

Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Newsletter

Volume 31:3 April 2020

Message from the President

Barry Agar, CVRS President for April

While nature has wreaked havoc upon the affairs of men with the COVID-19, our gardens have paid no attention to it at all. Right on schedule the snowdrops and crocus have brightened our lives, making way for hordes of cheerful daffodils.

Hellebores are still shyly hanging their heads, waiting for us to turn their faces briefly to the sun. Among the many hellebores, one of the most attractive is *Helleborus x nigercors*. This is a cross between the well-known Christmas rose *Hellebores niger* and the tough *H. argutifolius* (formerly *H. corsicus*). It is more compact than *H. argutifolius*, and more floriferous than *H. niger*.



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There are many cultivars of this available and they are well worth seeking out. They also have the advantage of being relatively drought and shade tolerant, and deer resistant.

At Royal Roads the *Magnolias* are out in full force. The *stellatas* and their relations are opening up; a species, *Magnolia amoena* started weeks ago, and has paid the price with browned flowers at its crown. However, a *M. campbellii* hybrid 'Betty Jessel' (featured in photo) with gorgeous deep purple pink flowers is just opening, right next to a *Magnolia* 'Pegasus' with pure white flowers. Further down in is *Magnolia zenii*, a Chinese species threatened in its native China, showing off a fastigiata form and small white flowers.



If this weren't enough, *Camellia* 'Donation' is throwing itself into the fray. 'Donation' is a *C. williamsii* hybrid, and perhaps one of the best. The flowers are semi double, a good solid pink, and they know when to leave the party. Unlike some of the *C. japonica* hybrids, which linger long past their welcome, and suffer from DTS (Dead Tissue Syndrome – they look like a used tissue hanging on the tree), *C.* 'Donation' drops its petals as soon as they are past their prime.

Soon the *Anemones* will be with us, racing through the understory, another plant that has the innate good sense to leave while the fun is at its height. They carpet the ground with flowers and foliage and then quietly disappear before summer, leaving no unsightly foliage.

If nothing else, our enforced social distancing and isolation has pushed us back into the garden. No distractions, no going out for coffee, visitors have to stay a respectable distance from the fence. We can concentrate on the task for the day, the pressure is off.

As we move through this next period, we ask that you send photos of your garden, of that special plant, and yourself in your garden. We might not be able to visit but we can still stay in contact and enjoy everyone's hard work.

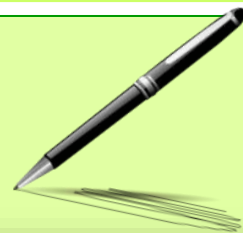
Besides, if you would rather stay inside and have a protracted run on Netflix, you can always photoshop the weeds out. We will never know.

Barrie Agar
CVRS President, April



***Narcissus* 'Jetfire' is not experiencing the discomforts of garden distancing**

Letter *from the Editor*



No Monthly Meeting and Guest Speaker information, no Tea Service reminders, no Plant Fair Volunteer pleadings, no Member Plant Sale donation reminders.

Okay, breathe in. No enticing Garden Tour Notices, no Garden Bus Tour schedules or signups, no Book Club Meeting or Propagating Club Meeting reminders, *no Calendar of Events*.

So, there goes about fifty percent of the content of the monthly newsletter. What is left to make this worthwhile to members? Perhaps we can share with other members our hopes for the future and the activities we can work on while we are “distancing”. We can share how we are discovering that we appreciate the camaraderie of shared gardening experiences and know that after we tire of the peace and quiet of our gardens, we will want to share them once again.

How are you all faring? I do hope you are all experiencing this time as an opportunity to run soil through your hands without feeling an urge to disinfect it first. I am enjoying the pace---the slow down---for now.

During this past week, my sister posted an inspirational reminder to be grateful today:

Ok, but honestly, how privileged are so many of us that, during a global pandemic, we can just stay warm at home, reading, working, [learning], creating, talking to our loved ones, with [few] worries and [fridges] stocked with food?

I had a moment like that today. I went on a hike for one and one-half hours with the dogs, and we didn't meet anyone on the undulating forest trail. I became lost in nature, admiring the red stems and deep green foliage of *Gaultheria shallon* and *Mahonia*



Life is good. The birds and bees continue with their lives, as do we.
Thank you to an unknown photographer

nervosa and breathing in the rich scent of *myccorhizae* at work in the compost of the forest floor.

We were about four hundred meters from the end of our hike when we met two young women. They stepped well off the trail and waited, obviously afraid of a pack of dogs. It seemed strange to me, because the dogs hadn't been exceptionally loud when they announced that humans were approaching. When we got closer, I explained that the dogs were noisy but friendly. The ladies smiled and said that they were just giving us lots of room. I replied that it was good for dogs to socialize with people on the trails. They just smiled and we moved on. It wasn't until I had walked another twenty metres that I realized their behaviour in giving us “lots of room” had nothing to do with the dogs.

The hike had been so restorative that I had completely forgotten about the coronavirus. I experienced a **“Wow, am I fortunate!”** epiphany.

Verna Buhler

Rhododendron faithiae

(CGC#14142 163sd2010)

*Steve Hootman, Executive Director and Curator
of the Rhododendron Species foundation de-
scribes Rhododendron faithiae (0\R1\6)*

RSBG#163sd2010



***Rhododendron faithiae* CGG#14142 This plant is
currently sold out at RSF Photo: RSF**

“This is sure to be a widely grown and popular new species in gardens. This very rare species (known from only two or three locations in the wild) is a member of subsection **Fortunea**. It is probably most closely related to **hemsleyanum** and the recently introduced **serotinum** and shares some of the same characteristics:

- large, fragrant white flowers in mid-summer
- a large habit and impressively big and bold foliage.

As seen in the wild, this was a spectacular plant with large elliptic leaves to ten inches or more in length.

One of the most exciting finds that Peter Cox and I have ever had together. Probably best with a bit of shade in the afternoon to preserve the summertime flowers.”

Editor’s Note:

Ken Webb has a four-foot tall healthy plant in a pot that has already bloomed for him!!



**Evan Bean photos (three) of growth progressions of
*Rhododendron faithiae***

Before and After

Photo Story by Alan Campbell

Sandy and I have been on our property for 26 years now and over that time have slowly expanded the garden as our interest and experience increased. The most labour intensive, a five-year job, was to remove an extensive covering of English Ivy over which was to become our Spring rhododendron garden.

As the ivy was removed, we found an area that wished for a pathway along a stream leading down into the rhododendron garden. Over this pathway, I decided, we needed an arbour. At this point, my Scottish heritage came to the fore and pushed me to obtain the needed material from our property rather than spending money at the local sawmill or lumber yard.

With my trusty Husqvarna 445, I approached a number of selected cedar trees on the property, fell them, cut them to length, peeled off the bark, and then with a sledgehammer and splitting wedges produced the finished product with which to start building.





All uprights were set into concrete, the horizontals nailed into place and over the years the English Ivy that was spared extermination was permitted to cover the one side to produce horticultural windows for an aesthetic view.

Over twenty some odd years later, I noticed that the posts at ground level were beginning to rot away. As retirement was nearing, I told myself that soon I would extend the concrete collars higher to encase stronger wood. Unfortunately, I procrastinated one Winter storm too long. The combination of the rot and the weight of the ivy windows proved to be too much, and a rather strong wind collapsed a majority of the structure.

After the cleanup was completed the resulting vacant expanse proved to be too much and we decided something needed to be done. This past Winter

we got to work trying to design a feature that could replace the old structure.

Twenty-five years had passed since the building of the first arbour and I knew I wasn't going to build an identical structure. Firstly, because I didn't have the cedar trees to cut down and secondly---well, I was 25 years older. Successfully ignoring my Scottish grandfather's whispering in my ear, I purchased the needed dimensional lumber and got to work. Now here I need to admit that I am more of a power saw and sledgehammer builder, so the precision needed to obtain the precise angles to get the structure together proved rather frustrating at times.

Even though the garden tours have been cancelled this Spring due to social distancing we do welcome individuals to wander the garden should they choose. Inspect the new addition---though please don't look too closely---and see if it maintains our garden appeal.

Stunning, but not *Rhododendron sinogrande*

Photo Story by Ali Morris



Many years ago, I purchased this plant called *Rhododendron sinogrande* from a reputable rhododendron nursery. I have treasured it in my garden ever since. However, when it finally presented me with flowers after 17 years, it became clear that this wasn't what I expected!

Some of you know I'm a bit anal about proper plant identification, so for the last five years I have tried to get the name of this plant. It may not happen. . . but that won't keep me from enjoying my beloved plant.



Ali's *Rhododendron sinogrande* (?)



Rhododendron sinogrande at Glendoick Creamy-white, in huge trusses. Magnificent, with the largest leaves in the genus, up to almost 1m in length. Best in mild, sheltered gardens but we can grow it well at Glendoick. Always creates a sensation.

Photo and description: Glendoick

Podophyllum hexandrum is great companion plant for a Rhododendron garden.

This species comes to us from the Himalayans, it can vary quite a bit. If planted with some morning sun, it will get this incredible colour.

It also has the most beautiful red fruit of all the Mayapple I grow in my collection.



***Podophyllum* 'Spotty Dotty'**

Photo: Dan Heims



Editor's Note:

I found this species on the Rhododendron Species Foundation website. However, the pistil may not be as large and bright in colour as Ali's plant's flowers. (Photo and description: RSF)



***Rhododendron coriaceum*
JN#12175**

A relative of the big-leaf species *R. rex*, this species has smaller leaves, but the new foliage emerges coated with a velvety silver-white indumentum, very beautiful. The flowers are typically white with a red or purple blotch (mid-spring). Rarely seen in cultivation. These are grown from seed collected in the wild. (+5\R1\4) RSBG#128sd2013

Leslie K.C. Clay (Les)

A small sign on the fence, "The Clay's", confirmed that this was the home of the renowned Leslie Clay. The chain link fence enclosing the yard was near invisible due to the hedge composed of tall and dense foliage of rhododendrons, *Ilex* rich with crimson berries, mature *Cornus*, and a selection of the ever-graceful *Acer palmatum*. Another sign "Linnaea Nurseries" marked a neighbouring entrance.



A gentleman looked up from pruning a vine clambering along the carport. His pleasant smile softened the warning on the sign posted above him. Instead, it spoke of the sense of humour that glinted in his eyes as he expressed his greeting.

Les Clay, at eighty-seven, displayed no sense of frailty that one might expect to see in a man who had worked hard in a tough business for his entire life. "Oh, they told you I would be up early, did they? Yes, I am usually outside shortly after eight; I have never understood staying in bed in the mornings. It is a lovely part of the day."

Clay graduated in 1955/56 and worked during the summers at the University of British Columbia Botanical Garden. His parents owned a small property in Burnaby where their love for gardening led to a change in careers; his father retired from BC Electric, and they opened a small landscaping business. The space filled to overflowing very soon, and if they were to continue, acquiring more space was crucial. They propagated their plants in a small greenhouse, a lean-to attached to their house in Burnaby, and found a one-acre rental property in Surrey where they could grow their plants to

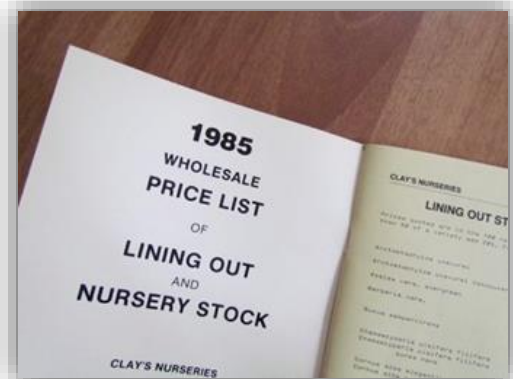


marketable sizes. Their propagation methods multiplied new plants quickly; once again, as demand grew, it was apparent that the one-acre property was insufficient.

An opportunity arose, in the 1958, to purchase forty acres for \$10,500 near Murray Creek, East of Langley, British Columbia. Initially the Clay's cleared two to three acres, and their landscape crew, composed of four to five men, moved their entire in-ground stock to the new site. The soil, Whatcom silty loam, in the area was perfect for their purposes. The Clay's Nursery grew exponentially, from that small propagation business in Burnaby to the 30x60 foot glass greenhouse on acres of great soil.

Thousands of cuttings were rooted each year into a 2½ to 3-inch medium in a greenhouse, generally held at 60 degrees under shade cloth that filtered approximately 50% of the sunlight. Space continued to be an issue as plants grew. Markets expanded to include international orders and precipitated the building of more greenhouses.

Initially, moving plants across borders was manageable, but in time that changed and fulfilling the demands of the international market became increasingly difficult. Growers' challenges became complex as insecticide guidelines and availability of products changed.



The highlight of Clay's entire experience over his years in the nursery business emerged from the effort to overcome the obstacles in meeting international demands.

His relationship with Bruce Briggs in Washington led to research and experimentation in methods of plant propagation. Both gentlemen were fascinated by the idea of tissue culture and because of their shared interest they became the pioneers in plant tissue culture.

"Why?" Les Clay repeated the question he was asked. "Why?" "The 10-fold factor, of course!" The 87-year old gentleman's eyes lit up and he became animated. "It was just astounding!"

Clay described the magic of the 10-fold factor. With just a tiny bit of growing plant tissue---part of a leaf, or an unopened flower bud---dropped into a test tube and provided with perfect conditions, the plant piece would reproduce in multi-fold proportions. Then the new growing tissues could produce just as many once again. "Over and over again. To see this happening before my eyes---it was unbelievable!"

Designing the equipment and making the changes was challenging. Tissue culture production required bleaching and sterile environments, Laminer airflow hoods, hyper-filters, gel-made elements, complex growing mediums, and the use of specific acids. The Clays accepted the futuristic opportunity with enthusiasm, and tissue culture became the new method of propagating. Not only did the speed of

propagation amaze and thrill Les Clay, these vials of sterile, growing plant tissue could safely be transported internationally.

He walked over to a photo of a young man sitting at a desk, with at least fifty small rhododendron plants along the walls to his left, and a rack of test tubes on either side of him. The photos behind him on the walls featured the laboratories, propagation and production greenhouses, and endless beds of nursery stock.



"I was a bit younger here," he said, "but that is what it looked like when I was preparing some orders for shipping."

Every year for twenty years, Clay would travel to the Horticultural Trade Show in England with plants and tubes. Clay's Nursery shipped its products all over Europe, and to Japan and Korea as well. New Zealand became one of its best customers.

Clay explained that he worked closely with John Bond, the Queen's gardener at Windsor Castle, providing Windsor with plants left over from the English Trade Show. "You know," he smiled, paused, then nodded. "Yes, I believe I could safely say that most of its North American collection of rhododendrons came from us."

The Clay's Nursery experienced these highlights and notable success, but the obstacles they faced in filling international demand for their plant products were certainly not the only challenges and disheartening events during those years. In one year a storm flattened three of their greenhouses

resulting in a loss of at least \$150,000. However disastrous it was, the Clay's remained determined and rebuilt. Les Clay quickly moves away from lengthy discussions of negative experiences. "What is important, is that one moves on."

Les Clay had also begun crossing rhododendrons to create his own treasures for the hybrid rhododendron world. Although they have not been registered, Clay hybrids have been growing in rhododendron lovers' gardens for many years.

The process of registration is complex and time consuming, and recently, encouraged by family, Clay has considered doing so, sorting through his records to select and register some of his favourites.

The labels are there; although at times the plant has grown around its identification tag. Clay did not appear particularly impressed by the label he found beneath the stunning red-flowering hybrid. Its parentage was 'Essex Scarlet' x *strigillosum*. *Rhododendron* 'Essex Scarlet' was used to parent a number of well-known red hybrids such as 'Baden Baden' and 'Elizabeth Hobbie'. Clay's cross appears to have inherited more of the qualities of its species parent.



Clay has tentatively named a number of his hybrids after family members and friends:



A lovely soft coloured hybrid with cheerful buds is *Rhododendron* 'Hotei' x 'Karen Triplett'.



Rhododendron 'Isabel Pierce' x 'Pink Pearl'



One of the hybrids that the rhododendron community may be most familiar with is *Rhododendron* 'Langley Tranquility'. This lovely favourite is *Rhododendron* 'Graf Zeppelin' x 'King of Shrubs'.



Rhododendron dichanthrum 'Stonefield' x Muncaster Mist



Rhododendron 'Mrs. AT de la Mare' x 'Polar Bear'



Brilliant and cheerful *Rhododendron* 'Robyn Garland' ('Top Banana' x 'Karen Triplett')



Rhododendron 'Peggy Richardson', aka Margaret Richardson



Rhododendron 'Robert Nelson' ('Blue Peter' x 'Blue Boy')



The *Rhododendron*
'George's Delight' x
'Pirouette' may
possibly be named
Rhododendron
'Barbara Nelson'



Rhododendron
'Beverly Clay'
(*'Graf Zeppelin'* x
'King of Shrubs')



Rhododendron
'Elizabeth Clay'
(*'Vulcan'* x
yakushmanum)



Rhododendron
'George
Hardiman'



Rhododendron 'Les
(Butch) Clay'
(*Azalea* 'Ginger' x
'Gibraltar')



Rhododendron
'Lucy Hardiman'



Rhododendron
'Eva Clay'
(*'Antoon Van*
Weilie' x
'Cotton Candy')



Rhododendron
'Sarah Clay'



Rhododendron
'Jurgen Hoese'
(Deciduous
azalea)



Rhododendron
'James Nelson'



Sorting through records and photos can be an intimidating project. "It is daunting," he admits, but Clay has already begun the journey ...

He could simply sit back and enjoy his commendable accomplishments at this point in his life. The walls of his office are adorned with honours conferred on him through the years.

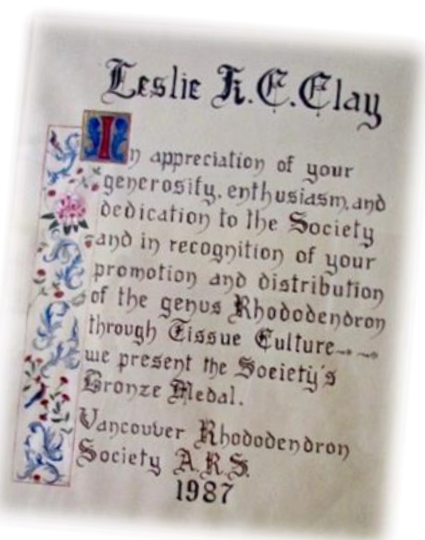
On one wall, twenty of many ribbons form a brilliant collage displaying some of his plant and truss wins.

Leslie K. C. Clay served as President of the International Propagator's Society, Western Region in 1975 - 1976

In 1987, the Vancouver Rhododendron Society awarded Les Clay the **ARS Bronze Medal**

He was a Certified Member of the British Columbia Institute of Agrologists.

Around the room other recognitions are proof that Les Clay spent very little time sitting back when there were things that needed to be done. Year after year, he contributed.



- The Township of Langley Eric Flowerdew Volunteer Award of Merit in 2007
- The Township of Langley Eric Flowerdew Volunteer Award of Merit in 2008
- Rotary Club of Langley Distinguished Service Award 2012
- Langley Chamber of Commerce H.D. Stafford Good Citizen of the Year Award 2013
- The Township of Langley Eric Flowerdew Volunteer Award of Merit in 2014

However, the work is never done for a creative and hardworking person.



But still, numerous exciting events keep Les Clay waking early to ensure he has time for all that needs to be done.

Clay was proud and excited about the upcoming opening of the new Rotary Interpretive Center at Derek Doubleday Arboretum in the Township of Langley. The Rotary Club of Langley raised and contributed \$250,000 for the centre's design and construction. It was the largest donation the Club has ever made in Langley and was done to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the chartering of Langley's first Rotary club in 1958.

Les Clay is honoured by the development of a Rose Garden named after his late wife, Beverly. The Beverly Anne Clay Rose Garden is being designed and planted by Brad Jalbert with a unique collection of scented roses.



Les Clay photographs the beautiful rose named after his late wife, Beverley Anne Clay.

Langley rose breeder, Brad Jalbert, honours his late friend with a rose of her own---Beverly Anne Clay.

The Official Opening of the Beverly Anne Clay Rose Garden took place on July 4, 2019.

"Jalbert, whose roses have won prestigious international awards, also stocked the rose garden at the Derek Doubleday Arboretum with some of his favourite scented roses in her honour.

His company, Select Roses which he started in Langley in 1990, donated the roses on the single condition that the garden, in front of the Arboretum's new Rotary Interpretive Centre on Fraser Highway, next to Langley Airport, would be named after her.

"We donated all the plant material for the rose garden and will continue with our support of it," said Jalbert. "When we made that offer, the only condition was on the rose garden's naming."

Photo and text: Aldergrove Star

This morning, on his third attempt to progress along his path to his house for his extremely delayed lunch, the eighty-seven year old gentleman pauses again.

“That tree there,” he points to the graceful birch shimmering with every breeze, “will have to be moved to build my daughter’s house.”

Clay gently shakes his head back and forth as he studies it and his eyes glow with amazement.

“You know, not many years ago that tree was just a tiny bit of tree tissue in a test tube.” He remains gazing at it for a time before turning. Then he smiles brightly, waves, and ambles towards his house.



Leslie K. C. Clay is a role model, an embodiment of energy, initiative, drive, and determination. His love for life and growing plants and germinating ideas, and then actualizing those dreams is awe-inspiring.

Useful Links:

Cowichan Rhododendron Society:
cowichanrhodos.ca/

Victoria Rhododendron Society:
victoriarhodo.ca/index.html

Mount Arrowsmith Rhododendron Society:
marsrhodos.ca/

North Island Rhododendron Society:
nirsrhodos.ca/ws/

The American Rhododendron Society:
rhododendron.org/

Nanaimo Rhododendron Society:
nanaimorhodos.ca

Nanoose Bay Garden Club:
nanoosegardenclub.ca/

Linda Gilkeson’s website:
lindagilkeson.ca/

Vancouver Island Rock and Garden Society:
virags.com

Linda Chalker-Scott:
<https://puyallup.wsu.edu/lcs/>

Steve Henning:
rhodyman.net

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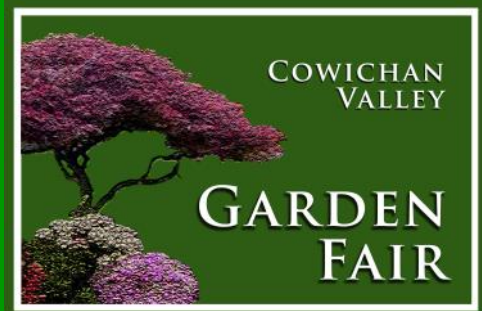
Newsletter Editor: Verna Buhler



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American
Rhododendron Society
P.O. Box 904
Duncan, British Columbia
V9L 3Y2

<http://cowichanrhodos.ca>



<http://cowichanvalleygardenfair.com>

Due to COVID-19 the 2020
Garden Fair is cancelled



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CowichanValleyGardenFair](http://www.facebook.com/CowichanValleyGardenFair)

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