



# NEWSLETTER

Volume 22:4 Editor: Ian E. Efford April 2011

## President's Message

Those of you with some of the early rhododendrons, like 'Christmas Cheer' or 'Rosa Mundi' should be having a good display of pink colour in your garden about now. Lucky you! There are a few around in various gardens I have seen lately. (There is a gorgeous plant just over the fence in the neighbour's yard that is teasing me.) Another rhodo that may be out in your garden is 'Snow Lady', as mine is just about ready to burst open. The heathers are also adding lots of colour to our gardens this time of the year along with all the flowering bulbs. Spring is coming, even though on some days the weather does not feel like it. Everything seems so late this year compared to the last couple of springs that started so very early.

The Plant Sale is coming together. Growers and Commercial interests have been invited. The venue is booked. The organizing team is working through a long list of things to do. At the April meeting there will be sign-up sheets to put your name on in order to help out with this major club fund-raiser. There will be many jobs to fill, both on the Friday evening and on the Saturday.

We will also be interested in having members sign up to give a short demonstration of about 15 minutes in length. Topics could include: Planting, Rhodo nutrition, Pruning, Watering, Types of Rhodos, etc. What could you do in one of these areas?

A couple of weeks ago I attended the District 1 meeting for the area rhodo presidents. It was interesting to hear what some of the other clubs are doing. Glen Jamison, ARS Editor and vireya fanatic, wondered if there are any people here on the Island that are interested in getting together to talk viryeas. If you are interested, contact him.

See you at the meeting on April 6<sup>th</sup>.

David Annis

## From the Editor

I would like to thank Siggie Kemmler for his stellar work in formatting the newsletters of the past months. This job has now been taken up by Mary-Lynn Boxem who has more experience with formatting material for newsletters. This is her first edition. Welcome aboard Mary-Lynn.

In taking over the programme coordinator's job at short notice, I forgot the May speaker had already been arranged and apologize to Siggie and Ken. This does not mean that they will not speak in next year's programme! At the moment, I have most of next year's speakers lined up and am in the process of trying to attract a "star" speaker for September. I am also waiting for confirmation of the May speaker. You will be informed as soon as I have that information.

Ian E. Efford (efford@shaw.ca)

## Coming Events

April 6  
Norma Senn:  
"Rhododendron  
Gardens of the South  
Island of New Zealand"

April 30  
Plant Sale and Garden  
Show at the Cow-Ex,  
10am - 2pm (p. 7)

April 16  
Cairnsmore Place Plant  
Sale (p. 7)

May 4  
To be announced

May 22  
A Self Guided Tour of  
Nine Nanaimo Gardens  
(p. 8)

*Also remember the Annual  
Picnic in June.*

## Examining the Way We Garden

It is rare for this newsletter to move outside the immediate realm of rhododendrons: this is an exception. I would like to bring to your attention two books that focus on the myths in gardening and the fact that most of these myths are not based on fact. Although much of our gardening has been learned from our parents, many of their home truths were wrong! The two books were written by **Linda Chalker-Scott** who was a laboratory research scientist and then changed careers to become a professor of horticulture. In making this transition, she drew on her critical scientific training and examined all aspect of horticulture from a scientific perspective. The result is two very readable books that are made up of short chapters. Each chapter states a “well-know truth” and then proceeds to examine the scientific knowledge behind it. Often no factual support for the “truth” could be found and the way we have been told to garden is not the best action if we wish to obtain the best results. Each chapter then ends with a short summary of the recommended way to deal with the problem.

For example, in the second volume, she examines, foliar feeding; companion planting; night light; red leaves and what they tell us about the plant's health; winter watering; sterilizing clippers; water crystals; root snorkels; milk and roses; weed-killing gluten; and compost tea, among other ideas. The chapters are short, interesting, scientifically accurate, well-written and will make you change your gardening habits often acquired over many years.

I highly recommend that you read these two books, published by the University of Washington Press:

- ***The Informed Gardener***
- ***The Informed Gardener Blooms Again***

In order to whet your appetite, what follows is one of the chapters from the second book, printed with permission of the author. It deals with a topic often discussed among rhododendron growers - whether or not to use western red cedar chips as a mulch. I might add a note of local interest on this matter. The small shingle factory on North Road, on the left just before the Bing Creek Waste Disposal Facility, has been a source of free cedar chips over the last few years. Recently, I went there only to discover that the plant, the trailer home and everything else was gone! That is except for half an acre or more of cedar chips. I drive right up to the piles [through the second gate away from #18 Highway], and load them into my trailer.

Ian E. Efford

## The Myth of Allelopathic Wood Chips

By *Linda Chalker-Scott*

### The Myth

*"Wood chips made from cedars will kill landscape plants."*

I have an ongoing love affair with wood-chip mulches. Invariably after giving a presentation on sustainable landscape management, I get the "But what about ... ?" questions. Recently, the concerns have been "But what about cedar wood chips? I've heard they are toxic and will kill my plants." There are many references to this ability, called allelopathy—the suppression of plant growth due to toxic compounds in the tissues of another plant—on the Internet and in popular publications. A recent article in *Grounds Maintenance* states that "allelopathic mulches include uncomposted sawdust of redwood (*Sequoia*) and cedar (*Cedrus*); the bark of spruce (*Picea*), larch (*Larix*)-and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga*); and both the leaves and sawdust of *Eucalyptus*." Web sites warn against the use of cedar wood chips, citing cases in which toxic leachate from wood and foliage has killed plants and animals in both terrestrial and aquatic systems. Other sites suggest that volatile chemicals released from cedar foliage will inhibit seed germination, kill seedlings, and cause tip burn on the foliage of established plants. Gardening Q&A pages zoom in on the mention of cedar mulch and attribute landscape problems to its use. No wonder there is widespread concern on how safe cedar-based mulches are for healthy landscape plants.

### The Reality

There are bona fide examples of allelopathy in tree species. Probably the best known is black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), which contains the compound juglone. This water-soluble member of the quinone family is found in all parts of the black walnut and is quite effective in killing competitors, especially seedlings and other shallowly rooted plants. It appears that juglone reduces oxygen uptake and photosynthetic activity, inhibiting the growth of sensitive plants. Nevertheless, there are a variety of landscape plant materials that are resistant to juglone toxicity.

On the other hand, there is virtually no documented evidence for allelopathic activity in those trees commonly called cedars (and which include *Thuja*, *Juniperus*, and *Cedrus* spp.). Though one study suggests that Douglas fir seedlings might be sensitive to *Thuja* extracts, these seedlings were held under highly artificial laboratory conditions (i.e., were submersed in solutions for seventy-four hours).

Cedars, especially Thuja species, have developed chemical weapons against a number of pests and pathogens. Researchers have found that *Thuja plicata* heartwood contains thujaplicin, a water-soluble tropolone that inhibits not only various bacteria and fungi but tumor activity as well. This antimicrobial activity is probably responsible for the rot-resistant nature of cedar wood. There is, however, no evidence that this substance harms plant tissues.

Another weapon in cedar's chemical arsenal is thujone, one of several essential oils found in the foliage of Thuja and other species, including junipers and sage. Best known for its ability to repel clothing moths, thujone and other foliar terpenes also repel, or kill cockroaches, termites, carpet beetles, Argentine ants, and odorous house ants. These compounds are not readily soluble in water but volatilize and become airborne. The lack of solubility also suggests that this compound will not leach

into nearby aquatic areas, despite concerns to the contrary.

### The Bottom Line

- It is unlikely that wood-chip mulches containing cedar will have negative effects on established landscape plants.
- The allelopathic activities attributed to mulches made from cedar and other species may actually be due to other factors, such as nutrient and light limitations.
- Seeds and seedlings, whether weeds or desirable species, are more sensitive to mulch suppression, as they do not have established root systems.

**Quoted from “The Informed Gardener Blooms Again” with permission of the author.**

### The Best Rhododendrons for the Valley The Views of Some of Our Most Experienced Growers

As a large number of people purchase their rhododendrons at this time of the year, I have asked four of our most experienced growers for their recommendations.

#### Ingeborg Woodworth

<i>R. yakushmanum</i>	Various
<i>R. macrophyllum</i>	Pink
Annah Krushke	Reddish-purple
Taurus	Red

#### Leslie Drew

P.J.M.	Light purple/Light violet
Point Defiance	White, pink edge
<i>R. fortunei</i>	Lilac to pink
<i>R. yakushmanum</i> 'Ken Janeck'	Fuchsine-pink
<i>R. occidentale</i>	

#### Alan Campbell

<i>R. augustinii</i>	Blue trough purple
Halfdan Lem	Red
Horizon Monarch	Yellow
Jean's Favourite	Blue

#### Roger Salby

Weston's Aglow	Purplish pink, red spots
Starbrjght Champagne	Pale yellow, deep red throat
Capistrano	Yellow
Wind River	Yellow to light purplish pink
Polarnacht	Beetroot purple

## Magnificent Failure – Playfair Park

M.J. Harvey

This is the story of a group of gardeners who came together through the urging of **Adam Szczawinski** with the aim of founding a national arboretum in Canada. Dr. Szczawinski had been appointed Provincial Botanist in 1955 based at the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, on Vancouver Island, and threw himself immediately into saving the former Victoria water supply reservoir at Thetis Lake from development, writing a series of popular handbooks and curating the plant collections. He also had a vision of founding a major national arboretum in the vicinity of Victoria and in 1956 brought together a group of about ten people to form The Arboretum Society of the Pacific Northwest. The reasons for suggesting the national arboretum be on Vancouver Island were that it has the mildest climate in the whole of Canada [Zone 9], and although the Vancouver area climate was similar if damper, there was a possible pollution problem as well as higher land prices.

The first task of the new society was to scout a suitable tract of land and a number of possible sites were examined for soil and drainage conditions, but it became obvious that a single suitable area was not available. So it was decided to search for a series of smaller plots, each plot to specialize in a particular aspect.

At this point the Municipality of Saanich came to the rescue. [I should mention that Greater Victoria is a loose association of thirteen independent municipalities and several unincorporated areas; of the municipalities, Saanich, to the north of the city of Victoria, has the largest population.] At the time Saanich was in the process of developing a parks system. The twenty-five designated parks were initially looked after by ten volunteer park committees, each committee being given an annual grant of about \$200.

One of these parks was a 3.7 ha [9-acre] rock knoll called Playfair Park which had been cleared of stones and stumps by volunteers drawn from the neighbourhood and led by **Norman Zapf**. In a 1958 Saanich set up a parks department with **A.E. Richman** as Superintendent who saw to it that an upper portion of Playfair was set aside for Phase 1 of the arboretum project and was to be devoted to the display of rhododendrons and other *ericaceae*. There was an agreement that once the arboretum was set up Saanich Parks Department would take over its maintenance.

Meanwhile, on the political side, the initial premise of the Arboretum Society had been based on support from

the Federal Government of Canada. **George Chatterton**, who had been Reeve of Saanich and who had encouraged the Society from its beginning, was elected Member of Parliament in the Conservative government of **John Diefenbaker**. George Chatterton put the case for a national arboretum to the Minister of Agriculture, **Alvin Hamilton**, who was impressed with the idea and promised his full support, agreeing to fund the project and provide land. Then, just as the Arboretum Society was getting started, a general election defeated the Conservatives, installing the Liberal government of Lester B. Pearson, which insisted that, despite possible climatic drawbacks, the proper place for a national arboretum had to be the Capital City – Ottawa. It was at this point that the Arboretum Society scaled down its site search and decided to set up a series of smaller areas, and as it turned out Playfair Park was the first and last of these.

Despite the loss of national support the members of the Arboretum Society, with the continuing help of Saanich parks Department, began the process of assembling material to plant in Playfair Park. They received a flood of material both nationally and internationally in addition to the plants raised from, and cuttings by, the members themselves.

Locally **Ed Lohbrunner** provided some rhododendrons – he had started with the intention of setting up a rhododendron nursery but ran into frost drainage problems and became famous for alpiners. The camellias came from the old Layritz nursery. **Richard Layritz** (1867-1954) had run the largest nursery in British Columbia supplying many of the young sequoias now a prominent feature of Victoria. Further up Vancouver Island the Royston nursery of **Ted and Mary Greig** supplied much material and from the mainland of British Columbia, **Wilson's** Heather Farm at Sardis sent numerous *Calluna* and *Erica* plants.

Over the border in Seattle **J.A. Witt** of the University of Washington Arboretum donated in 1962 a large number of rooted cuttings including 350 named Glenn Dale azaleas. Further afield the garden designer **Beatrix Farrand** donated seeds from Maine, **Eric Saville** sent cuttings from Windsor Great Park and Edinburgh Botanic Garden also contributed seeds. These are just a few of the contributors and for the time the list was very comprehensive.

One of the more unlikely donations was a camphor tree, *Cinnamomum camphora*, raised from seed on Saltspring Island and donated to the garden. This species is usually

thought of as tropical and although thought most unlikely to survive it was accepted and dutifully planted out. It not only survived but also grew robustly and is now a tall evergreen tree. Its leaves give off that characteristic nose-clearing odour when crushed.

The garden was officially opened in April 1959 by **Mrs. Frank Ross**, wife of Lieutenant governor of the Province of British Columbia, and herself Patroness of the Society.

In the early years gifts and purchases continued to be made and by 1963 the Plant Accessions List, maintained by **Stuart Holland**, recorded that about 650 species and hybrid rhododendrons, 600 azaleas of all sorts, 45 camellias, 300 heathers, daphnes, cypress and companion plants had been planted.

But all was not well – a succession of cold winters eliminated many of the plants a year or so after planting. In addition the members record “an astoundingly high rate of vandalism, especially of the small plants.” It was obvious that some people regarded the park as a free nursery with which to stock their own gardens. For instance, the Seattle gift of 350 Glenn Dale azaleas vanished to the last plant. Another problem recorded was the impossibility of keeping labels on the plants.

The Arboretum Society was officially wound up in 1980 and the dream of an arboretum on the Saanich Peninsula was reluctantly abandoned at a meeting of a majority of the original group.

So, after nearly fifty years, what remains of the original plantings? Actually, an impressive display. Natural selection (as well as the un-natural selection mentioned above) has eliminated many of the more tender species. Most of the slower-growing plants have gone because the growth in height of the more vigorous hybrids has shaded them out. Now the visitor walks under rather than between the bushes, at times in a tunnel formed by the arching growth of the plants, some of which are up to 8 meters (26 ft.) tall. The camellias, being shade tolerant, have survived extremely well. The rhododendrons give a magnificent display which is a matter of local pride although to get to them one has to negotiate a maze of residential streets and there are even keen gardeners in Victoria who have not visited the park.

In 2000 **Ken Webb** and **Bill McMillan** of the Victoria Rhododendron Society got together an informal group to meet in Playfair Park on Wednesdays at noon. This became the Playfair park Study group and had the aim of identifying the plants present and mapping them. Bill was contacted by **Catherine Skinner** and given the

archival file of the Arboretum Society which had been maintained by **Stuart Holland** and which has a complete list of the plants and their donors. Remarkably there are even receipts from the Royston Nursery of **Ted** and **Mary Greig** dated October 1961. Using these lists in conjunction with a variety of reference and picture books we were able to put names on many of the rhododendrons.

The natural history of the park is that it belongs in the garry oak-camas summer-dry ecosystem. The light shade cast by the overstorey of oaks [*Quercus garryana*] gives protection to the rhododendrons from the summer sun and the wind. The shallow soil and the Victoria summer drought have been ameliorated by the park department’s mulching the beds and installing an irrigation system. Adjacent to the rhododendrons are rocky areas still bearing native patches of camas bulbs, dogwood bushes [*Cornus nuttallii*, the Provincial Flower of British Columbia], snowberry [*Symphoricarpos albus*], ocean spray [*Holodiscus discolor*] and many other herbs and shrubs.

Part of the success of Playfair Park is due to its topography and its mild climate. The park consists of a rocky knoll in the center of the Saanich Peninsula and was presumably made into a park because the surface rock made it difficult to service housing lots. Being somewhat distant from the coast it largely avoids the chilling effects of the morning coastal fogs and the cool afternoon on-shore convention breezes. This enables the site to warm up and develop a little heat on summer afternoons obviously helping the cinnamon tree and the fan palms [*Trachycarpus fortunei*] to thrive. The fact that the site is elevated enables cold air to drain down the slope on still, clear nights avoiding damaging spring frosts.

A 1984 photograph shows the shrubs up to waist high but the past twenty years have seen a phenomenal growth of the plants that now tower above one’s head. Most of the flowers can only be seen from underneath. What to do? Saanich Parks Department has asked the Victoria Rhododendron Society for advice on the treatment of the rhododendrons – pruning, thinning, transplanting – and we have been hesitant in coming up with suggestions. This brings to mind a parallel but larger situation in England when the Wakehurst Estate, laid out originally by **Sir George Loder**, was given to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew [“Kew-in-the-Country”]. The main planting, now called Himalayan Valley, had become overgrown into an impenetrable tangle of rhododendrons. The remedy of the gardeners in charge,

of taking out two in every three bushes, was criticized at the time as too severe, but now the area is accessible and everyone is happy with it. Something similar may be necessary at Playfair Park but no one wants to do the selection or take responsibility. A little more mapping and labeling is probably still needed.

This account is a compilation from many sources. It depends most heavily on the lists and notes compiled for the Arboretum society by Stuart Holland and kindly loaned to us by Catherine Skinner. Also quoted is the twenty-fifth anniversary account of the Society by Catherine Skinner, and the book *Rhododendrons on a Western Shore* edited by **Alec McCarter** and published by the Victoria Rhododendron Society in 1989.

For visitors to Victoria wishing to visit Playfair Park, one route is to take Quadra Street north and to turn right one block past the Tattersall lights on to Rock Street at the convenience store.

[Editor: In recent editions of our newsletter, I printed and article about Playfair Park and in the last edition, a follow-up note recommending members find time to visit this park during the flowering season. Since then, I have found the above article on the history of this park and thought that you would be interested. It is Reprinted from the Fall 2004 edition of the Journal of the American Rhododendron Society with permission of the editor. If someone visits the park this spring, please send me one or two photos.]

### *Rhododendron anwhiense*



*Photo by Alan Kepert*

“*Rhododendron anwhiense* [Subsection Maculifera.] is not well-known here but must be regarded as one of the finest in the Rhododendron genus. The Maculifera series contains a number of superb species, including *morii*, *pachysanthum*, *pachytrichum*, and *pseudochrysanthum*. This is a compact, free-flowering, and generally hardy plant which should be suitable for most locations.....”

**Do any of our members grow this species on Vancouver Island? The other species in the group are grown by members and, in my experience, morii is a very floriferous and beautifully formed plant.**

## Annual General Meeting

The AGM will take place during the May General Meeting. As required by our constitution, below is a proposed slate of candidates for election to the Executive and Convenor positions for next year. This slate is not final and other members are encouraged to consider standing for any of the positions. Please let me know if you wish to add your name to the list of candidates to fill one of these positions.

Sharon Tillie  
sharontillie@shaw.ca

### Executive

Past President: David Annis  
President: Ian Efford  
Vice President: Sandra Stevenson  
Secretary: Leslie Bundon  
Treasurer: Bill Dumont  
Membership: Marie Jacques

### Members at Large

Bernie Dinter, Carrie Nelson, Elaine Kitchen,  
Christopher Justice

### Convenors

Sunshine: Mary Gale  
Tea: Debra Kobulka  
Raffle: Hilda Gerrits  
Club Liason: Alan Campbell  
Library: Dixie Mueller  
Speakers: Ian Efford and team  
Newsletter Editor: Ian Efford  
History: Mona Kaiser and Liz Murray  
Garden Tours: Sharon Tillie  
Plant Sale: The team  
Facility Liason: Roy Elvins  
Christmas Party: The team

### Cairnsmore Place Plant Sale

A plant sale will be held on Saturday, April 16 at Cairnsmore Place, 250 Cairnsmore St from 11:00 to 2:00. This is a fundraiser organized by the Volunteer Gardeners to raise funds for the maintenance of the gardens. Everyone is invited to tour the yard to witness the results of work done over the past two years for the enjoyment of the residents and staff. There will be over 300 plants, some birdhouses, and garden ornaments for sale.

## Special Freebies for First 100 Customers



## Giant Rhododendron and Plant Sale - Cowichan Garden Fair

**Saturday April 30, 2011**

**10 am – 2 pm**

## Cowichan Exhibition Main Hall Duncan

- Doors open at 10 am sharp until 2 pm.
- Come early for best selection
- Truss (flower) display of local rhodos in bloom
- Demonstrations and presentations
- More than 3000 rhodos and other plants for sale
- Unique, special and hard to find rhodos for sale
- Many different growers and sellers of high quality plants from all over Vancouver Island
- Free planting, growing, maintenance advice from dedicated rhodoholics and garden experts
- Gardening Demonstrations and valuable advice
- Unique and interesting vendors and garden suppliers
- Free Coffee and Donuts for first 200 customers

**Nanaimo Rhododendron Society  
presents**



**A Self Guided Tour of Nine  
Nanaimo Gardens**

**Sunday, May 22nd, 2011  
10am to 4pm**

**Tickets \$15**



**Available at:  
Turley's, Buckerfields, Art Knapp,  
Dig This, Diana's Garden Center**

**For more info see our website at  
[Nanaimo.rhodos.ca](http://Nanaimo.rhodos.ca)**

**Home and Garden Pest Management  
Guide for British Columbia**

*Joan Rich*

Have you ever wondered what is eating your rhodies or whether that mysterious plant is a weed or a rare find? I recommend the new 2009 edition of the **Home and Garden Pest Management Guide for British Columbia** as a great resource. Included are sections on prevention of problems, cultural methods for pest management, plant disorders not caused by pests, and detailed information on the diseases and pests of fruits, berries, vegetables, ornamentals, lawns, and house plants. Scientifically-based information on the management of pests and diseases that plague our gardens is included. I particularly like the dozens of excellent photos of beneficial and harmful insects, weeds, and plant diseases that help the reader identify and deal with plant problems. This guide is available through Crown Publications in Victoria. Call 1-800-663-6105 or email [crownpub@gov.bc.ca](mailto:crownpub@gov.bc.ca). You can also order online at [www.crownpub.bc.ca](http://www.crownpub.bc.ca).

Reproduced from the March 2011 issue of the Rhodovine, the newsletter of the Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society [Modified by the editor].

**Plant Sale**

The new, expanded plant sale and garden fair is designed, over the next couple of years, to be of increased benefit to the community, the nurseries and the members. In this first year, in particular, we will need as many volunteers as possible. Many of the jobs will not require physical effort but simply someone to monitor a particular location. If you cannot volunteer at the next meeting, please e-mail us and offer your services.

**Bus Tour**

We need a few more people to go on this year's spectacular tour of gardens in the Fraser Valley. If you have not signed up already, do so at the next meeting or let us know by phone or e-mail. It is great fun and everyone is encouraged to bring a friend.

*Newsletter formatting/desktop  
publishing by Mary-Lynn Boxem*