



NEWSLETTER

Volume 23:2 Editor: Ian Efford February 2012

President's Message

On the 1st February, we had an excellent talk by Bill Terry on his Himalayan expedition to see *Meconopsis*, the blue poppy, in the wild. The occasion was also the first jointly sponsored meeting with the Cowichan Valley Garden Club and the talk attracted visitors from as far away as Qualicum Beach. We also welcomed our District Director, Mary Parker, who was probably rather surprised by the very large crowd that filled the hall. I was equally astonished by the refreshments after the talk which far exceeded anything that we normally have at our meetings. I think that the audience went away very happy with the talk and the friendly ambiance of this effort towards mutual cooperation with our gardening friends in the Valley. Special thanks should go to Sandra Stevenson, who coordinated the preparation of the hall while I entertained our guest speaker, to Bill Dumont, who battled the regular problem of getting the talk, the computer and the projected to work as a single unit, and to the volunteers who produced and managed the refreshments. We must also thank Diane McAmmond, President of CVGC, and her members for sharing in this venture. Let us hope that it is the beginning of future cooperation.

On a related note, we are seeking one or two volunteers to coordinate the refreshments at our regular meetings and, in particular, to coordinate the garden tour this year. This latter task involves finding a few gardeners who will agree to visits and arranging the times. Not a big task and there will be suggestions from other members as to the best gardens to approach. Let me know if you can take up one of these roles.

At the Christmas Party, David Annis was awarded the Silver Bowl for his outstanding work for the Society over the years. The silver bowl is a way for the society to honour one of its outstanding and hard working members. The selection of the award winner each year is made solely by those of our members who have previously received the silver bowl. I had hoped for a photo of David with the bowl but, for once, no one at the party had a camera! A photo should appear in a future newsletter.

Coming Events

March 7
Geoff Ball: "Milner Gardens and It's Rhododendrons"

March 20
District 1 Executive Meeting

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

In the case of our annual donation of \$500 worth of plants to a public location within the CVRD, your Executive voted unanimously to choose the new park at the railway station in Cobble Hill. This new park is very visible to the public from the road and is fully irrigated. This year there were very few suggestions and I encourage you to consider possible sites for the future so that we have some on hand to choose from when the time comes.

Over the last few weeks a lot of work has been undertaken to prepare for the Garden Fair this year. Most of this work has fallen on Bill Dumont's shoulders and he should be congratulated on his efforts. In particular, the new website that can be seen at:

www.CowichanValleyGardenFair.com

We are having a few days of spring weather and very soon rhododendrons will begin flowering. Take some photos of the new arrivals for the newsletter.

Ian E. Efford

From the Editor

The newsletter is a little late this month as Mary-Lynn Boxem was on holiday and she does the formatting. It contains a number of interesting articles on a wide range of subjects. It also has a new logo which was developed by Bill Dumont as part of the work undertaken to create the sweatshirts, aprons, etc.

Our members remain very quiet and have not produced any articles this month although Liz Murray did send in two rhododendrons in winter pictures. Thanks Liz! I am still waiting for some of the winning pictures from the very successful photo competition to reach the editor's desk in an electronic format. Surely, someone wants their name in lights! What about some articles about what lived or died this winter, what has bloomed early this spring,

Ian E. Efford, the hopeful editor

Kalmias – Amiable Companions for Rhododendrons

Linda Derkach

About 25 years ago, I discovered the Mountain Laurel – *Kalmia latifolia*. I placed my treasure next to Rhododendron 'Cunningham's White' and under a yellow plum, and for about 20 years they were fast friends.

I loved my kalmia – dark green, evergreen leaves, no pests or bugs, and massive sprays of tiny white flowers all through winter – a lovely addition to Christmas wreaths and bouquets. Then that horrible winter of 2007 struck, and by spring my kalmia now about 20 feet tall poking its head out from the top of the plum tree was a shadow of its former self – brown leafed and ugly. Fortunately, I had taken off shoots and cuttings, so that when I finally took the decision to remove it, my heart was not too broken. The loss of a plant is also an opportunity to do something different – but it did not include a kalmia.

Fast forward to June 2011, when several of us journeyed to Haida Gold, the home of Harry and Gwen Wright in Courtenay. In case you haven't been there, this magnificent garden is tucked right in the middle of a well-populated residential area – it's like coming upon Sleeping Beauty's castle!



And at once, my love of kalmias was re-ignited! Kalmias are valuable companions for our beloved rhododendrons – blooming when most rhodies are done, and enjoying the same cultural conditions. They are found throughout North America, and grow in moist, humus rich, acidic soil in part shade, or sun where the soil remains reliably moist. There are seven species of kalmia, with *Kalmia angustifolia* and *K. latifolia* more common in our west coast gardens.

Kalmias are evergreen, slow growing and suffer few diseases or pests in my experience. Sometimes fungal leaf spots and blight, leaf gall, powdery mildew, weevils, scale, lace bugs and borers may cause problems. I had great success propagating *Kalmia latifolia*. Where it layered itself, digging out the rooted cutting and potting it up was very easy and very successful. Offspring of my old *Kalmia latifolia* still thrive in the gardens of many friends and family via this method. You can also help rooting along by making a small cut in a low branch, staking it down to the ground and waiting till roots form. As well, cuttings taken in late spring or midsummer can be successful.

Back to Haida Gold where the kalmias thrive in the care of the Wrights, and where so many gorgeous varieties delight the eye. Instantly, I was back in England 2004 and on a visit to Scotney Castle, a magnificent National Trust property in Lamberhurst, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. An early June visit there rewarded us with a glorious display of hundreds of blooming kalmias, along with medieval castle ruins and an enormous and elegant



Kalmia 'Olympic Fire'



Kalmia 'Nancy' with her unopened blossoms resembling sugar candies

Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) reflected in the castle moat. It is a sight I shall never forget and I have longed to return. But now I don't have to! If you want to be delighted by this reliable, varied and magnificent bloomer, just take a trip up island to Haida Gold in June – you will not be disappointed.

I asked Harry Wright the secret to his success with kalmias. Here is what he had to say: "Many years ago I bought a flat of kalmias in 2 1/4 " pots from Les Clay and all the books said they grow well with rhododendrons, enjoying the same conditions, which may be true, but they sure didn't respond the same for me. So after babying them for about five years and not being too impressed I informed them that they were going to be put into the landscape. Well, they pouted for a couple of years and realizing that this was as good as it was going to get, finally started rewarding us. And every June for the last fifteen years or so they have really been putting on a beautiful display.

The branches are a bit more fragile than rhododendrons and the odd year they have received some snow damage, but they are certainly well worth growing, and like rhododendrons, perform best when receiving at least a half day of sun."

Reprinted from the October issue of Rhodovine the newsletter of the Mount Arrowsmith RS. Note, not all the photos are from the article.



One of the gardens visited last year during the CVRS/CVGC garden tour was that of Silvie Scott located on the southern edge of Qualichan Lake. In the centre of one of the main flower beds, in full sun, was a vibrant display of *Kalmia* 'Minuet' shown in this picture by Silvie. It illustrates that this group of laurels can be grown successfully in the Valley and should be considered as a companion plant to rhododendrons with which it has a love of acid, well drained and high organic soils. For those interested in more information on the *Kalmia*, a detailed account can be found in a well written book in our library - "*Kalmia: Mountain Laurel and its Related Species* by Richard A. Jaynes

New Research Shows 25% Rhododendron Species under Threat of Extinction

Botanic Gardens Conservation International

Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) has published a Red List of Rhododendrons report assessing the conservation status of the Rhododendron plant species. Research by BGCI and Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh shows that a quarter of the 1157 Rhododendron species are under threat in the wild; one Rhododendron plant species (*Rhododendron kanehirae*) would be extinct but for collections in botanic gardens (one of which is the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Scotland); and another species of Rhododendron is now completely extinct.

The 128 page Red List of Rhododendrons report designates Rhododendron plant species according to a classification system for conservation status from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature known as IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria. The report shows that of the 1157 Rhododendron

species surveyed their conservation status was: Extinct 1, Extinct in the Wild 1, Critically Endangered 36, Endangered 39, Vulnerable 241, Near Threatened 66, Data Deficient 290, Least Concern 483. Consequently, 316 are considered threatened with extinction and therefore require conservation action (i.e. they are classified as Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable).



Rhododendron kanehirae flowering at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (Logan), June 2011

The report notes that ‘Whilst the centres of diversity are in the Himalayas and South East Asia, rhododendrons naturally grow, albeit with less diversity, in North America, Europe, and elsewhere in Asia in moist frequently montane ecosystems. Rhododendrons in general prefer to grow in regions of high rainfall, high humidity and a temperate climate, also having a preference for acidic soil. Within the genus there is a great diversity of forms, ranging from low creeping plants a few centimetres tall to trees of 30 metres. Even within a species there can often be great diversity in form and flower colour.

Rhododendrons are beloved by horticulturists around the world for their flowers. But as the report notes, they are also valued for their medicinal properties, and in some communities they are used for firewood, timber, teas, honey, wine, jams, narcotics, etc, and also as sources of insecticides. For the environment (‘ecosystem services’), rhododendrons grow in areas

of high rainfall and high humidity on acidic soils; conditions under which few plants would survive. They stabilize slopes and protect watersheds, notably in the Himalayas where so many of Asia’s major rivers start; and they support a wealth of biodiversity too.

The internationally adopted Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (for 2020), calls for 75 per cent of all threatened plants to be conserved in ‘ex situ’ collections (e.g. botanic gardens); in the case of Rhododendrons this equates to 238 threatened species. BGCi estimate that 65 per cent of threatened Rhododendron species are currently held in conservation collections. Further research is required, especially in relation to where there is data deficiency.

Sara Oldfield, Secretary General of Botanic Gardens Conservation International said “Rhododendrons are back in fashion as garden plants but in their natural habitats they are in trouble. Horticultural skills are urgently needed to restore endangered Rhododendron species in China and other parts of Asia where they are important components of mountain ecosystems. BGCi is committed to help save these beautiful plants from extinction.”

David Chamberlain, Research Associate at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh added “Rhododendron kanehirae is considered to be extinct in the wild, following flooding of the river banks around its only known natural locality in Northern Taiwan. This was caused by a dam that was built in 1984. However, an ex situ conservation project is being run by the Taiwan Endangered Species Research Institute. As a result of crucial international collaboration, plants have now been distributed to Botanic Gardens in Taiwan, Japan, the UK and the United States to ensure that this unique species has a future”.

Copies of the Rhododendron Red List report can be downloaded for free (PDF). Printed copies are available from BGCi at £15 each and can be ordered via the BGCi website.

Malahat in Winter

by Liz Murray



A Correction: Chemical Control of Weevils

In preparing the last newsletter, I modified the Chemical Control section of the main article as it was written specifically for Washington State where pesticide regulations are different from those in British Columbia. I changed the wording to say that there were no chemical insecticides that were permitted for use on weevils in British Columbia. This is incorrect, some insecticides are permitted. Below is a summary of my findings.

The 2009 edition of “Home and Garden Pest Management Guide for British Columbia”, a publication of the BC Ministry of Agriculture states on p.69 that “Spraying with pyrethrins and malathion will also help to control weevils”. This remains the official view of the Province although permission to use these chemicals lies with the federal government.

Before a pesticide can be used in Canada, it must be registered by Health. Pesticides classed as “Domestic” are designed for use by home gardeners and would have “Domestic” on the front panel of the label. Pesticides can only be used according to the information on the label on the container.

There are a few labels which say general use but one should search for those that mention the control of weevils, root weevils or are for use on ornamentals. It is permissible to use these products in British Columbia unless there is a municipal by-law against using cosmetic pesticides in gardens. In the Cowichan Valley there is no such regulation.

There are many different domestic pesticides that contain pyrethrin available for home gardeners to use but only a few of these have labels that say they can be used to control certain beetles on ornamentals such as rhododendrons. The pyrethrin products labeled for this use are generally dust formulations.

Pyrethrin comes in two forms, one is “organic” [originally from chrysanthemums grow commercially in Kenya] but it is only effective if the powder actually contacts the weevil and the pyrethrum is quickly destroyed in sunlight. This means that it is best used at night when the adult females are active on the plants. The second form has another insecticide mixed with it to boost its effectiveness and, thus, it is not “organic”.

In fact, if you are going to go out at night and spray pyrethrin on the plants, you might as well pick off the weevils from the leaves or place a sheet around the plant, shake it, and gather the weevils up from the sheet. It will save you the cost of the insecticide and exposure to the chemicals.

There are a few registered domestic pesticides that contain malathion with very general labels. For example, one liquid formulation with malathion says it can be used on ornamentals to control beetles. In the case of the malathion, this should be applied to the plant in order to kill the adults. It is not really effective if used as a drench against the larvae. In reviewing this subject, I was learned about a fungus product [Met 52 a granular bioinsecticide] that works in the same way as nematodes. It is mixed with the soil and attacks the larvae it is restricted, however, to commercial growers who use it to help control weevils in ornamentals.

If you have an infestation of root weevils, a suggested strategy would be:

- Firstly, try to pick off the adult females that crawl up onto the plant at night or place a sheet around the base of the plant and shake it and then pick up the adults that drop on the sheet. Over time this process should reduce or eliminate the infestation.
- Secondly, drench the soil around the roots with a nematode culture during the warm weather in order to kill the larvae that eat the root stems.
- Thirdly, place a plastic band around the lower stem and coat it with a sticky substance, such as “Tanglefoot”.
- Finally, as a last resort, spray the plants with malathion in the late evening when the adults are on the leaves. I would only use this latter step if the infestation was really extensive.

If the infestation is serious enough to kills plants, select resistant cultivars and species from the list given in the last issue of the newsletter to re-plant in the same areas of the garden.

All that to correct an error in one paragraph!

Ian E. Efford

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank *Madeline A. Waring*, Pesticide Specialist, Plant and Animal Health Branch. BC Ministry of Agriculture and *Tracy Hueppelshouser*, Provincial Entomologist, for providing information used in preparing this article.

Entomophagous fungi

Field application on *Metarhizium anisopliae* (Met52) for management of root weevils in berry crops [BPI07-090] Kenna MacKenzie - Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Adults of several species of root weevils (Coleoptera, Curculionidae, Entiminae) are parthenogenic, highly fecund and flightless. Larvae feed on plant roots causing economic damage to crops including coniferous trees, rhododendrons and azaleas, berries and grapes. Adults often winter in surrounding vegetation.

There are very few chemical options for management of root weevils in Canada, and those products available (carbofuran, malathion, azinphos-methyl in BC) are of environmental concern.

Low-risk products that target larvae are needed.

Entomophagous fungi such as *Metarhizium anisopliae* and *Beauveria bassiana* are effective insect control agents and are registered for various pests, including root weevils, of agricultural crops in many OECD countries. Numerous studies have demonstrated *Metarhizium anisopliae* F52 (a.k.a. 275-86 and Bio1020 in Europe) to be highly pathogenic to *Otiorhynchus sulcatus* and efficacious in containerized nursery crops.

Novozymes Biologicals produces a commercially available insecticide based on *M. anisopliae* (strain F52). This product is registered in the U.S.A. for root weevil control in non-food use.

A Species Garden at Milner

A report in the MARS newsletter of November 2011 stated:

“For some time now we have been trying to encourage the building of a Species Garden at Milner Gardens. In an attempt to expedite this, we have formed a committee to follow up and locate a spot at Milner agreeable to everyone. Then we can start planning the work needed to get the project underway, and especially how MARS can contribute. Don Bridgen is coordinating our efforts with Milner Gardens.”

The Species Garden Committee has had a walk around the location within Milner Gardens which is proposed for the Species Garden. The location looks good but there is a lot of tree felling and clearing to be done, and a water supply needed before we can think of planting. The next steps are to prepare a description of the garden and its purpose, and to get estimates of the costs involved in its construction. As I said before, this is a long term project.

[Editor: Expansion of the species collection at Milner Garden was raised some years ago and CVRS contributed funds towards the a greenhouse for raising species rhododendrons. As far as I know, the greenhouse was never built.]

Bill Terry's Books

At Bill Terry's lecture, many of you purchased copies of *Blue Heaven; Encounters with the Blue Poppy* (TouchWood Editions, 2009) which is praise for that fabled flower. It covers the Blue Poppy's history in the wild and in gardens, explodes the myth that it's impossible to grow, and shows how its cultivation is well within the reach of any patient and persistent gardener in the Pacific Northwest. For those that enjoy the book, you will be interested to know that his lecture will appear in book form as beautifully illustrated book to be published by TouchWood this fall, probably titled *Hunting the Wild Blue Poppy*.



2011-2012 Executive

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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