



NEWSLETTER

Volume 17, Number 4

EDITOR: LESLIE DREW

April 2006




An inviting view of the Murrays' garden

Four Tours, Six Gardens

Four tours of six Cowichan Valley gardens, two in April and two in May, have been lined up for CVRS members and friends by Anne and Roger Slaby, the conveners. Here is the schedule:

- **April 9** from 2 to 4 PM – the garden of Liz and Allan Murray, 1951 Doran Road, Cobble Hill.
- **April 26** from 6:30 to 8 PM – the adjacent gardens of Daphne Jackson, 4820 Hillbank Road, and Peter Kearns, access off Hillbank Road.
- **May 11** from 6:30 to 8 PM – the garden of Siggi and Maria Kemmler, 3730 Gibbins Road.
- **May 17** from 6:30 to 8 PM – the garden of Wilson and Jane Grahame, 6541 Birdseye Drive, and the nearby garden of Barbara Grantham, 6487 Pacific Drive.

Garden Club members are invited to join us in touring these gardens, and we are being asked to join their tours which are all in May and will be announced in the May newsletter. 

For more on April's tour gardens, see pages 4 and 5.

What's Coming Up

April Meeting: April 5 in St. John's Anglican Church Hall, 486 Jubilee Street, Duncan. Set-up 7 PM, meeting starts 7:30.

Main Speaker: Les Clay of Vancouver, noted rhodo producer by the tissue culture method, will be speaking on newer hybrids.

Educational Short Talk: Roger Slaby on Kalmias.

Display: Let's have a fine showing of rhodo blossoms or sprays; it's supposed to be spring, isn't it? Contributors at the March meeting were Peter Kearns, Joyce Gammie, and Johanna and Moe Massa.

Plant Table: Please bring your spare plants of whatever you're raising for the garden. This is one of our fundraisers and a chance to share material.

Tea and Goodies: Janet and David Gardner, co-ordinators (748-1867), Judy Williams (748-3531); Cheryl and Michael Krieger (391-6225).

Combined Directors' Meeting and Propagating

Group Meeting: April 19 at 6:30 PM at Cherry Point Rhododendrons, the home and nursery of Roger and Anne Slaby, 1264 Cherry Point Road.

Spring Show and Sale: May 6 in St. John's Anglican Church Hall, 10 AM to 2 PM.

Annual Picnic: June 3 at Ingeborg Woodsworth's Mayo Creek Gardens. Members of the North Island Chapter are being invited as guests.

ARS Western Regional Conference: Harrison Hot Springs September 22 to 24.

*Meetings are held the first Wednesday of the month
in St. John's Anglican Church Hall,
486 Jubilee Street, Duncan*

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society
PO Box 904, Duncan, BC V9L 3Y2 <http://cowichan.rhodos.ca>



VANCOUVER ISLAND HYBRIDS – PART 2

Dracula and Rhododendrons

by Alan Campbell

Mythology and symbolism play a rich and wonderful part within the history of China, and the rhododendrons has a place within these fables. The rhododendron and the cuckoo share the same Chinese pictogram, derived from the name of an ancient King of Sichuan who was brutally ousted from his throne and palace by his brother. Legend has it that when the heart-broken king died, he was transformed into a cuckoo and his tears of sorrow fell to the ground and became bright red rhododendrons.

Historical legends inspired by rhododendrons are not isolated to China. Stories from ages past tell us of the Greek commander Xenophon leading his army onto Asia Minor in the 5th century BC where they collected local honey produced from the yellow-flowered *Rhododendron luteum*. This natural sweet delight caused the invading host to have “lost their senses.” Luckily for the Greeks, no defenders found them while their honey-induced affliction had them out of sorts. Not so lucky was Pompey’s Roman army 300 years later. Perhaps these Roman legions missed that day of history class, but they unwittingly followed the Greeks’ footsteps onto the same shores of the Black Sea and into the same *luteum* honey-induced stupor, during which the Colchian “homeland security” forces found them. The outcome was, needless to say, unpleasant. *The Two Thousand Year Curse of the Rhododendron* by David Leach, which recounts this story as well as others, was published in the American Rhododendron Society’s book *Rhododendron Information* (1967).

The Cowichan Valley holds claim to a number of “urban legends”, one of which I can now pronounce as documented fact. In 1900, a retired British army medical doctor and his wife, Richard and Susan Stoker, moved to Duncan and into a house near Quamichan Lake and shortly after built a summer house on Marble Bay at Cowichan Lake. Dr. Stoker was not the only learned member of his family. A brother by the name of Bram was a well-known author. He wrote, among other books, the classic horror tale *Dracula*. Now you’re asking, “How does Dracula connect with rhododendrons?” Let’s continue.

Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society member Leslie Drew and her husband Frank wrote an exceptional article titled “Furs, Gold, and Rhododendrons,” which was included in the Victoria Rhododendron Society’s publication *Rhododendrons on a Western Shore* (1989). Their article clearly illustrates the early Vancouver Island rhododendron enthusiasts and the interaction between them. I have borrowed some names and dates from it.

George and Suzanne Buchanan Simpson settled at Cowichan Lake in 1914 and quickly befriended Dr. and Mrs. Stoker, as people with shared interests naturally will. The Stokers’ and the Buchanan Simpsons’ shared interest in gardening and plants in general swiftly resulted in flourishing gardens and a burgeoning nursery business, nourished with material discovered by plant hunters worldwide. Throughout the 1920s and the early half of the 1930s, their interest turned toward alpine plants and rhododendron species. Eventually, due to personal family matters, the Buchanan Simpsons made the decision to sell their Marble Bay Alpine Plant Nursery business to a Royston couple in 1935.

Ted and Mary Greig, originally from Duncan, shared an intense interest in alpine plants, which prompted their decision to purchase the Buchanan Simpsons’ nursery stock and begin their own horticultural endeavors at their new home in Royston. The alpine plants resented being relocated to this low-level seaside environment, but the rhododendrons flourished. Obtaining wild collected seed from the plant-hunting expeditions of Frank Kingdon Ward and those of the partnership of Frank Ludlow and George Sheriff, the Greig nursery became well known for propagating the best forms of species *Rhododendra*. It is not a rare occurrence to be wandering about an established rhododendron garden and find plant labels reading *R. auriculatum* (Greig form) or *R. strigillosum* (Greig form). Somewhat less common is to come across named forms of Greig-propagated species, two of which are ‘Royston Blue’, a form of *R. augustinii*. and ‘Chancellor’s Choice’, a form of *R. pseudochrysanthum*, so named by Herman Vaartnou in honour of Dr. Ian McTaggart-Cowan, Chancellor of the University of Victoria from 1979 to 1984.

... continued on Page 3



The Big Fund-Raiser

At least nine regional nurseries will be offering rhododendrons and companion plants at the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society's annual sale May 6 from 10 AM to 2 PM in St. John's Anglican Church Hall, Jubilee Street. The sale is the group's major fund-raiser of the year.

Rhododendrons will be sold by **Cherry Point Rhododendrons, Firwood Nursery, Les Clay, Mayo Creek Gardens, Peter Kearns, Prospect Nursery and Rhodo Ranch**, and companion plants will be offered by **Island Specialty Nursery and Keith Muir**.

As in the past, full support of members will be required for the event to be successful. "We hope that you will volunteer for a couple of hours the evening before or on the day," **Ian Efford**, sales co-ordinator, says. He will be circulating a list of jobs at the April meeting.

"We have a new and much better location, but the change will require us to make a special effort so that potential buyers will know where and when the sale is to take place and how good it will be." He will distribute posters for members to post throughout the Valley and give to members of other garden clubs. ↪

Dracula and Rhododendrons . . . continued from Page 2

The Greigs' expertise at propagating species *Rhododendra*, along with the ability to evaluate the best forms, eventually made Royston Nursery a name of distinction throughout the rhodo world. It is thought that at one point the Royston Nursery supplied 10% of the rhododendrons available in North America. For this accomplishment Ted and Mary were sought out as charter members of the newly forming **American Rhododendron Society**. Some 20 years later, they would be recognized by the ARS by becoming joint recipients of the Gold Medal, the highest award that can be bestowed by the society.

During the mid-1960s, a group of ARS members formed a non-profit organization which would become known as the Rhododendron Species Foundation. The purpose of this organization would be to establish a comprehensive collection of authentic forms of rhododendron species that were becoming threatened by the destruction of their natural habitat.

Donation of Plants

At the February Directors' meeting, it was agreed that the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society would purchase \$500 of plants at the annual sale and donate these plants to a not-for-profit organization in the Valley. This might be a hospital, a hospice or nursing home, a municipal site, a park, or a similar organization.

We expect that the plants would be donated to different regions each year. By such a donation, the Society wishes to help beautify the Valley and thereby encourage tourism. The donation, which will take place at the end of the sale, will also publicize the Society and its activities. We hope that an increase in membership will follow.

Members, please suggest suitable locations for this year's donation. The main requirement is that the recipient organization has the capacity to maintain the plants in good health after the initial planting, which might be supervised by the Society. Please submit suggestions to **Ian Efford** at 245-1453 or efford@shaw.ca. The Directors will review suggestions and report to the membership before any final selection is made. ↪ *by Ian Efford*

A member of the group, **Dr. Milton Walker**, visited the great public and private gardens of Britain requesting propagation material. But there was a snag. American import regulations prohibited the importation of plant material from Europe. Canada did not have the same restrictions, nor was there a restriction on plant material entering the United States from Canada. Dr. Walker contacted the Greigs in Royston to inquire whether the cuttings could be imported and propagated in British Columbia. Mary made further inquiries, and arrangements were made with the University of British Columbia. Over the next several years, cutting material from the major gardens of Britain arrived at UBC and to the propagating skills of **Evelyn Jack** (now **Weesjes**), who took on much of the correspondence with the British sources. The birth of the Foundation was secured, made possible by the efforts of Ted and Mary Greig of Royston. ↪

Next month: The Royston Nursery hybrids



Misty View Farm – the Garden of Allan and Liz Murray

by Liz Murray


We put in the driveway in 1972 and did the first clearing of the land, which was predominantly second-growth fir and cedar. The land is sloping, and goes from hot, dry, rocky outcroppings to swampy lowland and woodland. Although we have developed the gardens over many years, the majority of the rhododendrons were planted since 1988.

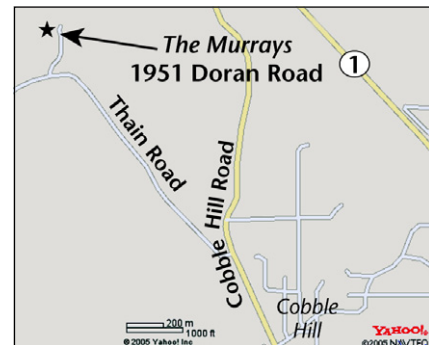
As you come down the driveway, you will see the magnolias, maples, dogwoods, and other trees as well as a few fruit trees. Early in the season, the flowering magnolias add colour to the garden and later, their soft green leaves add a lovely backdrop to the colourful rhododendrons. The espaliered fruit trees have been the victims of deer damage and are pruned to sustain life.

On your left is the streambed, built to control and enhance runoff water. After a good rain and through much of the winter, the water rushes and tumbles over the waterfalls. Rhododendrons and other treasures form colourful beds edging this stream. Watch for the 70 or so magnolias planted in between—many are Jury hybrids, with some species and other hybrids. Coming around the corner of the driveway you will see the small pool. Keep an eye out for clematis growing here and there.

Walking on, you will come to the main rock feature and small rhodo garden. Many succulents reside in the cracks and crevices and drier areas. To create this garden, the topsoil was removed from the rock outcroppings and the rocks were power washed until clean. Alpines are planted into the crevices and seem to enjoy a baking by the hot summer sunshine.

Feel free to walk through the pathways and discover the various areas of our garden. Stop often and look around—the view seems to change dramatically with every step you take.

For us, the garden is a labour of love. Please sign our guest book; we value comments and suggestions so that we may see the garden through your eyes. We look forward to seeing you. 



Rhododendrons in April


Should we trust the weather forecasts or our instincts? I say this because it's time to consider our contributions to the coming truss show and sale.

Dare we count on anything? I not only remember last summer's extreme heat, which even burned the leaves of *R. 'Crete'*. At that time, I used my patio umbrellas to shade plants exposed to the full blazing sun. This allowed air circulation, especially for some species rhododendrons with large leaves. Just laying shade/row cover over them would have created a hot-air trap.

Right now, I'm visiting my winter-damaged rhodos and plucking off some of the most unsightly frost-burned leaves, while considering their location.

Did I provide enough wind and (or) overhead protection? I will definitely plant more varieties of pine that will not get too big. I'm also considering more evergreen hedges. One can be creative here, and blend evergreens with deciduous shrubs.

Creating a suitable, lightly shaded environment for rhodos that suffered during the past year will be my priority this spring. Naturally, I believed I had done this over the last 10 years. Alas . . .

Mid-April to May produces the greatest show of blooms on species and hybrids alike, regardless of the vagaries of the weather. Don't forget to bring some of your trusses to the next meeting. 

by Ingeborg Woodsworth



Rhodonhil of the Jacksons

by Daphne Jackson

Some 36 years ago, my husband and I and our three sons were living in a modern house on a quarter-acre lot. Our youngest son desperately wanted a pony, the middle son loved to go fishing in the creek at the end of the road, and the eldest son spent hours kicking a soccer ball around the small lawn at great hazard to the windows and flower beds. We all decided, after three years in that situation, that the answer would be to find a house on acreage. One day, after looking at several other possibilities, I saw an advertisement for a house on just over six acres in Cowichan Bay.

The first time I visited “Rhodonhil,” I was excited by what I saw—a large lower lawn for the budding soccer player (he turned out to be an accountant); a barn and paddock for a pony (son #3 soon lost interest in horses and later became an accountant too); and even a ravine and a stretch of Spears Creek with trout and a late coho salmon run for the budding fisherman (he took up sailing and later became a teacher).

Later that day, when my husband Geoff returned home, I asked what he would think if I had found a house with field, woodland, ravine, creek, and large beautifully laid-out garden with plants in it that I had been trying to grow for years. There were even four bedrooms so that the two younger boys, who were at this time drawing a chalk line across their shared bedroom floor with firm instructions that it must not be crossed, could have separate rooms. Geoff agreed that it sounded to be just what we were looking for and more.

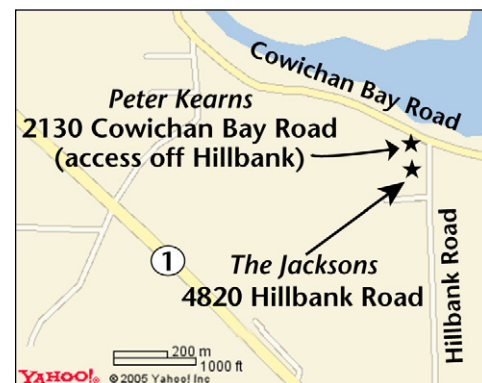
The owners were master gardeners Dave and Lurana Dougan, who were moving to Nanaimo and, I’m sure, reluctantly selling their beautiful place. When we moved in during the spring of 1970, the flower show was spectacular. Only now are we sadly coming to realize that it is time to downsize and sell our much-loved home and garden.

We have tried to add to the Dougan legacy over the years. We removed an enormous cedar hedge and rearranged the flower beds as plants grew out of their allotted spaces. Some original plants from the old Layritz nursery are still here, many over 15 feet tall. Some plants have sadly died, but even their replacements are now large, mature rhododendrons.

Peter Kearns’ Rhodos

by Peter Kearns

I moved here in 1973 and, inspired by the collection of the Jacksons next door, planted three or four rhodos. In the early 1980s, I started clearing the wilderness area at the bottom of the property and created beds to start a rhododendron nursery. These beds were stocked mainly with two-inch liners, mostly from Clay’s, and also with cuttings from the plants of generous friends. What you see today are plants I kept for propagating or simply because I liked them. So what I have is a collection of rhodos rather than a planned garden. I keep a record of when each plant blooms. Last year I recorded 310 different ones, so there is a good chance that there will be a fair show on April 26. I look forward to seeing you. ↪



Most of the original deciduous azaleas are still here and blooming well, and we have added our favourites to Dave’s and Lurana’s great choices. While lying in bed, we used to see the top of the dawn cypress, a tree once thought to be extinct, but now it towers over the house. A rhododendron bearing the registered name of Dave Dougan and produced by the Weesjes grows in the garden. I believe we now have about 300 shrubs of various varieties and many of them have been here for up to 50 years.

When the time comes to move, I know that I will worry about whether the deadheading is being done and whether any new owners will dig over the beds before the late risers, like the blue poppies and the tall Himalayan primulas, show their leaves. And will they always remember to check the creek for the coho salmon run about December 20th? I hope so. ↪



Importing Plants

The following guide for importing plants from the United States were prepared by **Ron Knight**, ARS alternate director for ARS District 1 and distributed at the district meeting March 19 at the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, Saanich, B.C.

1. Garden plants are classified by the Canadian government as “restricted goods” and therefore a phytosanitary certificate with attached USDA shield is required when they are purchased in the United States. Without this certificate, plants may be seized by Canadian border officials. Moreover, not declaring plants at the border can also result in seizure and a fine of up to \$400.
2. Plants may be imported from the United States (but not from off this continent) in regular nursery pots containing soil and related materials.
3. Advance notice is required by a nursery in order to have a USDA inspector issue the proper documents. Also, separate phytosanitary certificates must be issued by each nursery where you purchase plants and there will be extra costs associated with each set of documents. As an alternative, you can take all the plants you purchase in the United States (at different nurseries) to a USDA office to have them inspected, and according to the people at Greer Gardens, the cost is much less.
4. Visit the Canada Border Service Agency (CBSA) Web site (www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca) before you leave Canada to check whether the American nurseries you plan to visit are in specially regulated areas. For example, in 2005, rhododendrons and azaleas could not be brought back to Canada from several counties in California and from County Curry in Oregon because of concerns about sudden-oak-death disease.
5. Import permits are required only for commercial use and as specified in special policy directives issued by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (www.inspection.gc.ca). However, if you bring a truckload of rhodies to the border, the inspectors may think you obtained them for business purposes and you may be asked for an import permit.

— 2006 Directors —

PRESIDENT	Ingeborg Woodsworth mayocreekgardens@shaw.ca	749-6291
VICE-PRESIDENT (Acting)	Ian Efford efford@shaw.ca	246-1453
SECRETARY	Leslie Drew sahltlamrise@shaw.ca	748-6152
TREASURER	Siggi Kemmler siggi-k@shaw.ca	746-8751
MEMBERS AT LARGE	Roger and Anne Slaby rs0321@telus.net	748-4623
	Ian Efford efford@shaw.ca	246-1453
	Jackie Walker jacquelinewalker@shaw.ca	743-3650
EX-OFFICIO	Alan Campbell stonefold@shaw.ca	743-3597

— Tea and Goodies Teams —

APRIL: Janet and David Gardner* (748-1867), Judy Williams (748-3531); Cheryl and Michael Krieger (391-6225)

MAY: Peter Kearns* (746-5782); Daphne Jackson (748-9475); Mary Gale (743-9329)

SEPTEMBER: David Annis* (748-1338); Doris and Ian Anderson (746-8678); Ruth and Michael Ker (748-7791)

OCTOBER: Cindy and James Little* (743-6777); Liz and Allan Murray (743-9190); Bev and Charlie Mountain (746-6339)

NOVEMBER: Anne and Roger Slaby* (748-4623); Maria and Siggi Kemmler (746-8751); Sharon Tillie (748-8254)

- * Indicates team leader.
- Please let your team leader and Maria Kemmler know if you can't come to the meeting.
- The team leader will select one team member to bring a half litre of milk.
- The team under each month's heading will supply goodies, set up and make tea and coffee, and be responsible for the clean-up after the meeting. The teams should be at the hall by 7:15 PM.
- Maria will look after the kitchen supplies. If anything is needed, or if there are questions or problems, please phone her at 746-8751.

**PLEASE REMEMBER TO RETURN YOUR
LIBRARY BOOKS AT THE NEXT MEETING!**