



# NEWSLETTER

Volume 18, Number 2

EDITOR: LESLIE DREW

February 2007



*Ian Efford photographed this unusual vireya in Australia's National Rhododendron Garden. See page 4 for more about this fantastic garden.*

## Potluck Supper in March

The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society's annual pre-Christmas party, which had to be called off because of snowy weather, has been rescheduled to March 7, the club's regular monthly meeting date.

It will start with a potluck supper and the previously planned tributes to Stan and Nyra Groves and Fred Collins. The club's Silver Bowl will also be presented.

The speaker will be Glen Jamieson of Qualicum Beach, whose topic will be "Plant Hunting in Yunnan, China: From George Forrest to the Present." 

## What's Coming Up

**February Meeting:** February 7 in St. John's Anglican Church Hall, 486 Jubilee Street, Duncan. Set-up at 7 PM, meeting starts 7:30. Speaker first, business later.

**Speaker:** Ian Efford will speak on "Rhododendrons and Gardens in Tasmania," a PowerPoint presentation.

**Tea and Goodies:** Sharon Pettersson\* (743-0787), Mona Kaiser and Tom Rimmer (715-1814), and Janice Graham-Andrews (246-5420). \* indicates team leader.

**Directors' Meeting:** February 14; place to be announced.

**Propagating Group Meeting:** February 13 at 7:30 PM at the home of Janet Gardner, 1228 Margaret Place.

**March Meeting:** March 7 in St. John's Anglican Church Hall, Jubilee Street, rescheduling of the Christmas party.

**Annual Spring Sale:** May 5 in the Rabbit Barn at the Exhibition Grounds.

**ARS Annual Convention:** April 12–15, South San Francisco, Embassy Suites Hotel. See Web site (<http://www.ars2007conf.org>) for details.

*Next meeting to be held February 7, 2007,  
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>



## President's Message

Are you keeping warm by the fireside with heaps of seed catalogues, dreaming of spring and flowers? Enjoy! Mother Nature is looking after our gardens with snow blankets and even pruning, occasionally too severely, granted.

This year you will be able to come up with your favourite dappled-shade project; that is, a hedge or Japanese maple/ornamental cherry or trellis with various climbers (even movable when no longer needed).

Ian Efford, our February speaker, will have us in Tasmania in sunshine and rhododendrons, assured to pick up your spirits.

Trying to top this in March, we'll enjoy our potluck supper (the delayed high-spirits for the

postponed Christmas party) and another inspiring PowerPoint presentation by **Glen Jamieson**.

Next, we'll be thinking of our various commitments to the plant sale May 6. Our directors have booked the Rabbit Barn at the Exhibition Grounds and are considering various requirements. Please call them up and let them know what you would like to help them with.

On reading the Finnerty Garden newsletter and of the storm damage there, I found myself reminded of the importance of keeping photographic records each year of those plants and plant groupings that we especially treasure. Like ourselves, all provincial parks and gardens will have a busy, creative year ahead.

by Ingeborg Woodsworth

## From the Minutes . . .

The latest indoor game is known as Dodging Storms: how to schedule meetings that do not coincide with a big blow, a big snowfall, power failures—whatever inconveniences the weather tosses our way.

The CVRS general meeting on January 3 made it; the January 10 directors' meeting at **Bill Dumont's**, like the Christmas party, didn't. After that last occasion the directors agreed to conduct any business at hand by emails and phone calls.

In the Dodging Storms board game, it devolves on our president, **Ingeborg Woodsworth**, after consultation with other directors, to make the ultimate decision and that's not easy for a valley as long and wide as ours with differing weather patterns. The overarching consideration, though, must be the safety of all our members.

Here are items from the January general meeting:

. . . **Alan Campbell** reported that **Steve Hootman** of the Rhododendron Species Foundation was prepared to give a series of species study sessions on the Island early in 2008, if there was sufficient

interest. He said he would be contacting the other four chapters, and that the sessions would be held one day each weekend over a period of several weeks.

. . . At **Bill Dumont's** suggestion it was agreed that the Christmas party postponed in December owing to bad weather would take the form of a potluck supper at the March 7 general meeting (see story Page 1).

. . . Treasurer **Siggi Kemmler** presented the club's financial reports for 2006. See page 6 for details.

At the January 10 directors' meeting in cyberspace and via the telephone, it was decided not to invite the public to **Ian Efford's** talk on "Rhododendrons and Gardens of Tasmania" at our February 7 general meeting, again because of uncertainty over the weather. ↪

### Guidebook Available

Copies of *Greer's Guidebook to Available Rhododendrons* have arrived, and may be picked up at the February 7 regular meeting. The price is \$25 each.



## THE QUESTION BOX

# Now Is the Winter of Our Discontent . . .

by Norman Todd

**Q** How do I deal with all the wind and snow damage?" ask distressed gardeners all over Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland.


**A** At my place the first big snowstorm dropped a 100-foot Douglas-fir on top of the nursery. Luckily its line of fall was along a path. The next storm dropped an arbutus close by. I don't have to worry much about what to do with most of the affected plants. Getting rid of the fractured pots was a bigger problem.

The snow did a lot more damage to the bigger plants. There were many, many split and broken limbs and branches. The next big storm took down three more century-old trees. The most serious one had rhododendrons planted all around the roots. Some of them were ten feet up in the air. The most satisfying part of this four- or five-ton monster's fate was when we made a cut near the base—the root mass fell back with a massive thud that I'm sure registered on the seismographs at the Geoscience Centre at Pat

Bay. Apart from the plants crushed by the trunk, the branches of the fallen tree, and a new tree stump, one would never think so many rhododendrons had had a temporary rise in elevation.

Smaller trees and shrubs that have been wrenched to the ground can be coaxed back to an upright position by the use of a block and tackle or a come-along. We have straightened three fair-sized shrubs by using the truck as a tractor.

The damaged branches should be cut off with a sharp pruning saw just above a dormant bud, if one is visible. If one is not visible, prune anyway. There are dormant buds present and in most cases they will sprout. Later pruning will remove any excess dead wood. There are a few rhododendrons that will not sprout from old buds. These usually have smooth exfoliating bark like an arbutus (*thomsonii*, *barbatum*). These should be pruned back anyway and if no growth appears by summer then the whole branch should be cut back to the ground.

Many will remember the great snow of 1996. We burned rhododendron wood for three days and considered the place a disaster area. In three or four years, there was little evidence of the devastation—in fact, some rhodos had a better shape than they had before. Take heart—remember the quotation from Shakespeare more completely is: *Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer . . .* 

## PROPAGATION


# Two Surprises

by Siggi Kemmler

**O**n the propagation front I can report that somehow the circuit breaker for my outdoor receptacles tripped on one of the coldest nights this winter. The next morning I found that the temperature in the propagating box had dropped to 4°C. Good thing I check every day.

But there is another welcome surprise. Perhaps you remember that Moe Massa brought a sprig of

Dr. Stuart Holland's hybrid *R.* 'Transit Gold' to our October meeting. He encouraged me to put it into the propagating box, which I did.

After a few days, about 90% of the trimmed foliage turned brown. I was tempted to pull the two cuttings and discard them, but then thought, "what the heck, leave them." There was no change until two days ago (mid-January) when I noticed there is a tiny bit of bright green showing in the centre of one of them. So I tugged on both cuttings and voilà! Both resist dislodging. It appears that they are rooting! 



## **How to be Overwhelmed: Australia's National Rhododendron Garden**

*by Ian Efford*

Australia's unimaginable plant diversity can be a bit overwhelming to first-time visitors interested in gardening or wild flowers. There are around 25 000 different native plants in Australia, compared with less than 2000 in Britain.

Australians are gardeners and the climate in most of the country allows them to grow the traditional garden plants of Europe and North America alongside a very wide range of tropical and semi-tropical plants from around the world. Don't walk in a national park and expect to photograph all the wild flowers. In one park in Western Australia, there are more than 700 species and, because the flowering is linked to intermittent rainfall, they often all flower at the same time!

Seeing many of these plants is easy, even if one's visit is confined to the cities, since almost all cities and many towns have a botanic garden and the larger ones—Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide—have up to three. Some of these gardens are hidden treasures and are not well publicized. For example,



*View over the Yarra Valley from the National Rhododendron Garden*



*One of the many paths that radiate through Australia's National Rhododendron Garden*

the very large botanic garden in central Sydney is obvious to a visitor, but its two companion gardens in the wetter and drier regions to the west are less known. On this last visit, we went to the Mount Tomah Botanic Garden, which is two hours by car to the northwest of Sydney, and, despite the drizzle, it is a “must see.”

For rhododendron lovers, an even more obscure treasure can be found about an hour east of Melbourne in the beautiful village of Olinda in the Dandenong Hills. (Rent a car! Previously, we tried public transport and did not make it!) This is the 43-hectare National Rhododendron Garden now run by Parks Victoria. The garden, at an elevation of about 450–600 metres, overlooks the Yarra Valley to the northeast. The garden is located in the Olinda State Forest, an area of great natural beauty dominated by *Eucalyptus regnans*, the tallest flowering tree in the world, with its understorey of tree ferns. The forest has many mammals and birds of which the lyrebird is one of the most famous.



## **How to be Overwhelmed . . .**

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This garden was established in 1961 by the Australian Rhododendron Society (Victorian Branch) and is now run by Parks Victoria with many volunteers from the Society. The garden is overwhelming! At the entrance is a large hall containing cuttings from most of the rhododendrons flowering that day. One can then take a bus tour that slowly follows some of the 10 kilometres of winding and hilly paths around the garden, passing very large beds containing 550 species of rhododendrons and areas of proteas, 3000 camellia, cherries, magnolia, and lilies, and more than a quarter of a million daffodils. The garden contains more than 15 000 rhododendron and 12 000 azalea plants ranging in size from the very small alpine species up to 30 metre high trees. Half of the plants are species and the rest cultivars. Only two species of rhododendron are native to Australia—both are vireyas and found in the mountains of northern Queensland.

In October–November, near the entrance, the visitor is confronted by the vibrant display



*A vibrant display of azaleas at Australia's National Rhododendron Garden*




*A vireya species cross [laetum x javanicum]*

of thousands of colourful azaleas surrounding a small lake. It is worth visiting the garden just for this display. After the introductory bus tour, one can walk around the garden (at least one hour), and enter hidden glades and forested areas where rhododendrons and other flowers provide riots of colour.

The only problems with this garden, apart from the lack of publicity and poor access except by private car, is the lack of labels. At most, 40–50% of the plants are labelled, but even then one sometimes has to crawl under the plants to find the information. The others are not labelled, although I am sure someone has the records in the office.

This must be one of the very few places in the world where so many rhododendrons can be seen at one time. It is truly worth the effort to visit and be overwhelmed!



Footnote: I have deposited in the library a CD entitled “National Rhododendron Gardens” describing the garden and another one containing our own photos from our most recent visit. 



## CVRS Financial Statements for 2006

### Income and Expenses for 2006

INCOME		EXPENSES	
Interest	\$4.66	Rent	\$630.00
Membership Subscriptions	\$1454.00	Speakers	\$635.00
Raffles	\$452.50	Govt Fees	\$25.00
Plant Sale	\$5198.60	ARS	\$1342.22
Float, returned	\$400.00	Library	\$32.70
Transfers from Savings	\$500.00	Bursary	\$500.00
Transfers from Term Deposits	\$3551.99	Donations	\$500.00
Greer's Guidebook	\$26.00	Insurance	\$69.80
Miscellaneous	\$20.00	Advertising	\$611.49
	<b>\$11,607.75</b>	Float	\$400.00
		To Growers	\$4135.13
		Photo & Framing	\$182.88
		District Directors' Fund	\$95.00
		Picnic	\$61.65
		Power Point Projector	\$1609.12
		Newsletter	\$60.17
		Miscellaneous	\$133.74
			<b>\$11,023.90</b>
<i>Income:</i>	<i>\$11,607.75</i>		
<i>Expenses:</i>	<i>(\$11,023.90)</i>		
<i>Gain (Loss)</i>	<i>\$583.85</i>		

### Current Account

Opening Balance:	\$921.15
Income:	\$11,607.75
	\$12,528.90
Less Expenses:	(\$11,023.90)
Year-end Balance:	\$1,505.00
	(\$921.15)
<i>Gain on Year</i>	<i>\$583.85</i>

### Club holdings on December 31, 2006

Term 3 (Prime – 1.5%)	\$12,367.28
Term 4 Nov. 22 transferred to Checking	0.00
Term 6 (12–18 months, 3.5%, 90-day cashable)	1,500.00
Credit interest	0.22
Term 5 Interest	60.78
Term 4 interest	67.50
Patronage	18.07
Term 3 interest	506.63
For year:	653.20
Shares	5.00
Term Deposits	13,867.28
Savings \$921.96	
Cash Balance	1,504.80
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$16,299.24</i>



## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

### Eco-Friendly Bags

by Leslie Drew

Since reading about them in one of the North Island Rhododendron Society's newsletters, I just had to sample the new grocery bags made from vegetable oil and cornstarch that can be tossed on the compost heap and break down as fast as banana peels. The plastic ones, we're told, take 500 years to decompose in landfills, and animals ingesting them while sniffing out food scraps can suffer slow and painful deaths.

So, from Lee Valley Tools, came a roll of 100 pale green Norwegian-made BioBags. The feel is marvelous, like touching silk, yet they're strong. They don't quite fit my kitchen garbage container, but no matter; if they catch on, we'll get different sizes. Most buyers at the Duncan

Farmers' Market don't want anything to do with plastic bags. They ask that their purchases be put in brown paper bags; either that or they bring their own fabric bags. In Europe, the new compostable packaging is being well received. Sainsbury's, Britain's big grocery chain, will be selling more of their own-brand products including ready-meals in the non-plastic wrappings.

The unit price from Lee Valley was \$19.95 and shipping and taxes jacked the total bill to \$31.02, which works out roughly at \$0.31 a bag, and it says on the wrapper that the bags should be renewed every 3 days. One hopes that with demand the price will come down. Actually, for now, if our senior governments are serious about reducing the mountains of plastic waste and aren't just intent on foisting the problem onto the consumer, something can be done. The sales taxes should come off the BioBags. Besides, shouldn't these bags be classified as edibles?

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### February In The Garden

by Allan and Liz Murray

Ahh, February! The longer hours of daylight become much more noticeable in February. As I write, snow is on the ground and it is very cold, and I long for warmer days and the beginning of new growth. I can hardly wait to wander through the garden, checking the swelling buds.

While walking through the February garden, it's time to ponder a few questions. What will the plants look like next year? What you feed your plants this spring will determine the growth, health and bloom next year. The first step is to ensure that the soil pH is 4.5 to 5.5. Local nurseries can tell you where to send soil samples for testing.

How do you water? Do you use overhead water systems or do you use a drip system or spray system? Do you live on the west coast of the Island and have lots of rain almost year-round, or are you on the east coast with its Mediterranean climate—wet in the colder months and dry in the warm months?

We know that rhododendrons need moisture at all times and also must be well drained. They need an available supply of nutrients at all times as well. Seems like an incredible balancing act, doesn't it? Yet, in the Himalayas and other sites around the world, nature's balance has ruled since the beginning of time. The trick is to create that balance in our own gardens, which have a completely opposite climate. Lots to think about!


Some of your rhodos may need to "green up." One of rhodos' best friends is magnesium sulphate (Epsom salts). It should be spread around the plants at the rate of half

a pound per 100 square feet. Use this at the beginning of March to raise the pH in the soil; this will allow the plants to take in the nutrients from the fertilizer you will give them, be it chemical or organic, later in the month.

Here comes the question again—chemical or organic? Let's look at some of the reasons to use both, or either. If you use overhead water, you can make a choice because you have the ability to put on the water and drive the chemical fertilizer into the ground when you put it around the plant several times a year, usually mid-March, mid-April, and the first week of May. If you have a west coast Island garden you may want to use more fertilizer because the rain will dilute it and wash it away from the roots.

Chemical fertilizer will deliver the main nutrients needed by your rhodos. If you have a drip system, you are going to rely on the early spring rains to deliver this fertilizer to the roots. Even though you need continuous feed you will not have the rain to deliver in the dry months of spring and summer.

An application of an organic fertilizer with all of the trace elements will release slowly for 2–3 years, but needs to be applied only once a year, in March, while you have the rain for maximum benefit. Some gardeners give their newly planted rhodos chemical fertilizer as well as the organic at planting time. They feel that this gives the plants an immediate boost and long-term fertilizing—the best of both worlds. However, chemical fertilizer needs to be washed off the leaves or it will burn. With organic fertilizer, there is less chance of this.

Next month we will give you the organic fertilizer recipe. In the meantime, give some thought to which fertilizer will work best in your garden—chemical or organic? 



Editor's Notebook

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Double Whammy

Bizarre incidents occur when the kind of storms we're getting now roll in. Witness what happened at the private garden of Wanda McEvoy, who is the moving spirit behind George Fraser Days and the rhododendron gardens commemorating the pioneer nurseryman and rhodo hybridizer at Ucluelet. Wanda and her husband live at Port Albion, across the inlet from Ukee. Five large hemlocks blew down, crushing four or five of their oldest and biggest rhodos as well as several other shrubs. One huge root system was exposed—about 8 metres high and 10 metres wide. In the cleanup, her husband cut back the criss-crossed fallen hemlocks only to have the massive root ball bounce back to a somewhat horizontal position and in doing so, crush more plants. It seems that sometimes gardens get hit coming and going.

Wanda reports that the George Fraser Project rhodo gardens fared remarkably well, considering the ferocity of the four wild-west coast storms of late 2006. "We did lose a couple of plants in one garden along the highway from a fallen tree and a motor vehicle accident—same garden, two different incidents just two days apart."

And further north, on the seafront at Tlell in the Queen Charlotte Islands, John Davies reports that his rainfall readings for November and December amounted to 36% of the annual average. "We've had storms that we've never seen before," he says, looking back over 42 years.

He and his wife Jennifer have yet to see how the old rhododendrons fared at the one-time Evans place on Kumdis Slough. Being in a sheltered spot, they may be all right. Dating from before the First World War, the garden has been abandoned for years, yet the now tree-sized rhodos still flower every spring.

New Members

New members Doug and Ellen Cameron came to Vancouver Island and purchased property in the Cowichan Valley in 1990 and built their own home. Even before the house was complete they started building gardens with rhododendrons as the first plantings and adding many more plants. They also put in organic vegetable gardens. Over the years, they have expanded the flower gardens and other landscaping features. Now the grounds are a quiet and peaceful enhancement of their home.

—2007 Directors—

Table listing 2007 Directors: PRESIDENT (Ingeborg Woodsworth), FIRST VICE PRESIDENT (Ian Efford), SECOND VICE PRESIDENT (Janet Gardner), SECRETARY (Sharon Tillie), TREASURER (Siggi Kemmler), MEMBERS AT LARGE (Leslie Bundon, Bill Dumont, Roger and Anne Slaby, Jackie Walker), EX-OFFICIO (Alan Campbell).

—2007 Conveners—

Table listing 2007 Conveners: GARDEN TOURS (Anne and Roger Slaby), HISTORIAN (Bev Mountain), INTER-CHAPTER RELATIONS (Ingeborg Woodsworth), LIBRARIAN (Janet Gardner), MEMBERSHIPS (Sharon Pettersson), NEWSLETTER EDITOR (Leslie Drew), PICNIC/XMAS PARTY (Directors co-ordinating with: Hilda Gerrits, Anne Springford), RAFFLE (Daphne Jackson, Dawn Fedorchuk), SPEAKERS (Alan Campbell), SPRING SALE (Ian Efford, Anne Slaby), PROPAGATION (Alan Campbell), REFRESHMENTS (Maria Kemmler), SUNSHINE (Ann Springford), WEB SITE (Alan Campbell).