



NEWSLETTER

Volume 21: 1

Editor: Ian E. Efford

February 2010

President's Message

I trust that you have had a great start to 2010. Sharon and I certainly did as we had a week's cruise down the Mexican Riviera at the beginning of January to celebrate our 25th anniversary.

Even though we have had some pretty heavy rainfalls, there have been some decent days in between. It is exciting to see the new growth that is coming up already. On my walks around the neighbourhood I see snowdrops and aconites. I even have some crocuses that are about ready to come out. Mind you, they are in a large pot in a sheltered area.

The heathers add lots of mauve and white colours to the gardens. It is especially good to have them around for Robbie Burns day!

Are there any rhododendrons out in your garden? I am starting to see a few buds break on my R. Olive which is a very early bloomer.

The Executive looks forward to a busy spring season as we organize the next few meetings and get ready for our Plant Sale. And to spend time in our own gardens.

See you at the meeting on the 3rd of February.

David Annis



David Annis presenting Leslie Drew with the Life-Membership certificate for her many contributions to the Society since it was founded.

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society

PO Box 904, Duncan, British Columbia V9L 3Y3 <http://cowichan.rhodos.ca>



Photos of Mary Parker's Garden in Nanaimo.

All the plants, including the hedge, are in pots!





More photos from the Nanaimo garden.



Mary Parker in her Qualicum Beach Garden



Potted Rhododendrons

Two trends are taking place in our society, the population is aging and people are moving into accommodation with smaller and smaller gardens. The latter include houses with small lots, townhouses and apartments. In each case, the owners are looking for ways to continue their gardening within the smaller spaces and, in some cases, make life easier by reducing the weight of the material that has to be handled.

A number of gardening publications have articles on this issue and it is now possible to plant a row of fruit trees, two foot apart in a south-facing row, each one leaning at a 45 degree angle to the north so that the fruit needs of a family can be grown in the smallest of gardens.

How do we continue our interest in rhododendrons under the same conditions? Well, as can be seen from the photos on the previous pages, Mary Parker has managed to create a full rhododendron garden in Nanaimo with only potted plants including the hedges! So that the reader can understand some of the techniques in creating such a garden, the following two articles give some details from from enthusiasts in Oregon and Australia.

Editor

“A person born to be a flower pot will not go beyond the porch”

Mexican Proverb

Doug Furr

Over the past year, two guest speakers at our monthly meetings, Terry Henderson, and Mike Bones, covered similar, yet different, topics. Last February Terry spoke of growing rhodies in pots, and in March Mike shared the beauty and challenge of growing *bonsai* rhodies. I became

Future Events

3rd February 2010 7.30pm
Alan Campbell “Garden Structures”
St John’s Anglican Church

10th February Wednesday 7.30pm
Richard Hebda “Facing Climate Change on our
Landscape and in our Gardens”
Beban Park Social Centre, Nanaimo

17th February 2010 7.00pm
The Propagation Group
2307 Lochsyde Drive, Duncan off Lakes
Road

9-11th April 2010

The Ultimate Rhododendron Conference
April 9 – 11, 2010 at UBC Botanical Garden

October 2010

**“Celebrating 50 year of the Victoria Branch of
the Australian Rhododendron Society and its
famous National Rhododendron Garden”**

interested in plant pots and soon uncovered a surplus of information, so I decided to focus on *bonsai* pots to figure out why they are very expensive. And then I discovered that the more I learned, the more I needed to learn. The following is a synopsis of my discoveries thus far. Bonsai containers are, typically, wood, plastic, mica, terra cotta, earthenware, stoneware, porcelain, and bone china. Plastic and mica are usually used as training containers. Mica pots are made of 80% mica (mineral), 15% polyethylene (plastic), and 5% graphite, and are an attractive, inexpensive choice if one does not intend to

exhibit at shows. Terra cotta is not frost-resistant, and earthenware fired at a low temperature may not be frost-resistant. Thus, longlasting bonsai pots of appropriate quality for treasured *bonsai* plants are glazed earthenware, stoneware, porcelain, or bone china, and that is why they are very expensive. What distinguishes earthenware, stoneware, porcelain, and bone china from one another is the kind of clay used and the firing process.

Earthenware is a coarse and opaque ceramic ware which is fired at a relatively low temperature. It is made of kaolin clay that when fired is porous and opaque. It is always slightly porous, whether it is glazed or unglazed. If fired at a very high temperature, it is somewhat frost-resistant. From a horticultural perspective, it is good for a pot to be porous, so if you're not going to have your bonsai collection outdoors, earthenware may be the best choice.

Stoneware looks like earthenware, but is made of a higher quality kaolin clay and is fired at a higher temperature. Because of this, the strength and durability of stoneware is much closer to that of porcelain. It is impervious to water and absolutely frost-resistant. For these reasons, a stoneware pot, glazed on the exterior only, with a drain hole, is often considered the best choice.

Porcelain is made from a white, high-quality kaolin clay. Bone china is made from translucent white clay containing at least 25 percent bone ash. Both are fired at extremely high temperatures and are frost-resistant. However, the pots themselves may be artistically viewed as too “feminine” for displaying many types of *bonsai* plants.

Most ceramics are made following a few basic steps. The manufacturing process begins with dry clay, which is ground up and mixed with water. This is referred to as **blunging**. This mixture is blended to form **slip**, then pressed to remove excess water, placed into a pug mill and chopped, then cut and molded to shape, called **leather**, or **cheese**, then fired. The first firing in the kiln is the **biscuit**. The fired pieces are then glazed and

fired a second time, which is the **glost**. Once polished, the pieces are complete.

Don't get me wrong, you can put *bonsai* plants into anything with a drain hole, but the suggested container is any container that does not compete with the beauty of the plant. Plain drab colors are better than bright flowery ones, and earth tones are highly recommended.

TIPS FROM THE OLD TOOL SHED:

Garage sales, rummage sales, bazaars and second hand stores are good flowerpot sources. When you get your “treasure” home, the first thing you should do is clean the pot/planter. If it is fiberglass or a resin, mild dish soap and a good scrub brush should do the trick. If it is concrete or terra cotta, a 1:10 bleach and water mixture (e.g. 1 part liquid bleach to 10 parts of water) and a good stiff brush will clean out the pores well. Always wear gloves and a mask if using bleach. Rinse the pots well with clear water, and then make sure the pot/planter is completely dry before storing it until used.

[Ed: This article was taken, with permission from the author and the editor, from the Eugene Chapter newsletter.]

Dwarf Rhododendrons

A talk by Ian Wallace summarized by Marcia Begg

Ian Wallace started by asking ‘What is a dwarf rhododendron?’ and answered with reservations about climate, micro-climate, soil, water, etc. All of which will affect growth not to mention the plant's own characteristics. He gave R. “Sappho” as an example. In the suburbs it might grow low and tight but in the Dandenongs with good conditions it is tall and gangly. He quoted Peter Cox as saying ‘The greater the altitude the more dwarf they become’ referring to northern hemisphere conditions where frosts and cold are

a major problem whereas in Australia the heat of the sun and hot winds are the problem.

He gave advice on growing conditions:

- Dwarf rhododendrons grow well in pots and a lot can be fitted into a small garden. They can also be moved to suit their requirements. If growing in pots mix water saving crystals into the potting mix.
- Keep pots off the ground to prevent water born diseases. Symptoms are leaf drop and dieback.
- In the ground the pH needs to be balanced with free calcium, pH can then be as high as 7-8.
- Dwarfs are easy to move because they are shallow rooted but keep away from new concrete and Lilydale toppings
- Do not add mushroom compost as the pH is around 7 and too high.
- Use a slow release fertiliser in spring and autumn and sprinkle some sulphate of potash around the roots.
- Keep mulch at least 3 inches away from stems.
- Some sort of spray is essential to control pests and diseases such as red spider and lace bug.
- Plants with indumentum have some protection from pests but not from weevils.
- *R. moupinense* and *R. cilliicalyx* are barometer plants – they are the first to suffer insect attack.

Some of his recommended plants are: *R. tsariense* and *proteoides* which are both grown for their indumentum, *balsamaeflora*, *hanseanum*, “Princess Anne”, *nakaharae*, *ledoides*, *megeratum*, *valentinianum* and *lepidostylum*.

{Editor: Modified from the Victoria branch of the Australian Rhododendron Society newsletter}

Articles of Interest

Scented Plants

For anyone in the area interested in fragrant rhododendrons, Harold Fearing’s Notes from the Chair in the November 2009 issue of the Yak, the newsletter of the Fraser South Rhododendron Society, is well worth a peruse. It mentions a number of fragrant rhodos that can be grown in this area and shows photographs of some of them. The article can be found at: <http://www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth/yak/YAKnov09.pdf>

Following on the same subject, the January issue of the Yak, has an excellent article by Norma Senn on other scented plants. It is called “Up the garden path with a year of scent-sational plants” and can be found at <http://www.flounder.ca/FraserSouth/yak/YAKjan10.pdf>. This is the first of two articles she is writing on the subject.

Thanks from Sigg

Siggi Kemmler wishes to thank members for the two vireya plants that were given to him while he was in hospital. He has now been home for some weeks and is on his way to full recovery. We all look forward to seeing him back at our meetings.

Propagation Group

As can be seen from the “Future Events” calender, the propagation group will begin meeting again after an autumn “recess”. This group is open to anyone interested in propagating or caring for rhododendrons. It is a relaxed evening of informal discussion of various topics about methods of gardening, especially rhodos. Come along to the next meeting at 7.00pm on the 17th February and bring your questions.

This meeting will be at 2307 Lochsyde Drive [the first house on the left] just off Lakes Road. If you are planning on being there, please send a note to efford@shaw.ca or call 597-4470.

Cowichan Valley Garden Club

Annual Spring Flower Show and Plant Sale
Saturday April 10, 2010 - 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm
St. Peter's Church Hall, 5800 Church Road (off Maple Bay Road), Duncan, BC.

Admission: Adults/Seniors: \$2.00, Children: \$1.00

Admission to Afternoon Tea: Adults/Seniors: \$2.00.

Flower Show Entries from the public welcome.
Please email Diane McAmmond diane@shaw.ca to enter.

Thanks to Leslie Drew

The Society thanks Leslie Drew for her generous gift cards of beautiful rhododendron photos. These are used to send cards of sympathy to members who are ill or bereaved. If you know of anyone who should receive a card, please do not hesitate to contact our Sunshine Lady, Mary Gale, at 250-743-9329.

Up-date on Phytophthora

With regard to Ian Wright's series of talks on Vancouver Island, the latest news from the UK is that “The Phytophthora problem has taken a major turn for the worst with *P. ramorum* being found causing premature tree death on Japanese Larch a major UK forest crop. It's still early days but things look a little bleak.”

THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

The Christmas Party was a great success with around 40 attending. There was a fabulous collection of dishes to be sampled and a great selection of gifts in the raffle. Some people did over indulge in purchasing raffle tickets with one well-known member wearing them round his neck like a garland!

As a by-product of the party, the Society gave \$245 to the Salvation Army and two very large boxes of food were delivered to Cowichan Valley Basket Society the next morning.

These pictures of some of the party participants were all taken by Sharon Tillie, our resident photographer.



David Gardner and Carrie Nelson



Madelaine Webb and Sandy Campbell



Allan Murray



**Bill Dumont and Ingeborg
Woodworth**

2010 GOLDEN JUBILEE CONFERENCE

Australian Rhododendron Society



Plans are well in hand for our Golden Jubilee Conference to be held from Sunday 17th October to Wednesday 20th. Not only is it 50 years since the Australian Rhododendron Society was formed but it is also 50 years since the National Rhododendron Gardens were officially started.

Two mornings of speakers will be followed by garden visits and local attractions. The ARS National Council is generously funding Kenneth Cox from Scotland and other international, local and interstate speakers have been invited. Ken Cox is well known as an author of Rhododendron reference books, owner of Glendoick Nursery and plant hunter. He is a lively and entertaining speaker with a broad knowledge of rhododendrons and other species.

The first afternoon of the conference will be a 'Members Day' which will be open to all ARS members and delegates and will follow a combined Azalea and Rhododendron Show.

Registration forms and more detailed information about the programme will be published, soon, in a newsletter. The committee is hoping many members and friends are planning to visit the Dandenong Ranges for the Conference and a list of convenient accommodation will be included in the information. Local members who would be happy to provide "Home Stay" accommodation for interstate or overseas visitors or speakers would be greatly appreciated and could register with Michael Hare 9844 2232 or Marcia Begg 9751 1610.

Already there is a group from the New Zealand Rhododendron Association planning to attend and interest has been shown from a tour group in USA. Members from South Australia and Tasmania are also coming to celebrate this exciting event. We hope to see you all there in October 2010!

[Ed. The conference will be held in the beautiful Dandenong Ranges just east of Melbourne and the location of a one of the large and beautiful National Rhododendron Garden. I suggest that, if you are travelling from Vancouver to Melbourne, you consider travelling on Qantas or one of its partners because Qantas allows three free flights in Australia which allows an opportunity to explore.]

ARS Annual Convention - May 14 -17, 2010

Timed for peak bloom on Long Island, NY the Annual Convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Ronkonkoma. Hosted by the three Chapters of District 7 the meeting features beautiful garden tours, including the Phipp's estate and the Planting Fields Arboretum, a wonderful flower show and plant sale and educational sessions of value for attendees. All are invited to this exciting event.

The Ultimate Rhododendron Conference – April 9 to 11

The 100 available spaces are going quickly.

The conference is at the University of British Columbia Botanical Garden and Centre for Plant Research in Vancouver (www.ubcbotanicalgarden.org). This is Canada's premier rhododendron garden and it's the perfect environment to learn about rhododendrons. The Ultimate Rhododendron Conference is the first in North America to be designed on a double-track classroom learning model. It features classroom and field experiences at 2 learning levels, tours of 3 world-class gardens, rhodie sales, on-campus suite accommodation, and free time in evenings to visit beautiful Vancouver, site of the 2010 Olympics. Veteran rhododendron collectors will enjoy Douglas Justice's advanced (Level 2) classes with their emphasis on species, and Ron Knight's novice (Level 1) classes will be a great place for newer club members to learn all the basics of rhododendron gardening. In fact, you could use this conference as a way to introduce gardening friends, who are not yet members of your chapter, to the wonderful world of rhododendrons.

The registration fee of \$155 is all-inclusive for activities at UBC Botanical Gardens:

- * 6 ninety-minute learning sessions taught by professional teachers in high-tech classrooms
- * a folder of notes
- * Saturday and Sunday lunches and coffee breaks
- * Free admission to the Asian and Alpine Gardens.
- * Complimentary parking

Registration is limited to 100 rhodophiles and over 50% of available spaces are now taken. Level 2 classes are filling up especially quickly. Please **register now** to ensure that you get the learning level you want. If you need hotel accommodation, make your reservation soon because the conference committee has not pre-booked any blocks of rooms in the three recommended hotels. Conference details and a printable registration form may be obtained from the ARS District 1 website: www.rhodos.ca (click on "registration form" and "information" halfway down the page, under April 9 – 11). If you have questions, please contact Ron Knight at: rcknight@telus.net

Rhododendrons in the cold

Diana Scott, President,
North Island Rhododendron Society

As the temperatures dip below freezing, I watch the garden take on the frosty hues of winter. The Rhodos in our garden sustain winter damage from time to time, but usually ‘weather’ the mild cold that we typically get here on the coast. Over the past few winters we’ve had some pretty COLD spells, which may be the beginning of a nipplier trend in years to come.

Looking out our window at the garden, we can usually tell how cold it is by the curl and droop of the Rhodo leaves! Folks new to Rhodo growing may not be aware that the sight of droopy, shriveled-looking leaves on their favourite Rhodo is an appropriate protective response to the drop in temperature. Rhodos that are cold-hardy seem to show more leaf movement than those that are not.

Biologist Erik Tallak Nilsen in his research paper “Why Do Rhododendron Leaves Curl?” <http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/796.pdf> helps to explain his view of this interesting phenomenon.

Nilsen begins by crediting Charles Darwin for first categorizing leaf movements in his book “The Power of Movement in Plants” published in 1880. Darwin reported that many plant parts, particularly leaves, move in response to both environmental and physiological factors. The key factors are light intensity, light direction, water content, and temperature. The leaves of plants in hot, dry environments respond to

temperature by moving upward to avoid excess light absorption. In contrast, many Rhodo leaves droop downward and curl inward in response to cold temperatures.

According to the research described in Nilsen’s article, the droop and the curl are two distinct phenomena, both serving to protect the leaf from cold damage. Thermotropic (temperature related) leaf movements have been commonly thought to be a mechanism to prevent leaf desiccation or loss of water during cold periods or a way for the plant to shed snow, but Nilsen’s research does not support these theories. The droop and curl seem to be related more to the protection of the cell membranes from the effects of freezing. The leaf drooping is controlled by hydration of the leaf stalk or petiole, and the downward angle this produces may serve to protect the leaf from membrane damage due to strong sunlight and cold temperatures. The inward curl appears to be a response to leaf temperature (as opposed to air temperature) which reduces the amount of leaf area exposed to light, preventing cell damage by slowing the rate of thaw. Most damage caused by leaf freezing is a result of ice crystals piercing the cellular membranes, followed by too rapid a rate of re-warming. Drooping and curling may both reduce the area exposed to sunlight thus slowing the rate of re-warming after a period of cold. Leaf movement seems to be a significant factor in determining cold hardiness in rhododendrons.

Despite what it looks like in your garden, the Rhodos that appear the most shriveled

may very well be the ones that are taking
the cold weather in stride! I hope that over
the upcoming months you will be taking
our cold winter temperatures in stride
along with your Rhodos!

[Ed: Quoted from the NIRS newsletter for
January 2010 edited by Noni Godfrey]

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Vice President:	Alan Campbell
2 nd Vice-President	vacant
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Secretary:	
at Executive Meetings	David Annis
at General Meetings	Bill Dumont
Members at Large:	Sharon Tillie Jeremy Evans/ Marie Therese Evans Bill Dumont

2009-10 Conveners

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Spring Sale:	Peter Lewis
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