

# NEWSLETTER

Volume 21: 4

Editor: Ian E. Efford

May 2010

## From the Editor

As our president drifts slowly around Asia, he is missing all the very good displays of rhododendrons in the gardens around Vancouver Island. I have already been down to Victoria twice to see gardens and will be off tomorrow to see two more. I also attended the UBC training session in early April and found that both UBC and Vandusen gardens had excellent shows with a high percentage of the rhododendrons in flower. This is the time that you should be off seeing gardens in the southern part of the Island and, for some, preparing to see those in the north as part of the Society tour on the 14-15th May.

We are looking for a volunteer to host the garden party on the 12<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> June. A reasonably large garden that would hold comfortably about 40 people would be ideal. If you would like to offer your garden, please e-mail David Annis at [annisd@shaw.ca](mailto:annisd@shaw.ca).

Next Wednesday evening, we will be holding the annual election for the Executive. We will also be asking for volunteers to take on one or two of the convener jobs. Please look at the list in the last newsletter and offer to take a job or share one with a friend.

Ian E. Efford [[efford@shaw.ca](mailto:efford@shaw.ca)]

**1<sup>st</sup> May 2010 Saturday**  
**CVRS THE PLANT SALE**  
**10am-1.30pm**

**5<sup>th</sup> May Wednesday 7.30pm**

**“A Passion for Rhododendrons”**  
**Filmed at the Mendocino Coast**  
**Botanical Gardens. This film comes**  
**highly recommended.**

**Introduce a friend to the Society by**  
**bringing them to see the film.**

**14-15th May 2010**

CVRS Bus Tour

[Remember to make final payment to Bill  
Dumont by Friday]

**22<sup>nd</sup> May 2010**

George Fraser Day and Heritage Fair in Ucluelet

**October 2010**

“Celebrating 50 year of the Victoria Branch of  
the Australian Rhododendron Society and its  
famous National Rhododendron Garden”

**The Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society**

**A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society**

PO Box 904, Duncan, British Columbia V9L 3Y3 <http://cowichan.rhodos.ca>

**R. argrophyllum**

Allan was given the species plant *R. argrophyllum* ( with silver leaves ) as a thank you when his term of President of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society ended. It has thrived and come into it's own as a very beautiful and desirable garden plant. It is well behaved and very lovely both in flower and leaf. We are enjoying it more and more as it matures.

Liz Murray



## How to grow Japanese azalea 'Kirin':

Val Bourne

'Kirin' (syn 'Coral Bells'), a Japanese azalea, bears soft pink, scented "hose-in-hose" - one set within another - flowers. The clusters seem to be arranged in tiers and the lacy effect is feminine and fresh, so it provides a wide, yard-high floral feast for about two weeks between late April and May. It is one of many evergreen azaleas that burst into life as spring turns to summer.

Although gardeners recognise azaleas as smaller in every way to rhododendrons, the botanical differences are minor, so although originally classed as a separate genus, they have been shuffled together. Deciduous and evergreen forms are divided between subgenera *pentanthera* (deciduous) and *titsushi* (evergreen). The diminutive size and smaller flowers of the azalea make them ideal for a smaller garden, particularly as all the flowers appear within a couple of weeks. Those on acid soil can grow them in the ground. Many of us, however, can only succeed if we grow them in containers using ericaceous compost, because these showy plants from Asia only thrive in acid soil.

I have been lucky enough to see azaleas flowering on the lower reaches of the mountains of Nagano Prefecture, Japan. The Japanese come to admire them in mid-June and there are wild flower reserves in this region. The wild species (*Rhododendron molle* subsp. *japonicum*) is a warm flame-orange and grows on grassy slopes just above the tree line at about 3,280ft.

Close by are wild hemerocallis and just occasionally there is a bright, redder azalea among the warm-orange throng. The large flowers are spectacular against the grey June skies, like flames flickering up into the gloaming.



Japanese winters are cold and snowy in the mountains of Nagano, often called the Japanese Alps, so this plant is hardy and resilient. Japan also, however, endures a rainy season in early summer known as *tsuyu* or *baiyu*, literally meaning "plum rain" because the plums ripen then.

The season lasts for five to six weeks falling between mid-May and late-July, according to locality. But it does not rain every day, instead there are substantial downpours. All Japanese natives (like azaleas) resent dry British summers, so need watering.

The soil is acid in Japan and the sites gently slope, which aids drainage. Light levels are fairly high as these plants grow in open scrub, so the ideal site in a garden is light shade, which will encourage more flowers. The clean mountain air is perfect and generally azaleas do not tolerate heavy pollution. They are small-leaved and tolerate strong winds, but this makes them leggy.

There are many award-winning AGM varieties, including 'Niagara', which has cool white, frilly flowers blotched in pale green. Some azaleas with Japanese names were

introduced in the first two decades of the 20th century by Ernest Wilson who travelled to Japan between

1914 and 1915. 'Irohayama', a dainty shrub with funnel-shaped lavender-white flowers, is one of Wilson's introductions - arguably the best and the most popular.

### Growing tips

Many of us will have to grow our azaleas in a pot with ericaceous compost. Use a simply shaped pot with a wider top than base and stand it on pot feet to aid drainage. Find a frost-free position and be prepared to fleece if a late frost looks likely. Keep your plant in a bright position to prevent legginess and water regularly in summer using rain water if possible.

Feed after flowering with a slow-release food designed for azaleas. If you have a leggy azalea, Jeremy Trehane of Trehane Nursery advises being brave: cut it back hard after flowering. Tidy up soil (if it's in the ground) and add a fresh layer of ericaceous mulch. All azaleas benefit from a May mulch.

Cuttings can be taken from this year's growth just as it begins to harden - usually in September. Bottom heat and moisture are needed - create a polythene tent with a bag to keep up humidity.

### Good companions

Azaleas can be grown in bright positions on the edge of woodland gardens on acid soil and they mix well with flowering cherries, rhododendrons and camellias. They are enhanced by blue bulbs.

[Editor: This article was published in **The Telegraph on 27 Mar 2010**. "Kirin" or "Coral Bell" is not listed in Kenneth Cox "Rhododendrons and Azaleas: A Colour Guide" although it is found in the new website [www.hirsutum.info](http://www.hirsutum.info) [see an earlier newsletter], however, there is little information on this cultivar. Despite this lack of information, the article does give us some idea of how to look after our azaleas which are among the most spectacular spring plants in gardens.

The accompanying note on Kurume azaleas provides further information on other Japanese azaleas is from [backyardgardening.com](http://backyardgardening.com).]

### The Kurume hybrid azalea of Japan

owe their parentage to several species of mountain azaleas, predominantly *R. sataense* with *R. kiusianum*. Formerly, the Kurume hybrids were grouped under *R. obtusum*, but modern horticulturists now consider *R. obtusum* a hybrid and not a separate species. Dense, upright, evergreen shrub with small, 1 1/4 inch long, elliptic, glossy, olive green leaves. The Kurume are prized for showy clusters of small, profuse early to midspring flowers, 1 to 3 per truss, which literally cover the plant. Best adapted to partial sun. Prune immediately after flowering so you won't cut off any of next year's flower buds. Best if not sheared. Beautiful planted in generous, solid-colored drifts along edge of woods. The Kurume hybrids are also prized for bonsai culture. Plant as you would any of the other azaleas: high and in well-drained, acidic soil, rich with organic matter. Though azaleas have a potentially large list of possible pest and disease problems, they are usually trouble free if planted correctly in proper cultural conditions.



### Scented plants for the garden

In an earlier newsletter reference was made to an excellent article in the Yak on scented plants for our west coast gardens. The second of this series by Norma Senn can be found in the March issue of the Yak. It is entitled "Up the garden path: More scent-sational garden plants."

## Yaks

### Diana Scott

President, North Island Rhododendron Society

Ah, the yak and 'yak hybrids' — well loved and appreciated by Rhodo enthusiasts! *Rhododendron yakushimanum* *R. degronianum* *ssp. yakushimanum*) is native to and named for a small area on the northern end of Yaku Island or Yakushima off the southern coast of Japan. The island is a treasury of Japanese vegetation and is home to some 1,900 species and subspecies of flora. This rich ecological area was the first site in Japan to be inscribed as a World Heritage Site in 1993.

Susan Clark of the American Rhododendron Society Massachusetts Chapter has written an excellent article entitled "Species in Our Midst - *Rhododendron degronianum*"

<http://www.rosebay.org/chapterweb/specdegr.htm> where she explains how this beautiful and well loved Rhodo came from the far reaches of Japan to the attention of the world. Quote: "Yaks were first described by Nakai in 1921 and introduced into Europe by Lionel de Rothschild at Exbury in 1934, to whom 2 plants were sent by the famous Japanese botanist, Koichiro Wada. From Exbury yaks were grown at the Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Wisley. It was a Wisley yak, in full bloom, in the 1947 Chelsea Flower Show, that took a First Class Certificate and started the yak craze. Rhododendron

fanatics fell in love with this fabulous plant and they precipitated an exuberant breeding spate that is still producing hundreds of named yak crosses."

One of the more popular yaks is Ken Janeck (*degronianum* *ssp yakushimanum* seedling). The leaves are long, narrow, and roll slightly inward. As the new leaves emerge they are covered with a light fuzzy tomentum. This gradually fades over the summer to reveal the dark green leaves, while the undersides retain their thick cream to tawny-coloured indumentum. A midseason bloomer, Ken Janeck's flowers are pink fading to white with a spotted upper lobe. It's a compact mounding plant and I think that almost everyone I know has one!

Other popular yak hybrids include the series developed in the 1970's named after Snow White's seven dwarfs. R. 'Bashful' has blushing pink blooms that go well with the silvery young leaves. R. 'Dopey' has glossy red blooms and R. 'Grumpy' has pink buds and pale pink flowers that fade to cream. Other favourites are R. 'Fantastica' which has dark pink blooms that shade to white in the throat, with attractive light green spotting. R. Teddy Bear has deep orange indumentum and shell pink flowers. Yaku Prince, Yaku Princess, Yaku Queen and Yaku Sunrise have all been hybridized using *degronianum* *ssp yakushimanum* 'Koichiro Wada'.

The two Canadian Rhodo stamps released in March 2009 featured trusses of *R. yakushimanum* 'Mist Maiden' introduced in 1947, and Dr. D. L. Craig's 1979 hybrid of Mist Maiden, *R. 'Minas Maid'*. Although many yaks have pink blooms, colours can range from white and peachy yellows to pinks and lavenders through to bright reds.

*R. degronianum* ssp. *yakushimanum*, despite growing on cool, misty, windswept mountainsides in its native environment is very sun tolerant in cool climates and is among the hardiest of the large-leafed varieties. The compact form, the wide variety of bloom colours and the great leaf characteristics make the 'yak' and its hybrids a must for every Rhodo garden.

[Editor: This article appeared as the presidential message in the February issue of the North Island Rhododendron Society newsletter.]

*R. campylogynum*



*R. campylogynum* , the only species in the Subsection Campylogynum, is a popular small rhododendron ideal for your gardens. It can vary in colour from pink through red, purple to cream. In nature it is found in contiguous areas of Tibet, north India, Burma and China on rocks, cliffs and open hillsides.