



NEWSLETTER

Volume 23:4 Editor: Ian Efford April 2012

President's Message

In May we must vote on a slate of candidates for the Executive and to carry out various supporting roles in the society during 2012-13. We need new blood and would welcome members who would be willing to play a role in running the Society. If you are interested, let me know at the next meeting. In particular, I have been both President and Editor this year and it is usually the case that the President takes the job for two years. These two jobs take the most time and I would like to hand one over to a new player! Alternatively, what about sharing the editorial job with the idea of taking it over completely in the following year?

At the recent Executive meeting, it was decided that our name tags had seen better days. We are going to copy the plastic tags used by the Nanaimo RS and hope to have one for everyone before the Garden Fair this year. If not, we will certainly have them for September. To make sure that all the names are correct, the list of members will be circulated next Wednesday and you will be asked to check that the spelling, etc. is correct. It was decided that the society will pay for these tags the first time but we will charge for lost tags and add a substantial fine! The CVGC gives a free raffle ticket to anyone wearing their tag when they buy tickets. This encourages wearing of the tag and members to learn the names of other members. We hope to adopt this idea in September.

As spring is here, you are now enjoying some of your rhododendrons in flower. It is a great time to be gardening especially as some of the earliest ones are particularly attractive. Let us hope that the weather improves and we can enjoy the blossom without having to wear a heavy sweater!

I look forward to seeing you all at Wednesday's meeting.

Ian E. Efford

Coming Events

April 4
Bill Bischoff: "A Prize Winning Garden in the Making"

May 2
Dennis Bottemiller:
"Variables in Propagation of Rhododendron Cuttings"

May 5
2012 Cowichan Valley
Garden Fair and Rhodo Sale
– Cowex

District 1 Meeting

The American Rhododendron Society is divided into Districts and we are part of District 1 which represents members in British Columbia. Our Director for District 1, Mary Parker, is our representative on the ARS governing board. We now have six branches in District 1 and twice each year the presidents of all six branches meet to discuss issues of mutual benefit and changes that might be proposed at the ARS board meetings. This year, it was the turn of CVRS to play host to the District 1 meeting which took place at Lake Cowichan. Ingeborg Woodworth make all local arrangements. The meeting was in the old school house right next to the Lake Cowichan Memorial Rhododendron Garden and the lunch was generously supplied by the Lake Cowichan in Bloom executive lead by Pat Foster. Everyone was most grateful for their generosity.

The meeting ended with a bang when Sandra Stevenson and I handed out a gift package prepared by Bill Dumont to all the attending societies, Mary Parker and Ken Webb as the District 1 leaders, and Garth Wedemire, the District webmaster. In addition, one package was given to Pat Foster. The packages contained two bottles of Bill Dumont's wine, a cork screw and a notice asking people to provide gifts for the silent auction at the September Conference. By voice and e-mail, we have received notes of appreciating to CVRS for hosting the meeting and for the gifts. At the meeting, each president is asked to submit a report on the progress of their society during the previous year. My report is re-printed below.



*District 1 Attendees March 13th 2012 Lake Cowichan
[photo by Garth Wedemire]*

Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society Report to the American Rhododendron Society March 2012

The Society ran smoothly this year with an excellent programme of speakers and a gradual increase in membership. Attendance varied but we usually had 25-40 at each meeting. One of the highlights of the year was the talk by Bill Terry who spoke on his search for *Meconopsis* species in the Himalayas and the plants he found associated with these poppies. In order to attract new members and make the activities of the society better known in the area, the Cowichan Valley Garden Club was asked to co-sponsor this talk and for its membership to attend. The result was a very well received talk with over 120 attendees.

This effort to publicize the society's activities is also manifest in our plant sale which has expanded into a general Garden Fair [cowichanvalleygardenfair.com]. Most of the nurseries at the Garden Fair are specialized rhododendron growers but there are also nurseries selling other plants and a wide variety of vendors of garden-related tools, etc. At the same time, we are offering free booths to any non-profit garden or plant clubs in the area to publicize their activities.

This results is that we are becoming well-known throughout the garden community.

Another annual activity is our donation of \$500 worth of rhododendrons to a public site in the Regional District. So far, rhododendrons have been planted at the new Vancouver Island University campus in Duncan; the Rhododendron Memorial Garden in Lake Cowichan and a

site is being prepared by the Municipality at the road junction at the north end of Crofton. At the moment, this year's planting is being negotiated for a site at the Shawnigan Lake Community Centre. We try to find sites where the plants will be fully exposed to the public and also well-cared for by a responsible community organization.

The society has been very active financially with a significant cash flow and we expect to break even by the end of the year with a comfortable bank balance. We would like to improve in three areas: increase the number of younger members and the computer literacy of our volunteers and our

propagation group. The latter has been plagued by very low attendance which means that our production of plants for raffles, gifts to new members and other donations is drying up.

Finally, we are supporting the Nanaimo RS in its hosting of the ARS Conference in September. We have assumed responsibility for the silent auction, two before and after conference bus tours, and by producing an information booklet on the public rhododendron gardens on Vancouver Island.

Ian E. Efford

Duncan Elementary Celebrates 100 Years

Mona Kaiser



December 2013 will mark the 100th anniversary of one of our Valley's most notable buildings, Duncan Elementary School. The building was designed by renowned architect, W.T. Whiteway. Whiteway is perhaps best known for designing Vancouver's landmark Sun Tower, the beautiful and still standing structure that for the two years following its construction in 1912, held the record as the tallest building in the British Empire.¹ One hundred years later, Whiteway's landmark Duncan building not only stands, but has been the temporary home to thousands of Duncan students. Currently, nearly 400 French immersion students take their classes within the elegant halls of École Duncan Elementary.



W.T. Whiteway's World Building (as it was known then), in 1912 and today.

In anticipation of centennial celebrations, the Outdoor Classroom Committee of the school's Parent Advisory Council (PAC), has set about to restore the landscaped beds in front of the school's main building. The garden beds are long overdue for a significant renovation. The beds currently consist of a hodge-podge mix of plants and shrubs that are either over-mature, inappropriate for the site, or in need of substantial pruning. To help with this task, the PAC has organized a group of keen gardening parents who have volunteered to do the work.



A garden in need of some help and the team ready to do the work: Ecole Duncan's Outdoor Classroom Committee building a school vegetable garden, spring 2011.

It is with plant material that we hope members of the C.V.R.S. might be able to help us. Alan & Liz Murray have already kindly donated two large mature rhododendrons to move to the site, as well as some smaller plants. The two beds are 800 square feet each, so we have plenty of room to work with. We also have parents with strong backs and utility trailers. The beds themselves have in-ground irrigation (a system donated by Corix Water Products), and the soil has been amended by the donations of garden soil (Robart Contracting) and sea soil compost (SEA SOIL™). Since the gardens are east facing and the building itself provides good shelter from intense afternoon sun, the beds would be ideal for growing rhododendrons.

We are particularly interested in plants that may have an historical link with the school. Given the age of the building and the long-established presence of rhododendron enthusiasts in the Valley, some of these individuals may well have attended, taught at, or simply admired the grand building on Nagel Street. Indeed, as in our case, the architect of our own garden on Grieve Road, Edna Green, was an elementary teacher at the school.



Off to university: a fine specimen of R. yunnanense from seed. Moving day for the Buchanan Simpson rhododendrons, 1975. Journal of the American Rhododendron Society (Vol. 33, No. 1, January 1979).

The thought of bringing together a collection of rhododendrons either developed by local hybridizers, or chosen to honour the memory of local rhododendron growers, or simply favourites recommended by current rhododendron fans, seems like a wonderful opportunity to create a living museum in a historically significant location, that could cultivate for students, teachers and the community alike, a tangible link between the present and the past.



Teacher Julie-Marie Harris and her grade 3 Ecole Duncan students get a physical lesson in math, May 2011.

The École Duncan PAC would be very grateful for plants you might donate for our landscaping project or stories of plants or persons associated with our school, that we might try to incorporate into our plan. Please contact Mona Kaiser at 250-715-1814 or mona.kaiser@shaw.ca.

¹ Tom Henry, *Small City in a Big Valley: The Story of Duncan (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1999)*, 74-75.

Cairnsmore Plant Sale

On Saturday, April 21 at Cairnsmore Place, 250 Cairnsmore St., a plant sale will be held from 11:00 to 2:00. This is a fund-raiser organized by the Volunteer Gardeners to raise funds for the maintenance of the gardens. Everyone is invited to tour the garden to witness the results of work done over the past three years for the enjoyment of the residents and staff. There will be over 300 plants, some birdhouses, and garden ornaments for sale.

[Ed. If you go to this sale, you can visit the Duncan Elementary School building and garden described in another article in this issue. It is just down the road on the other side.]

Cyclamen

What more could one want in a genus than one that is renowned because, although it is small, there are species which flower in every month of the year. It is the only genus thus endowed: the Cyclamen, which even without flowers would still rank as a foliage plant.

Listed in order of hardiness are:

Cyclamen purpurascens blossoms rose-purple and fragrant in summer.

C. hederifolium blooms bountifully in fall.

C. coum, in magenta, pink or white, blooms all winter.

C. pseudibericum blooms pink or white in the spring.

CC. trochopteranthum, *mirabile*, *parvifolium*, the honey-scented *cilicium*, and the miniature *intaminatum* are all hardy.

Hardy only to Zone 7 are *CC. repandum*, *libanoticum*, *graecum*, and the dainty *balericum* and *creticum*.

Less hardy, to 26 degrees, are *CC. africanum*, *rohlfianum*, *persicum*, *somalense*, and *cyprium*.

For information on Cyclamen culture, go to the website www.cyclamen.org – they are an enchanting genus and make excellent companion plants in the rhododendron garden.

*Frances Burns, Editor, Eugene newsletter
December*

Victoria Chrysanthemum Society Annual Cutting Sale



April 14, 2012 10:00 am to 12:00 noon

**St. Mathias Church Hall, 600 Richmond Ave. (at Richardson), Victoria BC
Parking and hall entrance are off Richardson Ave.**

**Rooted cuttings of disbuds and sprays for sale.
There will be a large variety of cultivars available
\$3.00 each**

Propagation Meetings

As I mentioned in my report to the ARS, our propagation meetings have been poorly attended although they provide attendees with an excellent source of information on the cultivation and propagation of rhododendrons as well as considerable information on other garden plants. Your Executive discussed this at the last meeting and decided to try a new format. We plan four two hour sessions a year, probably on a Saturday morning, where propagation is discussed and demonstrated. In addition, attendees will be encouraged to raise a certain number of plants from cuttings with the continuous help, advice and encouragement of some of the more experienced members. We need to raise more plants so that we can have a steady stream of plants for our monthly raffle and for donations.

Here is an example of what one can produce in a relatively short time. This small plant of Girard's Fuchsia was taken as a cutting from Finnerty Garden at the University of Victoria in July of 2010 along with a number of cuttings of other evergreen azaleas. It has been outside for the last year but was brought into the greenhouse this spring and is already in full bloom. Eventually, it will grow to a large plant which will be about a metre high but can reach two metres or more across. During the flowering period, it will be completely covered in blooms so that the rest of the plant cannot be seen. Quite spectacular!



If you would like to attend the next propagation workshop, please e-mail me at efford@shaw.ca and we will let you know when and where it will take place.

Ian E. Efford

Sheet Mulching Made Easy

What is sheet mulching?

Sheet mulching is a relatively simple technique for creating gardens rich in organic matter. The basic concept is to place layers of a variety of nitrogen and carbon rich materials on top of the soil, allowing them to break down naturally over time – in essence, composting right in the garden itself. Sheet mulching in various forms has been practiced for hundreds of years by small farmers worldwide and has been making a come-back in North

America in recent years. Sheet mulching also goes by the names of sheet composting, lasagna gardening and permaculture gardening.

Why sheet mulch?

Sheet mulching has several very useful applications for the urban environment. It is a very effective way of transforming unwanted lawn space into growing areas for vegetables, perennials, shrubs and trees. It is also a very effective way of dealing with very

weedy areas as the weeds themselves are decomposed in the process, adding their nutrients to the soil. Sheet mulching is a relatively inexpensive, quick and physically less demanding way of converting lawns as it does not require digging and turning of the soil. Sheet mulching is also an excellent way to make use of a large amount of organic waste materials and has the benefits of other mulching techniques such as water retention in the soil and the prevention of soil compaction.

What materials can be used in a sheet mulch?

Just like in a compost pile, it is important to have a balance of nitrogenous (nitrogen rich) and carbonaceous (carbon rich) materials. Suitable nitrogenous materials include: grass clippings, green prunings and other yard waste; manures; coffee grounds; alfalfa meal or pellets; kelp meal; blood and bone meal, etc.. Suitable carbonaceous materials include: newspapers (but not colored flyers); corrugated cardboard (with the tape removed); dried leaves; shredded woody materials such as raspberry canes, small branches, etc.; wood chips or bark (for the top layer only); weed free straws; etc.. Some finished compost is also recommended to introduce composting bacteria, fungi and other organisms into the sheet mulch.

How do you create a sheet mulch?

Follow these basic steps:

1. Prepare the area to be mulched. Begin by trampling or slashing any taller vegetation and leave it to lie on the ground. If the ground is heavily compacted, poke holes with a garden fork every foot or so to a depth of 6-12 inches. Soak the area well with a garden hose or sprinkler.

2. Add soil amendments (optional). If your soil requires amendments such as dolomite lime, rock phosphate, or other minerals, add them now. Soils in the Edmonton area may benefit from the addition of lime to break up clay but do not generally need any other amendments.

3. Layer of nitrogenous material – Add grass clippings, manure, etc. to a depth of 1 inch. Wet down with garden hose.

4. Newspaper or cardboard – Provide a ¼ inch layer of newspaper and/or corrugated cardboard, overlapping sheets by a minimum of 6 inches. This layer ensures that the weeds or grasses will not grow through the mulch. If the area is very weedy, this layer can be increased to ½ inch in thickness. Wet down thoroughly with a garden hose.

5. Layer of nitrogenous material – Provide another 1 inch layer of green materials, manure, etc. You have now “sandwiched” the carbon (newspapers) between two nitrogen layers, ensuring that your soil does not become depleted of nitrogen while breaking down the newspaper. Wet down with a garden hose.

6. Additional carbon materials – Now add a 1-3 inch layer of leaves, straw, finely shredded branches, etc. and wet down thoroughly once again.

7. Compost layer – A 1-3 inch layer of compost will ensure that you are introducing sufficient beneficial bacteria, fungi and other microbes into the sheet mulch. This layer also allows you to plant some plants into the sheet mulch without cutting through the newspaper layer. Wet down with a garden hose.

8. Soil layer (optional) – If you have it available, you can add a 1-3 inch layer of soil on top of the compost. If you chose to add this layer, be certain that the soil is relatively free of weed seeds. Moisten with a garden hose.

9. Finishing layer – For aesthetics, moisture retention, and to reduce new weeds from germinating, add a 2” cover layer of wood chips, bark mulch, or another material. Compost can also be used as a finishing layer though it will be more prone to germinating new weed seeds. Leaves can be used as an effective top layer if they are in a protected area and will not be prone to blowing around. How do you plant into a sheet mulch?

Plant trees and shrubs prior to sheet mulching and work the sheet mulch around them (Do not allow sheet mulch materials to come into direct contact with the trunk of trees or shrubs). Perennials and annuals can be planted into the compost and soil layer or pockets of soil can be added into the sheet mulch to accommodate them. Their roots will soon penetrate through the carbon layers. It is best to transplant seedlings rather than seeding directly into the mulch as seeds can get lost in the coarse materials.

What happens in a sheet mulch as time goes by?

The introduction of all of this organic matter creates a feast for soil microbes and soil animals. Earthworms and other critters soon begin to feed on the newspaper and other materials, fertilizing and

aerating your soil in the process. In no more than two years, the newspaper and cardboard will have disappeared and the weeds will have decomposed as well. Some people chose to continually add new layers to the sheet mulch over time, employing a “no till” method of gardening.

[Editor: This article was copied but I have forgotten the source. There is a similar article in “The Urban Farmer” but it is has a number of differences although it might have been written by the same person. I apologize to the author and express thanks for a well written and informative article.]

<http://theurbanfarmer.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Sheet-Mulching-Made-Easy.pdf>

Milner Gardens & Woodland 2012 ‘Spring’ Speakers’ Series

Tickets \$10.00 each, or complete series \$25.00

**April 26th—Barrie Agar, Royal Roads University Hatley Park Head Gardener presents
“Working Smarter—Not Harder—Creates Gardening Enjoyment”**

**May 31st—Connie Kuramoto, Gaia College instructor and owner of “Gardens on the Go”
presents
“Healthy Soil Creates Beautiful & Bountiful Gardens”**

**All presentations 7:00 to 9:30 p.m. at Qualicum Beach Civic Centre, 747 Jones Street,
Qualicum Beach. Ticket sales at Milner Gardens & Woodland Welcome Centre and at the
door the evening of the presentation. Tickets are non-refundable.**

For more information www.milnergardens.org or

250-752-6153



David Annis, our past-president, was selected as the Silver Cup winner by the previous recipients of the cup. The cup was awarded at the Christmas party but, for once a photographer was not present. We have finally tracked David down with the cup and obtained this photo. Congratulations David!



2011-2012 Executive

Past President: David Annis
 President: Ian Efford
 (efford@shaw.ca 250597-4470)
 Vice President: Sandra Stevenson
 (pinchofherbs@shaw.ca 250-748-557)
 Secretary: Leslie Bundon
 Treasurer: Bill Dumont
 Membership: Marie Jacques

Members at Large

Bernie Dinter, Joe Hudak, Elaine Kitchen,
 Christopher Justice

Convenors

Sunshine: Mary Gale
 Tea: not filled
 Raffle: Hilda Gerrits
 Club Liason: Alan Campbell
 Library: Dixie Mueller
 Programme Co-ordinator: Alan Campbell
 Website and Newsletter Desktop Publisher:
 Contractor-Mary-Lynn Boxem
 Newsletter Editor: Ian Efford
 History: Mona Kaiser (pending) and
 Liz Murray
 Garden Tours: not filled
 Plant Sale:the team
 Facility Liason: Roy Elvins
 Christmas Party: The team

COWICHAN VALLEY RHODODENDRON SOCIETY

Programme for 2011-2012
7:30 pm at St John's Anglican Church
163 First St, Duncan, BC V9L 1R1
(1st and Jubilee)

September 7	Siggi Kemmler and Ken Webb "Rhododendron Nurseries in North Germany"
October 5	Bill McMillan "Selected English Gardens and Birds"
November 2	Gerry Gibbens "The Rhododendrons at VanDusen Gardens"
December 7	Christmas Party
February 1	Bill Terry "The Perfect Garden: Plant Hunting in Tibet" Co-Sponsored with the Cowichan Valley Garden Club
March 7	Geoff Ball "Milner Garden and its Rhododendrons"
March 20	District 1 Executive Meeting
April 4	Bill Bischoff "A Prize Winning Garden in the Making"
May 2	Dennis Bottemiller, Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden "Variables in Propagation of Rhododendron Cuttings"
May 5	Garden Fair and Rhododendron Sale
June 16	Summer Picnic