

Newsletter



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Volume 28:9 December 2017

President's Message

The propagation group met on a fine Saturday morning at Verna and George's place. Verna now has the propagator, and a group of us met to socialize, have some coffee and treats, and to learn about rhododendron propagation. The workspace was crowded as everyone, under Al Campbell's tutelage, prepared their cuttings, and carefully set them onto the heat bench.

There is something very compelling about propagation---the act of making many from one plant, of seeing, as if by magic those tiny translucent roots push through the bark to start drawing up water on their own.

The CVRS Christmas Party

Sunday, December 3

From 1-5 pm

McLay's Heritage House

(More details on page 3)

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"It was a dark and stormy night, and 'Dexter's Zanzibar' was just not himself. Normally he felt enthusiastic, but Christmas was coming and it was a time for family. . ."



It was a very pleasant way to spend a morning as well as being educational. There will be further gatherings to do more cuttings, check on the progress of those already inserted, and eventually to pot up the survivors. Some of these plants may be used to help the MARS group for their Rhododendron conference in 2019. We will send out any notice of future gatherings. Everyone is welcome to come to these events, and no prior experience is necessary!

The bleak midwinter is upon us, and it is time to withdraw to the fire to peruse the seed catalogues, and plan garden changes should it ever stop raining long enough to allow the soil to become workable. The leaves have been mostly swept from the trees, and lie on the lawns and paths. There is much debate as to whether it is better to leave them lie on the beds and break down in situ, or to remove them and bring them back as rich black leaf compost. It is

true that they protect the soil from rain erosion and puddling, and may protect some plants underneath from the ravages of frost and winter. Given they can be very thick and heavy, some recommend removing them in the spring to allow perennials below to emerge. Rhododendrons themselves are rather fond of mulch around them, which often mimics their natural conditions. A gardener from one of the large gardens in Ireland described making his leaf mould with a bit of Ammonium Nitrate to make a good acid mix and then spreading it lovingly around each plant. Given the last time I was there, the gardeners were in the process of pruning a sweep of Rhododendrons that had grown madly and enthusiastically beyond their allotted borders (It appeared to be more of a chainsaw massacre really---and literally as well). Yes, he might have been on to something.

Barrie Agar

As we draw near to the end of the year, we pause to remember dear friends who have left us: Moe Massa, Dave Dougan, Norm Todd. This edition includes a reprint of an article written by Norm Todd in 1997.



Dave Dougan with
Rhododendron 'Dave Dougan'
in 1998 (approximately),
in Evelyn Wieje's Garden

Photo: Sharon Tillie

Christmas Is Coming Soon

The CVRS Christmas Party!

Sunday, December 3, from 1-5 pm

McLay's Heritage House

5241 Koksilah Rd, Duncan, BC V9L 6V3

Phone: (250) 746-5233

Last year we held our Christmas party at McLay's Heritage House; McLay's House is an early twentieth Century House, with beautiful wood floors and a fireplace! We held this special event in the afternoon, as it can be challenging for anyone to drive at night in dark and, possibly, stormy weather! (Hmmm: "dark and stormy" could be used to start a tale for the storytelling competition---see below) Participants' experiences last year produced a range of responses, from gentle lasting smiles to much laughter---all indicators of having a blast!!



So this year, once again, we're having an **afternoon Christmas Party!**

Some things stay the same:

Buffet style **Food and Goodies** table, the same as other years: We ask that you bring your favorite Sweet or Savory dish to share and delight! A Non-alcoholic punch, Wine, and Soda/ fruit juice will be provided.

Rhodo Photo Contest: Don't forget to bring a copy of your best Rhodo photo for entry in the photo contest. Everyone also needs to bring 4 quarters for voting. There'll be prizes for 1st, 2nd and 3rd most popular photos. The photos may be posted at the Plant Fair in spring.

Story Telling: Back by popular demand. It is a well-known fact that Rhodo lovers are the best storytellers in the Cowichan Valley. There are very few rules to this contest:

Your story may be fact or fiction, indeed truth or veracity is discouraged

There will be 3 - 4 minutes (approx.) to spin your yarn

Following are 8 words that must be used at least once in your tale:

Maddenia, Point Defiance, Airy Fairy, Emma and May, Zanzibar, Quadrille, Zauberflote (Magic Flute - English translation will be accepted), fake news

These words are all Rhododendron related, except for, obviously, "Fake News". Yes, "fake news" is more than one word, but it is the unique concept of truth that we are after here. The master storyteller will be chosen by the most appropriate method (clapping-of-hands volume) and presented with a lovely prize. Start dreaming up your claim to fame.

Gift Table: Everyone/couple is asked to bring an unwrapped gift for the Auction

Table. An arm's length of tickets is sold to serve as your bidding tokens. Put your tickets into the cup of the gift you would like to receive; if your number is called, the gift is yours.

Local Food Bank Donations: As usual, we will be collecting for those less privileged. This season, the **Salvation Army** will also receive the proceeds from the Gift Table Auction.

Please mark Sunday December 3rd 1-5 on your calendar for the Rhodo Club's afternoon Christmas Party.

If you call Barrie Agar at: (250) 748-2308 or email her at barrie.agar@shaw.ca, she will help you arrange a ride.

We sincerely hope you are able to join us in the fun and festivities. If you would kindly RSVP

Elaine at y1880@yahoo.ca, we will set a place at the table especially for you.

SIGN UP EARLY!! Due to the size of the facility, our limit is 40 people.



Photo by Sandra Stevenson

PROPAGATION WORKSHOP

Thanks to all who came out with both enthusiasm and lovely cuttings!!

The propagation workshop on Saturday, November 18th, led by Al Campbell, brought twelve members together to learn about propagation, including selecting the most viable cuttings from rhododendron plants, preparing the cuttings using sharp clean tools, and selecting the appropriate rooting hormone.



Participants learned about options for ingredients, and the proportion of ingredients, for creating a suitable growing medium for cuttings; the club has chosen to use a coir, perlite and pumice mix. Alternatives and the rationale for planting cuttings in thin walled pots or containers, or inserting cuttings directly into growing medium spread throughout the entire propagator was discussed, and this year, once again, containers were used. This offers members the opportunity to prepare and label their own contributions; it also ensures that the cuttings will remain separated and clearly labeled. Then, once the cuttings were safely tucked inside the propagator, members had an opportunity to chat and browse the library over coffee and snacks. And, the sun shone!

Please contact Verna at (250) 748-8889 if you are interested in adding to the CVRS collection. There is still plenty of room for more cuttings! **Let's fill it!!**



LIGHT UP THE PROPAGATOR!

My original proposal for a club propagator included testing alternative lighting to see whether cuttings rooted better than if no lighting was used. This last year was a trial year without lights and automatic misting. I have strongly recommended that this year misting should be added. My own experience with it in my nursery beds and shade house have shown that it works very well and can be installed at a low cost. (550 sq.ft. + two 8 ft tables in the shade house for about \$140. Most of this cost is the timer).

The propagator is designed to be divided by a light barrier so that a “with and without” light test can be run. I would have done this test last year except that I became involved in long, rather convoluted discussions about which lights to use and the cost of different lights. At the start of the analysis, florescent lights were still in use in greenhouse situations. It became quite clear early on that LED lights were by far the better choice. For some time, I discussed with a supplier adhesive strip lights that can be stuck onto a board which is hung over the plants in such a way that the distance to the plants can vary. The alternative to this was small individual lights that can be placed in holes in the board. The strip lighting was expensive but it did have the advantage of a control, which allowed one to select a range of colours for the lights and to change these colours at will.

This resulted in another questions, which colours to use? To answer these questions, I turned to the professionals in the horticultural industry some who were experimenting with very advanced lighting and installing this lighting commercially. Philips in the Netherlands has various publications, which illustrate the commercial use of coloured LED lights to enhance the rooting and growth of greenhouse crops. See ---

http://www.lighting.philips.nl/b-dam/b2b-li/en_AA/products/Horticulture/Horticulture-products/pdf/PHIL_143043_CL_LED_Research_Module_UK_A04_spr_eads.pdf

The light colours used in most of these situations are red, deep red and blue. In many of the commercial situations the lights are not covering the ceiling but are actually hanging down between the plants so that the lower leaves benefit equally.

With this as a starting point, I approached the research and develop scientists in the horticultural section of Philips, both in the Netherlands and in Indiana, USA. I asked them to recommend the best lighting for rhododendrons in order to increase rooting as well as to produce plants that were well formed – not leggy. I should note that different genera of plants respond differently to different colour combinations of lighting.

They have recommended two lights:

- 1. PM/DR/B120/LB \$132.72 each**
[Production model option]
- 2. TL/DR/3/LB/P \$625.00 each**
[Top lighting option]

The cost of the wiring and connections would be extra. These are Canadian dollar prices from 2016.

Commercial Lighting in Delta can supply this equipment [www.comlight.com]. The contact is Tayhler Paul 604-540-4999.

So, after a year of research on lighting for the propagator, all I have been able to achieve is the two recommendations of what we should be using!

I think if CVRS carried out tests on the use of this coloured LED lights in the propagator, it would be of considerable use to us in the future, but it would also be of interest to many other clubs within the ARS family.

My correspondence on this matter is to be found in the propagation file in the library.

Ian E. Efford

Letter *from the Editor*



The Book Club is turning out to be a rather enjoyable mid-month opportunity to hover together with friends over a few wonderful books and some hot coffee. The books in the CVRS Library may be difficult to find elsewhere, and learning about their contents from those who have read them definitely makes selections for personal sign-outs much easier.



Could this even lead members to write book reports for the newsletter? Seriously? No. Okay, one or two of us might do so, a few might intend to,

some might begin to write and determine to finish before spring arrives, and some of us very simply know ourselves---we won't---no apologies! *However, most of us would willingly share our new discoveries while lounging about with other bibliophiles.*

Several members revealed that they had written book reports in the past. Reprinting some of these might encourage a few more of you to come to the Book Club afternoons. However, I have searched through many past newsletters, and have not found book reports. Where are they hiding; does anyone know?

But reviewing the newsletters led me to note a well-researched article, written by Ian Efford, on appropriate lighting for growing rhododendrons. And, interestingly, Ian has submitted another well-researched article on this topic for us this month. We have presented it here as a letter from Ian to the membership. Is it "light up" time? Why not review Ian's file in the library, perhaps discuss this at the next book club meeting, and give it some thought?

It's a thought,

Verna Buhler

CVRS BOOK CLUB

Next Book Club Meeting:

December 14, 2017 at 2 pm

in the CVRS LIBRARY at Verna and George's

3908 Cowichan Lake Road



Where Can I Get That Plant?

By Ian Efford

Garth Wedemire's recent talk included a list of species that he recommended we grow in our gardens. One problem is that most people in the audience were not able to write all the names down before the talk moved on. A more important problem is that most local nurseries do not stock these recommended species. Recently, Victoria Rhododendron Society has started propagating some of them for sale but other than that, the best sources are to order them from the Rhododendron Species Botanic Garden in Federal Way, or from Harold Fearing in Abbotsford.



R. quinquefolium

An alternative is for us to produce them in our own propagator, which is now managed by Verna Buhler and George Morgen. This would require that we are able to find the adult plant from which to take the cuttings. There is some information available to help with this search.

CVRS Library:

I have deposited in our CVRS library the following documents:

- **Finnerty Garden Plant List:** A complete list of all the plants that are in Finnerty Gardens at the University of Victoria. This list gives the reader the name of the plant, the number in case the label is missing, and the bed in which the plant is grown. A map of the beds is included with the computer list.
- **Finnerty Garden Plant List – Two:** A similar list from Finnerty Gardens, which appears to be a more modern version of the first list.
- **Lake Cowichan Memorial Rhododendron Garden Plant List:** A list of all the rhododendrons in The Lake Cowichan Memorial Rhododendron Garden.
- **CVRS Propagation:** This file contains information regarding the CVRS Propagation Program, and includes Paul Wurz's List of Recommended Hybrids for Vancouver Island

Ian Efford Files:

- **Glendale Gardens:** I have a computer list, maintained by Bill McMillan, from Glendale Gardens.
- **Rhododendron Varieties and Locations in British Columbia:** Harry Wright, with a subsequent revision in 2012 by Bob Wright, prepared a list of “Rhododendron Varieties and Locations in British Columbia”. This is a computer listing of all the species and cultivars of rhododendrons grown in our gardens. I have this on my computer but I do not know if it is readily available in a public location. It would be useful if it was accessible on the District 1 website. Nor do I know if it has been revised again.
- **Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden:** The club receives the new sales list from the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden
- **Fearing’s Farm Nursery:** An annual list of the species available from Fearing’s Farm Nursery can be found on-line.

With these sources, as well as by asking around the club, one should be able to find someone with the plants one needs, although I have found there are exceptions. I have been trying to obtain both *R. pentaphyllum* and *R. quinquefolium* for some time; I understand that both are very difficult to grow from cuttings.

When I ask gardens for permission to collect cuttings each year, I have always received permission.



R. edgeworthii Photo Garth Wedemire

As for a list of the recommended species and hybrids to grow on Vancouver Island, the annual list for the Pacific North West is published in JARS, and Garth gave us a species list as mentioned above. Also, Paul Wurz, during his last lecture provided a page listing his recommendations for hybrids. That is in the “**Propagation**” file that has also been passed on to Verna for the library.

Furthermore, I think that the club should insist on obtaining a copy of the presentations of any future speaker. Recommendations from experts are important but it is not always easy to scribble down the information during the talks. We need to be able to go back and check names and other information after the speaker has departed.

Finally, if anyone wants the *Glendale Gardens* and *Revised Harry Wright* lists, I will send them by e-mail if you contact me at efford@telus.net.

The Scales of Injustice

By Norm Todd January 1997

“This article is not intended to be about taxonomy; it is really about discrimination.”

Scaly-leafed rhododendrons are not so popular as the non-scaly ones. I suppose the two main reasons for this are the smaller flower truss, or the absence of a truss, and the smaller sized leaves. Most of us are initially attracted to rhododendrons by their big showy burst of so many flowers all stuck together in a multi-based mammiform, and the aim of most hybridizers (not only those working with rhododendrons) has been to produce bigger, more obvious blossoms. Bold and dramatic foliage are also desirable attributes.

The word ‘**lepidote**’ means having scales. These are found on the leaves, mostly on the underside, and often on the twigs and flowers. The word Leprosy (Roman) has the same root. The **elepidotes** (not having scales) include all the big leaved species like *R. macabeum* and *R. falconeri* and *R. fortunei* and many with the most interesting foliage. The indumented species are nearly all elepidotes, for example *R. yakushimanum*, *R. pachysanthum*, *R. fulvum*, and *R. arboreum*. Go to any garden centre and you will find only a few lepidotes. You can probably find ‘PJM’, ‘Curlew’, ‘Blue Diamond’, and perhaps *R. impeditum* but the vast majority being offered for sale will be non-scaly ones. Azaleas are elepidotes too.

Most breeding effort with elepidotes has gone into the low, dwarf varieties. The Birds and the Bees are renowned worldwide. Cox’s Birds include ‘Curlew’, ‘Ptarmigan’, ‘Wren’, ‘Egret’, ‘Phalarope’, and ‘Razorbill’. Warren Berg’s Bees started with ‘Patty Bee’ and went on to include ‘Too Bee’ and ‘Not to Bee’ (now called WeeBee) but Warren went on to

muddy the waters, for purposes of this article anyway, by giving his ‘Bee’ moniker to elepidotes when he registered ‘King Bee’ and ‘Wanna Bee’. This roiling of the waters is just typical of the classification, the taxonomy, of rhododendrons, and Warren Berg may even have a justifiable claim to consistency.

By and large elepidote rhododendrons will not cross with lepidote rhododendrons. The evolutionary lines of the two groups diverged long ago. Most elepidotes have the basic number of chromosomes ($2n = 26$) (ie. They are **diploids**). Most lepidotes are **polyploids**, with the greatest number of species having $2n = 78$ and the next most frequently occurring about half as often as the former with $2n = 52$. Some go as high as 156. This is one of the reasons why there are not as many lepidotes hybrids, as it helps to be a mother if your intended mate has the same number of chromosomes as you do. W. J. Bean, the late great English plantsman put it this way: “Lepidotes are less indulgent to the hybridizer and seemingly unpredictable.”

But there are other significant differences between the two main groups of rhododendrons. The flowers are curled up one way in the bud in scaly rhodos and the opposite way in the non-scaly ones. The seeds have different shapes too. The natural world is a bit too complicated to fit into neat boxes that would make the lives of those of us who are row-and-column accountants cozy and predictable. We just have to accept the fact that there is a lot of chaos out there and that there are a lot of exceptions to the rules that we so cleverly devise.

According to the Senior Registrar for the genus *Rhododendron* there are over 30,000 hybrids on his list. (He is still struggling to get them onto a computerized database.)

I would guess that only a small percentage is of the scaly persuasion. Just because the elepidotes are so numerous, and so many are so similar (man-made chaos), the lepidotes stand out by their individuality. Our club (*Victoria Rhododendron*

Society) logo is a lepidote, 'Transit Gold'. Its profile of hanging bells at least narrows one's guess at the plant's identification to something manageable. (What more could one say of an outline of 'Trude Webster' than that it was a rhododendron?)

The most damaging and insulting misconception about the lepidotes is that they are often confused with azaleas. I suppose it is too much to have gardeners carry around a small magnifying glass in just the same way they carry pruners, but a sneak peek would quickly show the difference. Azaleas don't have scales, but they have long hairs lying on top of their leaves pointing towards the tip just as a cat's hairs point towards its tail. This is easy to see with a 10-power glass. Many azaleas have five stamens while most other rhododendrons have ten or more and that is often, but not always, diagnostic.

As I remarked at the beginning, this article is not intended to be about taxonomy; it is really about discrimination. I can understand the small ones being confusing but to call a *R. augustinii* an azalea is very demoralizing to that noble plant. *Augustinii* belongs to a pretty distinctive group called the **Triflorum Series**, or if you prefer the latest revision, the **Triflora sub-section**, a group that is among the most garden-worthy in the whole genus. The colour range is from white through yellow, pink, near blue, purple and almost red. The smallest form of *R. keskei* is tiny, but most are in the 2 to 3 metre range.

February brings *R. lutescens* in a good clear yellow that rivals *R. forsythia*; then comes the white elegance of *R. rigidum*; the pink of *R. davidsonianum*; white and coral of *R. yunnanense*; the sheets of blue *R. augustinii*; more yellow of *R. ambiguum* and ending the season in June with smokey purple of *R. tricanthum*. Most of these are never seen in garden centres. Their growth is willow-like, as is the growth habit, but the foliage is not without interest year round. *R. lutescens*' new foliage is red while *R. oreotrephes*' and *R. rigidum*'s are quite blue.

Broad generalizations always need retractions. The claim that lepidotes are distinctive falls down when it comes to the 'blue' hybrids. *R. augustinii* will cross with every rhododendron in the **Lapponicum Series**. *R. impeditum*, *R. russatum*, *R. fastigiatum*, *R. intricatum* et al. love to get together not only among themselves but with *R. augustinii*. And so, perhaps in an effort by hybridizers to show that they know lepidotes exist, they have gone to town with this group. 'Blue Diamond', 'Blue Tit', 'Bob's Blue', 'Songbird', 'Blue Chip', 'St. Breward', 'St. Tudy', 'Oceanlake', and on and on. It's almost as bad with the elepidotes, where, to give an example, I counted 32 registered hybrids of 'Mars' x *yakushmanum*. The best blue hybrids in my opinion are 'Crater Lake', 'Blaney's Blue', and 'Ilam Violet'. If you have a mind for more evocative try 'Passionate Purple' or 'Vibrant Violet', maybe even put them in the same bed.

All of the Vireyas, the tropical species, that we don't see too many of here in Victoria, as they can't take frost, are lepidotes. Some of them rival orchids in their exotic flamboyance and where they can be grown outdoors, in Australia or California for example, breeding of Vireya hybrids is an exciting business.

There are physiological problems in crossing the hardy lepidotes we can grow with the tropical show-offs, but where similar problems exist in other genera (e.g. lilies), ingenious ways of making them compatible have been found. Also we are on the threshold of gene splicing and all that genetic engineering that we are reading about, so my guess is that it will not be long before we will see different and luxuriant lepidotes. Furthermore, Vireyas can bloom at almost any time of the year, presenting another great opening to the rhododendron hybridizer.

In the meantime if you have a space of say, ten square metres, try a planting of one *augustinii*, one *davidsonianum*, one *yunnanense*, one *ambiguum*, and one *concinnum*. Draw lots for

which goes where; put them where you can see them from the kitchen table and drag in all your neighbours for ego-gratification and a cup of coffee.



ARS 2018 Convention in Germany, “North America meets Europe”

The 2018 ARS Convention will be in Bremen, Germany 20-27 May 2018, with optional tours before and after the convention. The schedule probably will change slightly in the next couple months.

1st Pre Tour: May 7-12

Optional 5 days visiting Dutch Gardens including **Keukenhof Gardens** (starts in Amsterdam)

2nd Pre Tour: May 12-14

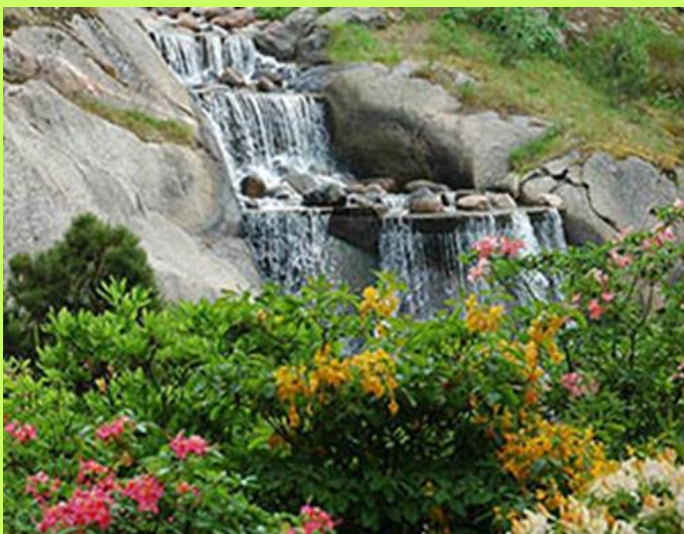
Optional 2 days visiting RHODO 2018 Rhododendron Festival and Hachmann Nursery (starts in Bremen)

3rd Pre-Tour: May 13-20

Optional 7 days visiting gardens in Denmark & Sweden including public and private gardens (starts in Bremen)



Frohlock's Garden



Azaleas in Sapokka Water Gardens in Finland

Photo Anne Vikki-Lanu

Convention: May 20-27

6 day convention in Bremen from May 20 to 27 including 3 days of garden and nursery tours (starts in Bremen)

Post-Tour: May 27-30

Optional 4 days visiting gardens in Finland.

**Details and registration for this
Convention at: ars2018.org**



Calendar of UPCOMING EVENTS

December 2017

Sunday, December 3 Cowichan Valley
CVRS Christmas Party at McLay's Heritage House - 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Monday, December 4 Victoria
Christmas Potluck Dinner at the Couvelier Pavilion at HCP Gardens, 505 Quayle Road - 5:30 pm

Tuesday, December 12 North Island
Annual Christmas Potluck Dinner and Party - 5:00 pm

Wednesday, December 13 Mount Arrowsmith
Speaker: TBA Topic: "TBA" - 7:30 pm

Wednesday, December 13 Fraser South
Annual Christmas Potluck Dinner at Langley Mennonite Church

Thursday, December 14 Nanaimo
Christmas Potluck & Auction - 6:30 pm

Thursday, December 14
Fill the Propagator - 1 pm

Thursday December 14
CVRS Book Club Meeting - 2 pm



Photo by Sandra Stevenson

No Monthly Meeting in January, but February 7th, 2018 will be exciting enough for two months!

May 20 – 27, 2018
ARS Convention, Bremen, Germany



2017-18 Executive

President: Barrie Agar
barrie.agar@shaw.ca (250) 748-2308

Vice President: Judeen Hendricksen

Past President: Carrie Nelson

Secretary: Verna Buhler
Vlbuhler@shaw.ca 250-748-8889

Treasurer: Elaine Kitchen
y1880@yahoo.ca 250-746-6419

Membership Chair: David Annis

Directors at Large:
Diane Allen, Alan Campbell, Ron Martin, Ali Morris

Convenors

Sunshine: Mary Gale

Tea: Judeen Hendricksen

Raffle: Hilda Gerrits

Club Liaison: Alan Campbell

Library: TBA (due to change of Library venue)

Membership Recruitment: Peter Lewis

Program Co-ordinator: Vacant

History: Ian Efford

Garden/Bus Tours: Vacant

CV Garden Fair: The Team

Facility Liaison: Roy Elvins

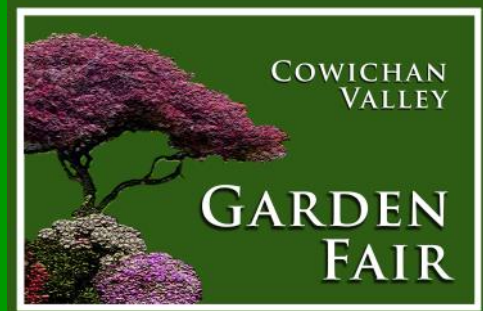
Christmas Party: The Team



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society
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V9L 3Y2

<http://cowichanrhodos.ca>



April 2018

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