seed Exchange starting in mid-January, see website for details.

I use 3-inch pots or 6-inch azalea pots for germination depending on seed quantity and size. On the bottom, I place maple leaves or a paper towel to prevent soil loss through the holes. Then comes a coarse mixture filling half the pot, then a finer (no perlite) mix to just about the inner rim. I then sterilize the mix with a very weak boiling mix of 20-20-20. A separate container of peat moss is also sterilized and a thin layer of about 3mm is placed on top and allowed to cool. Two labels are placed in each pot before the seed is sown and checked against the flagging tape. Excess seed is stored in the fridge in labelled pill vials with the cross and date. Rhododendron seed is sown on top of the peat layer as it needs light to germinate as well as moisture and heat of about 23° C. provided by the fluorescent lights in my 8 ft

by 12-foot insulated shed. Squares of Saran wrap cover the top of the pot held in place by large elastic bands bought at Staples. The Saran wrap is removed when the first true leaves are evident. Pots are placed in seedling trays with the soil surface about 8 inches below the 32 or 40-watt cool white fluorescents. They are on 14-16 hours per day, controlled by a battery backed up timer from Canadian Tire. Be sure that the timer can control the inductive wattage of your fluorescents plugged into it. Watering, if needed, should be done by putting water in the bottom of the seedling tray. Germination can start in about ten days with a majority germinating by three weeks, some stragglers take up to 3 months. Germination rates vary greatly with the cross and even vary if the same cross is made a few years later. It seems some parents must mature.

I know that my method seems complex. I grow a lot of seedlings, but if you can meet the light, temperature and moisture requirements you have a chance.



((Jeda x *R. sanguineum* ssp
haemaleum) X Carmen)

(Many Moons x *R.*
macabeum)

Alternately I could possibly supply established community pots with about 20-30 seedlings for club members to divide up and grow on. This would have a greater chance of success compared to somebody trying seedlings for the first time.

Your main threat to small seedlings is Fungus Gnats – I know from experience. Sticky Traps to spider webs to sundews have been tried, and you thought damping off was an issue... Fungus Gnats are attracted to peat moss.

The plants are Dicots, and the first true leaves appear about three weeks after germination. At this point, the plants have a fighting chance against fungus gnats. If germination is very good, I separate any seedlings with different radicle colors, and they are planted in a separate pot with the right label. Sometimes, excess seedlings are thrown away as I have other crosses that I want to sow. I cannot grow everything. Sometimes good-looking seed does not germinate or germinates and then dies – everything to do with plant physiology and not culture.

All my seedlings are planted permanently outside about 4 months after seeding. Seedlings are not shaded from the sun. I try to plant after the last frost and during a period of cloudy rainy weather. All plants are in community pots using six-inch azalea pots, potting mix should be relatively well drained. Courser mix occurs on the pot base, finer mix towards the top. The mix includes sand, perlite, organic matter, peat moss and a touch of dolomite. It is important that it drains well. Weak solutions of 20-20-20 and fish fertilizer are fed throughout the growing season ending in August on all pot sizes. On small seedlings, use a wand to not disturb the surface soil mixture with 20-20-20 or a small can of weak fish fertilizer poured gently onto the soil surface. As the root systems are very small initially, the soil surface must be kept constantly moist – as the plants get larger, this can be relaxed.

I try to repot in early spring before shoot growth starts. Generally, I have 2 or 3 pots with the same labels, and I repot seedlings according to size. All transplanted seedlings, regardless of size, must be healthy. My aim is to have leaves just touch each other after the coming summer growth to maximize winter photosynthesis and reduce weeds. My community pots have between 2 to 20 plants per pot depending on the cross and age of the seedlings. After this, they go into separate one-gallon pots. A few go into 2 plants per pot using a fairly course mix. From seed germination to flowering will require about 4 or 5 spring repottings. Seedlings languish if potted in too big a pot.



21-month community pots in front and 1 gallon of 33-month Rhodos

Culling occurs throughout the year as bad leaves, poor health, and me being underwhelmed by the plant makes it a good compost candidate. But sometimes, you hit the jackpot and this wonderful plant drives you onward. Then there is also that plant that is OK in your eyes but somebody else really

likes it – give it to them. If you get seedlings or seeds from me, it is more important to me that you try to grow them than never try. Even if you fail the first time. I usually have more seeds. Do you have a bucket list? Are you curious?

I started growing seedlings in kids play pools a few years ago as it saves water. Even larger one-gallon pots with about one inch of water seem to benefit during the summer heat. Later in the cooler fall the plants will be placed on the ground.



21-month-old various crosses



Mainly 54-month-old first bloom seedlings with a few 66-month-old second bloom seedlings

A beautiful plant from our president's garden...

Hibiscus 'Grape Sorbet' blooming here now. The bloom is 6-7" across. Planted next to *R. makinoi*.

This plant is one of a series of hibiscus hybrids developed at Texas A&M AgriLife Research. See link for more

info: agrilifetoday

Phoenix Perennials sold about 5 varieties of them a few years ago, but none since.

Ron



Here is a photo of the attendees of the District One meeting held on August 22, 2023 at Milner Gardens. (Missing from photo: Verna Buhler from Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society who took the picture.)

*Looking Forward to seeing you all at
our next meeting on Thursday,
September 14th! ☺*

