



NEWSLETTER

Volume 21 Number 8 Editor: Ian E. Efford and Siggie O. Kemmler December 2010

President's Message

Welcome to winter! How are your plants doing? First we get the 'marine effect' snow that dumps a fair amount of white stuff on us. And it is all very wet snow which is really heavy. Did you get outside in order to knock off that snow so that it did not break any of the branches? I was out Saturday with my granddaughter to do it and it turned out to be a nice little game for both of us!

Then we get the deep cold for a few days. Things look sad until it warms up. Take heart, most rhodos will weather this and are not bothered. (There are a few that are tender. You know which ones these are!) You will notice drooping leaves on the big leafed plants, but that is a factor of the cold. Hopefully it will not be too dry for too long. Usually we get rain after a few days of cold and snow.

Wasn't that a great talk by Glen Jamieson at the last meeting on Vireyas growing on a mountain on the island of Borneo? Glen knows how to put things together for an entertaining and informative talk. Also, those of you that missed the October 'Experts Panel' will have missed lots of basic information about rhododendrons. The four panelists did a terrific job. Hopefully we can run the panel again in the future.

The Christmas party is on for the next meeting, one of the highlights of the year for our club. It is a chance to enjoy some great food and socializing. It is a wonderful way to welcome the Christmas season. Remember to bring either an appetizer or a dessert to share with others. Also bring an unwrapped garden-related gift for the raffle. It shouldn't be all that expensive, perhaps around \$10. Raffle proceeds will be donated to the Food Bank and the Salvation Army. Speaking of Food Bank, you are welcome to bring non-perishables also which we will take over to the local Food Bank after our party. They will appreciate anything we donate.

If you are not able to attend our Christmas party, let me be the first to wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

David Annis

From the Editor

I have been promised a number of articles but, as can be expected, they are "in the post" and will no doubt appear in subsequent issues of the newsletter. In the mean time, I have reprinted three articles that should be of interest to members. Two are very old articles that appeared elsewhere and were identified by Noni Godfrey in the newsletter of NIRS and one is a reprint from the Rhodovine, the MARS newsletter.

Ian E. Efford [efford@shaw.ca]

CVRS Christmas Party

Make plans to attend our festive Christmas party. It will be held on the first Wednesday night in December, our usual meeting night. The date of that **Wednesday is December 1st**. It is intended to be a casual social event. Here are the details:

Time: 6:30 p.m.

Place: Anglican Church Hall

What to Bring:

1. Bring some 'finger food' of either the savory (appetizers) or the sweet variety (dessert).
2. Bring an unwrapped gift of up to \$10 to be raffled off.
3. Optional: Some people suggested that they would also bring donations that could be given to the food bank.

Wine, punch, and tea and coffee will be available.

Proceeds of the evening's raffle will be split and donated to the local Salvation Army and the local Food Bank.

If some of you wish to arrive early to help set up the hall, you would be most welcome. Some people will be starting to organize things about 5:15 pm.

Hope to see you there!

Recollections on the History of our Society: The Blessed Beginnings of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Club

Bev Mountain

I remember a very early meeting of the new club taking place in a storage shed behind what is now First Memorial Funeral Chapel. We had little or no funds to begin with, so the price was right. It was free.

The storage area was filled with pews and caskets. We had more members than seating in the pews allowed, and so the overflow of members arranged themselves on the caskets. Neither pews or caskets were very comfortable. This probably led to 1. A shorter meeting that night, 2. The membership to pay up, and 3. A search for a better and more comfortable meeting room.

The First Memorial Chapel was formerly the Catholic Church, hence the pews in the storage barn.

We could truthfully say; we had a blessed beginning.

[Bev now lives with a few rhododendrons on a farm in the Glenora area and can be reach at 250-746-6339]

Question and Answer

Question: My friend and I picked up several rhodies in one gallon pots last week. So what should we do with them now....should we plant them...or pot them upor keep over winter??

Answer: Hardy Rhododendrons and azaleas should go into the ground right away. So.....we should only purchase plants that we have room for – that can go into the ground soon after they are brought home. Plants that sit around in small pots will start to decline. Fall is the best time to plant rhododendrons. They will settle in and get growing without the dangers that come with a hot, dry summer. Fertilizing is not necessary now. It is just critical to have good soil with good compost and fine bark mulch. Worm castings mixed in the soil is very beneficial.

Some rhododendrons can do well in a large half barrel with very well-drained soil and lots of bark mulch. Make sure that the soil can't become water-

logged. Dwarf rhodies can be grown in half barrels all their lives. Other pots can be used such as large clay pots, wood or hypertufa – but not black or dark green. Dark pots heat up too quickly. Plants kept in black pots during the summer may die due to roots being over-heated.

Keep your rhodies out of the wind. Wind is very hard on rhododendrons – it desiccates and destroys the leaves. Big-leafed rhodies are most susceptible to wind damage. Finally, check the cold-hardiness of your plants. Any plant that won't take -15 degrees Celsius should be protected if it is in the ground or go into a greenhouse or garage with light when the thermometer dips.

Terry Richmond

[from the October 2010 Rhodovine, the MARS newsletter, edited by Linda Derkach]

[**Editor:** If, as projected, it is to be a very cold winter, rhododendrons in one gallon pots should be embedded in mulch or in the ground if you cannot plant them directly in the garden. This is because freezing can penetrate right through a small pot and kill the roots. To keep plants out of doors throughout the year in pots it is necessary to have large containers.]

More About Companion Plants

We all want our gardens to be colourful throughout the year and that is very difficult if we restrict plantings to our favourite rhododendrons. They might stretch through the first half of the year with some planning but the prospect is pretty bleak for the second half. This means that we should seek out annuals, perennials, trees and bushes that provide colour later in the year and sometimes shade during the hotter months. The recent article by Gordon MacKay discussed many of the acid loving plants and bulbs that would make ideal companions. Previous issues of the newsletter touch on some of the trees that are both very colourful and provide excellent shade. At the moment, we are enjoying a young *Stewartia* that is showing the spectacular red leaves of autumn and was reviewed in an article by Liz Murray in an earlier newsletter. At less than 2m it has a long way to go before it becomes a shade tree

but, in the mean time, it will give us autumn colour which compliments the dark green of the rhododendron leaves.

Another suggestion can be found in the November issue of the Yak [edited by Brenda Macdonald] which discussed *Disanthus cercidifolius* and the more commonly grown *Cercis* or redbud.

“The rich wine colour on the right (from the Bischoff’s garden) and the wonderful colour variation below, (from UBC’s Botany Photo of the Day) show the very rewarding fall colour of *Disanthus cercidifolius*, a shrubby tree with a relatively small distribution in parts of China and Japan. In summer the large, heart-shaped, blue-green leaves look remarkably like those of a *Cercis* or Redbud, but its fall colour is even more spectacular, and it is one of the few trees that will reliably colour up even in somewhat shady situations. Its blossoms are nondescript, certainly not the electric pink of the Redbud, and not even as showy as the strappy blossoms of its near relative the Witch Hazel. But its cold hardiness, resilience (*Cercis* wood is somewhat



“Scarlet Queen”. My introduction to this plant were our regular visits to California where gardens and parks contained a vivid red *Penstemon* “King George”. I made a great effort to find seeds of this plant to no avail. Finally, in Victoria, I did find seeds of a similar plant “Scarlet Queen”. I planted them in the spring and they grew to full flowering by the summer. I thought that the one that I showed at the September meeting was the end of the season flowering but here we are in late November and they are still in flower although rather crushed by the unseasonable snow. The following two photos were taken just before it snowed .

brittle and often sustains heavy winter damage due to snow load), affinity for the same acid soil as rhododendrons, and superb fall colour, make it an excellent choice for the Pacific Northwest garden.”

Finally, at the September meeting, I showed a companion plants that really impressed with its very bright red and white flowers. The is the *Penstemon*





Penstemons are perennials that originate in the Rockies and are therefore both hardy and drought tolerant. Over time, they will also grow to form quite large clumps. As companion plants they are ideal for some of your more sunny beds and those where the watering system does not quite reach.

Ian E. Efford

Penstemon photos taken by the author in the second half of November.



Fertilizer Basics: Azaleas and Rhododendrons

When nurseries grow azaleas and rhododendrons in containers, they often do it in a soil-less medium that contains no nutrients of its own. The nursery people have to add all the fertilizer the plants need to grow, and they tend to do it generously so that the plants are quick to reach saleable size.

When you plant an azalea or rhododendron, it quickly exhausts whatever nutrients remain in its root zone and has to reach out into surrounding

soil to get the nutrients it needs. You can help (and encourage root spread into native soil) by fertilizing. Plants need three major nutrients—nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K)—and several minor nutrients. The proportions of the major nutrients are listed in order (N-P-K) on the label under “Guaranteed analysis.” For example, a 10-8-6 fertilizer contains 10 percent nitrogen, 8 percent phosphorus, and 6 percent potassium. Because it contains all three major nutrients, it’s called a complete fertilizer. At nurseries and garden centers, you’ll find the general purpose fertilizers you’d expect, plus ones labeled specifically for azaleas and rhododendrons. The specialty fertilizers are formulated to acidify the soil, and usually derive their nitrogen from ammonium sulfate. That’s useful if your soil is not naturally acidic, but if your soil is already in the right range for azaleas and rhododendrons, there’s little advantage to an acid fertilizer. In such cases, general-purpose fertilizers work as well and usually cost less.

Commercial fertilizers come in either granular or liquid form. Granular fertilizers are usually cheaper, and are made to be scattered over the root zone two or three times each year. To encourage roots to grow out into native garden soil, sprinkle the fertilizer in a wide, doughnut-shaped band that straddles the edge of the drip line (the drip line is outside edge of the plant). Scatter it over the mulch and water it in.

Liquid fertilizer usually comes as soluble granules that you dissolve in water for application. It can be used two ways: sprayed onto the plants’ leaves (that’s called foliar feeding), or as a drench poured over the roots. Because liquid fertilizer is much less concentrated than granular, and because it flushes through the soil faster, you have to apply it more frequently—as often as once every week or two during the growing season. The nitrogen in liquid fertilizers is usually derived from urea, which can be absorbed through plant leaves. Do foliar feeding in the cool of the morning when the sun is not directly shining on the foliage, and when leaves are better able to take it in.

In principle, it’s best not to feed plants with high nitrogen after mid-summer, since fertilizer encourages plants to put on new growth that may not harden off in time to withstand fall frosts. Much depends on the plant’s age. Young plants need extra fertilizer to get established quickly, while mature plants don’t usually need much at all. Here’s a schedule that will give you healthy plants

that bloom well and hold up to the vicissitudes of climate.

At planting time - Before planting, some azalea and rhododendron specialists dig fertilizer into the soil. One good formula fortifies the planting soil with greensand for potassium, composted manure for nitrogen, and rock phosphate for phosphorus. The rock phosphate is important, since phosphorus is difficult to get into the root zone after planting (it doesn't move through the soil easily). Apply all ingredients according to label directions.

When a newly planted azalea or rhododendron drops its lower leaves, it's usually because the plant had to use up the nutrient reserves it stored there. That's a good sign that it needs feeding. Do that by sprinkling a complete fertilizer like a 10-10-6 plus trace elements on top of the soil before you water the plant in. Apply 1 tablespoon per foot of growth; in other words, give a 2-foot plant 2 tablespoons of complete fertilizer.

In early spring - As buds swell (but well before bloom) apply 10-8-6 granular rhododendron fertilizer or complete slow-release fertilizer. Some slow release fertilizers release in response to warmer temperatures and may not be effective in our cooler weather. Read the label. It takes about a handful per mature plant to do the job, but "don't put it on any heavier than you'd put salt on your corn or sugar on your grapefruit". If you're after more precision, a good rule of thumb is to apply one level tablespoon of fertilizer per foot of plant growth.

At leaf emergence - New leaves start growing just as blooms fade. After they unfold completely, apply another light dose of 10-8-6 or foliar fertilizer, especially if new leaves look pale.

In fall - Most plants don't usually need fall feeding, but they may benefit from top dressing with rotted manure in October. If you have plants that didn't put on much growth and look like they need a boost, you can give them a dose of 5-10-10 granular fertilizer. For greening of pale leaves: Use a foliar feed like Miracle grow. For chlorotic younger leaves – usually an iron deficiency – use chelated iron foliar feed or blood meal.

Chlorotic other foliage is usually a magnesium or manganese deficiency. For magnesium deficiencies you can directly apply Epsom salts (magnesium sulfate) to the soil lightly around the drip line or dissolve 1-2TBS. Epsom salts to a gallon of warm water and drench the soil. For manganese use barnyard manure. 12/2003

Courtesy of Meerkerk Rhododendron Gardens
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Fertilizing Rhododendrons the Organic Way

When fertilizing rhododendrons we should look to nature to show us the way. In nature mulching and fertilizing is a continuous process with the current year's mulch being gradually transformed in subsequent years to usable fertilizer. Nature's rhodo food begins with a leaf, needle, twig, petal and fruit fall - in short, any and all matter that falls to earth or flows into their area in ground water. Rhododendrons, because of their environment and the shallow layer of organic matter in which they grow, have evolved a massive root system consisting of literally thousands of tiny, shallow running feeder roots. These roots are extremely efficient in extracting life-sustaining plant nutrients from their immediate area. Root systems will be much smaller in a benign climate because a smaller amount of nutrients is required to maintain plant health. Conversely, rhododendrons in exposed and/or harsh conditions will have a vastly increased root system to extract every ounce of nourishment from their surroundings.

So how do we fertilize rhododendrons in our garden? First, any literature on fertilizing rhododendrons assumes that your plants are growing in the correct medium. Again, as in nature, this medium should be extremely high in organic matter, well drained, well aerated and moderately to slightly acidic. Fir and pine bark, composted oak leaves and evergreen needles, decayed wood, well rotted sawdust, coarse peat moss, reed sedge and topsoil high in organic matter are some of the materials that can be combined in endless combinations to provide excellent growing mediums. Growing medium acidity or pH value is not nearly as critical when growing plants in an organic medium using primarily organic fertilizers. One good quality compost for rhododendrons contains oak leaves, evergreen needles, alfalfa and washed seaweed. Between the various layers an organic nitrogen such as canola meal, fish meal or blood meal can be added.

A word of caution! Rhododendrons, because of their previously mentioned tiny feeder roots, can

be easily damaged through over-fertilization, especially when using high analysis chemical fertilizers. Elements to be used cautiously include nitrogen, iron, sulfur, boron, sodium and calcium. Contrary to popular belief, rhododendrons do not hate calcium. In actual fact the reverse is true. They will gorge themselves on available calcium until they make themselves sick. With respect to iron, a few years back a respected rhodo grower suggested I supply more iron to help combat the effect of full sunlight in my exposed garden. He was undoubtedly right, but I supplied so much iron sulfate that severe leaf scorching occurred. A little fertilizer goes a long way, especially with small plants.

I fertilize in early spring around the end of March using all the organic fertilizer and soil amendments that I can obtain. When I combine ingredients I try to duplicate natural fertilizer analysis. For instance, in canola meal (6-2-1) and in fish meal (3-2-1) the nitrogen is two to three times that of phosphorus and three to six times that of potassium. Three advantages of organic fertilizers over their chemical counterparts is in their trace element and humic content and in their extended time release of nutrients. Some fertilizers in the following list contain up to 34 trace elements, while seaweed is reported to contain every element presently known.

Blood meal: nitrogen and trace.

Bone meal: phosphorus and calcium and trace.

Fish meal: complete N-P-K and calcium and trace. Canola meal: complete N-P-K and trace.

Cottonseed meal: complete N-P-K and trace.

Powdered alfalfa: complete N-P-K and trace.

Worm castings: complete N-P-K and trace. Powdered rock phosphate: phosphorus and 32 trace.

Green sand: potassium and 34 trace.

Kelp meal: potassium and all trace.

Dolomite: calcium and magnesium.

Fertilizer Recipe:

2 parts fish meal

2 parts canola meal

2 parts alfalfa

1 part worm castings

1 part dolomite lime

1/2 part rock phosphate

1/2 part bone meal

1/2 part kelp meal

1/2 part green sand

Filler Recipe:

5 parts sand

5 parts double screened fir bark or 5 parts composted fish waste.

The filler, equal in volume to the fertilizer total, is used to prevent clumping of the meal type fertilizers and to minimize the dust problem associated with mixing finely ground or powdered materials. **Terry Richmond**, Port Alberni, British Columbia

Source: JARS V47:No.4:p202:1993

The Propagation Workshop
Presented by the Victoria Branch
in the Garden of Madeleine and Ken Webb
30th October 2010

The Victoria Branch of the ARS invited members from B.C. branches to attend a whole day workshop to learn the intricacies of taking cuttings and germinating seeds of rhododendrons. Thirty members attended including some of the local Victoria experts who acted as advisors. Five of those attending were our own members, Alan Campbell, Roger Slaby, Liz and Alan Murray and Ian E. Efford.

The day was divided into two parts. During the morning, various experts made short presentation of how they took cuttings, when they took them, the medium and containers they used and the type of facilities in which the cuttings were kept. The facilities ranged from greenhouses to various cutting boxes to plastic bags over plants on the window ledges. We all learned a lot especially as there was plenty of time for one on one discussion with the attendees and the experts themselves. We were then provided with an excellent lunch before embarking on the afternoon session.

In the afternoon, everyone was invited to take cuttings from the plants in the Webbs' extensive rhododendrons collection. This became very difficult as there are a very large number of different plants to be found in all corners of their garden. Where to go, which plants to select, were questions on everyone's mind as they juggled secateurs, temporary label, pen, glasses, plastic bags, etc. Once the cuttings were collected, the

Webbs had kindly prepared pots and potting mixture for anyone who wanted to pot their plants at that moment. They also made the labels for each individual cutting. Finally, they offered to hold the cuttings in their own greenhouse until rooted.

Two views of the proceedings:



Archie Brown explains his cutting box which he keeps on an apartment balcony while Ken Webb looks on.



Some of these cuttings end up in our own raffle or as gifts from the Webbs to anyone who visits their garden.



The attendees with Roger Slaby at the back on the left.

Shots of the greenhouse and nursery areas where Ken and Madeleine Webb produce a very large number of cuttings each year.





Yellow Hammer

Just to make sure that everyone was satisfied with the experience, there was also a place to list your “wish list” plants with a guarantee that someone would find that plants for you over the next year! I had been harbouring the desire for “Yellow Hammer” as I found that the small delicate,



yellow flowers were most attractive and that it often flowered twice during the year. Madeleine presented me with a pot containing Yellow Hammer within minutes of my writing down my request. It is now flowering in my garden while waiting for its new home to be dug over and the soil amended.

The day ended with a Chinese dinner at a small restaurant nearby where our group of 30-40 just about filled the whole place.

Ken and Madeleine Webb and the other members of the Victoria Branch are to be congratulated on putting on such an excellent event. There had been a lot of preparation which paid off in the smooth running of the day and the great enjoyment of all participants. **Thanks, Ken and Madeleine.**



Photos: The nursery beds by the Webbs; all others by Ian E. Efford

DVD and CD Collection in our Library

The following DVDs and Tapes are present in our library but are rarely out on loan. Members should

take them home and see pictures and movies on some of the memorable rhododendron gardens around the world.

If there is interest, other DVDs can be purchased by the Society from the ARS and other gardens.

DVDs

- Rhododendrons at the Golden Gate' [on order]
- 'Garden Walks' ARS 2006 [three copies]
- 'The Wonderful World of Maples' Harold Greer 2007
- 'National Rhododendron Gardens' Melbourne, Australia
- 'Pacific Region International Rhododendron Conference; Tasmania 2006'. Ian E. Efford
- 'National Rhododendron Gardens, Olinda, Victoria, Australia 2006' Ian E. Efford
- 'Rhododendrons at the Golden Gate' ARS 2007
- 'The Zurich Garden' ARS 2009 (?)
- 'Frank Fujioka's Program May 2006: Société Bretonne du Rhododendron' ARS
- 'Take a Tour of Taranaki's stunning Gardens of National Significance'

Tapes

- 'Garden Times; Showing You How to Create a Beautiful Garden' Mark Cullen and Dan Matheson 1995.
- 'The Concubine, the Pig and the Garden: The Life of the Abkhazi Garden' David Tarrant
- 'The Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden'



Think!

During a visit to my doctor, I asked him, "How do you determine whether or not an older person should be put in an old age home?"

"Well," he said, "we fill up a bathtub, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup and a bucket to the person to empty the bathtub."

"Oh, I understand," I said. "A normal person would use the bucket because it is bigger than the spoon or the teacup."

"No" he said. "A normal person would pull the plug. Do you want a bed near the window?"

Spring will come, despite what you think at the moment!



One of the large rhododendrons that were seen during our bus tour visit to Friberg Park, Comox
Photo by Ian E. Efford

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