



Newsletter

Volume 34:1 February 2023

Message from the President

Well, after this winter's cold snap, a snowfall worthy of a high-priced ski hill, and rainfall reminiscent of the 40 days and 40 nights, you could be forgiven for thinking that gardening as we know it is at an end. The shrubs are splayed out from snow load, evergreen perennials are flattened on the ground like a rabbit suddenly realizing that a hawk is swooping overhead, and the leaves of some Rhodos are still hanging vertically, trembling in case of another onslaught.

And yet....

I have seen the first Hellebore flower, obviously out of its mind, and the stem lying along the ground in self-protection, but flowering all the same.

The bay tree which I thought would have said "Farewell cruel world" and given up the ghost, is hail and hearty, and still bright green and flourishing. Last year it was draped in Christmas lights and a family quilt, but it managed just fine thank you, without intervention from the household cook, who was somewhat frantic at the possible loss of fresh bay leaves.

(Continued on page 2)



Mature Bay Laurel
(Photo: [NetPS Plant Finder](#))

February 1, 2023 Special Guest Panel See Page 3

With Sadness – Bill Dumont	4
CVRS Club Wreath Making	5
Letter from the Editor	6
Intriguing Companion Plants	7
Far Reaches Botanical Conservancy	10
With Sadness Harold Fearing	12
Fertilizing Rhododendrons	13
Upcoming Events	16

~~~~~ Banner Photo:

Rhododendron 'Lee Scarlet' reliably blooming earlier than most, brightly contrasts the black locomotive at MacMillan Bloedel Park in Chemainus. The rhododendrons in the park were donated and planted by the CVRS several years ago.

The tree has died twice to the ground before, and in conditions not as cold. Perhaps increased maturity is the answer. The roots have probed a little deeper, the bark on the trunk a bit thicker. Often, paradoxically, the damage from a severe freeze is from the inability of a plant to take up water. A good snow cover is no bad thing, insulating the ground and stems against a hard frost.

It remains to be seen what will happen to the *Rhododendron* flower buds, but the fact that the freeze occurred in the middle of winter bodes well for most of them. It is the late freeze when the buds are starting to swell and soften that causes the most damage.

Gardeners are nothing if not hopeful. Seeds are sown, laden with great expectations and bulbs carefully planted with visions of a display more colourful than that on the plant packaging, and that is saying something. The disappointments and trials of the previous season are forgotten. The fact that squirrels made off with 200 crocus corms pales to insignificance compared to the anticipation of a horde of new varieties that, surely, they will leave this year. The plants will be bigger, the weeds not as vigorous, and the deer will move to the neighbours.

It will be a good Spring,

Barrie

December 2022 Christmas Party



The CVRS Christmas Party was well attended, despite the lack of photographic evidence. Obviously, everyone was having too good of a time.

There was no clear winner of the story competition. This, for newcomers or those that have forgotten due to the Covid break in festivities, is a short story contest where participants must use selected names of five to eight *Rhododendrons* within their tales. This year's rhododendron name choices lent a somewhat racy and risqué edge to the tales.

I don't remember them all, but there was some Purple Lace involved. The glory of top spot was shared by Shirley Efford and Dorothy Kennedy.

~ Barrie Agar

Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

SPECIAL GUEST PANEL

Rhododendron Experts Answer Your Questions

Our Annual Expert Panel *Question and Answer* Event
is back again **February 1st, 2023, at 7pm.**

It has become a favourite evening for both our members and our guests

- *Come prepared with your questions. Our panelists love the challenge!*
- *Bring a notebook -- add a Task Column*

I Need to Know

- *Why do some of my Rhodos have very yellow foliage?*
- _____
- *Why do my Rhodos have small white flowers instead of big clumps of flowers like my neighbour's?*

According to Sean, Allan, and Al

- *They may need magnesium cations Mg^{2+} (20.19% by mass) and sulfate anions SO_4^{2-}*
- _____
- *Check what kind of Rhododendron you are growing.*
- *Perhaps it is a Laurel*

To Do

- *Review Chemistry notes*
- *Try to buy and apply*
- _____
- *Buy a new Rhodo--while it's blooming!*
- *Read label!*



Sean Rafferty is a former President of the Rhododendron Species Foundation and an expert on rhododendron species. He has accompanied plant hunters on expeditions around the world, and actively supports the preservation of species rhododendrons in critical regions of the world. Sean and Brenda Macdonald have created a rhododendron paradise, featuring a large variety of species rhododendrons on their property in Shirley, on the west coast of Vancouver Island.



Allen Murray, highly respected by individuals such as Lionel de Rothschild (middle), is one of the original members of the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society and served on the Executive for many years. His passion for rhododendrons naturally led to a retirement hobby of propagation of rhododendrons. He quickly became skilled and renowned for his success in the field.

Allen is quietly generous in sharing his knowledge and experience with any person who wishes to learn about rhododendrons.



Alan Campbell, always thoughtful and precise in his responses and explanations, has served on the Executive of the CVRS for most of his years of involvement with the Cowichan Chapter. He and Sandy worked for many years establishing a fabulous rhododendron garden near Shawnigan Lake and only recently moved to their new home in Cowichan Bay. In his retirement, Alan continues life-long learning about rhododendrons



*With great sadness
we acknowledge the sudden and unexpected passing of
Bill Dumont
a long-time member and very large personality and presence
in the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society*

Bill loved to organize large events and tours. To honour Bill's legacy and contributions to the Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society, please forward your thoughts and memories -- stories of your unforgettable experiences with Bill Dumont -- for an article in an upcoming newsletter. Bill had a way of impacting many of our lives, and his absence will leave a large vacancy within our group and in other societies in which he participated.

Please forward these to cowichanvalleyrhododendron@gmail.com or to the Newsletter Editor: vlbuhler@shaw.ca

Thank-you so much



CVRS

Wreath Making Workshop

Fun and Productive Event!



SANDRA STEVENSON, Workshop Leader,
prepares the workspace.

Trailer loads of greens have been cut and gathered from participants' gardens.



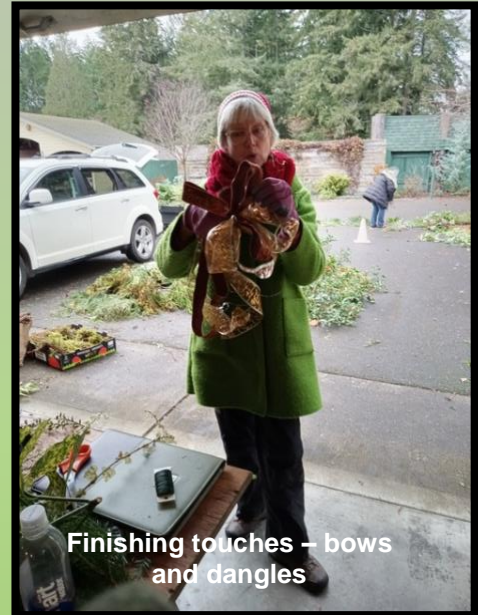
Okay – which tools?





CREATING...

CHATTING...



Finishing touches – bows and dangles

Ready to hang on welcoming front doors!



Beautiful wreaths and huge smiles!

(Photos submitted by Mary Pike)

Letter from the Editor

Hi Friends,

Months have flown by since we last chatted about gardening.

"Rest and be thankful."

— William Wordsworth

Winter offers us a change; we have time to try new recipes, purge our closets and cupboards, replace buttons and repair zippers, watch a few movies and podcasts, watch hockey and tennis, read books, write short stories or memoirs, work on new painting styles, gather with family and friends, take long or short walks, and hikes, set puzzles, sleep in, relax on the sofa, make long-term garden plans -- with eyes closed, make lists of upcoming tasks -- with eyes closed, and rest -- a lot.

The winter has been good for me in so many ways; I hope it has for you as well.

But it begins to happen again. The days become longer, the sun warms some of our garden beds and the garlic, snowdrops, and hellebores wake up to wave well before any groundhog does. Courageous energy of these small sprouts of green stir new life within us. What else is breaking dormancy? We wander through our gardens expectantly. It's true; we begin to break our own dormancy.

I have rested and am thankful. Still from the couch, mind you, but that is about to change.

The garden cleanup that didn't happen in fall because snow came while plants were still strong and green and leaves were still on the trees, can be done in short bursts of energy until hands become numb. The *Hellebores* need trimming and cleanup. Hosta leaves must be gathered and composted. Peonies and lilies should be cut back, the stalks piled near the compost pile so that if any bees tucked into those stalks for winter will remain safe until they wake from their naps.

So, when we meet on February 1st, let's share stories about our rest period and the special "spring guest" appearances in our gardens.



From gray to green. . .

Verna

Intriguing Companion Plants

In May 2018, I visited Ali Morris's Garden to take photos for the newsletter. I was amazed by the array of intriguing plants that were foreign to me. By now I am more familiar with many of them and am slowly acquiring more for my own garden.

*If these plants capture your attention as they did mine, you will want to highlight the date, **February 23, 2023**, on your calendar to ensure you attend the Zoom Presentation by Kelly Dodson and Sue Milliken hosted by ARS District 1.*





Rare Companion Plants

At Far Reaches Botanical Conservancy



KELLY DODSON AND SUE MILLIKEN

Special Presentation

for Vancouver Island Chapters & Friends

Thursday, February 23 at 7:30 pm

Via Zoom

The Presentation will be recorded for later viewing

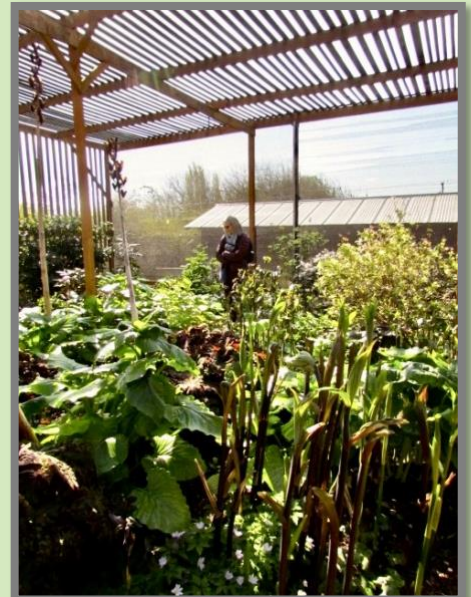
"Kelly and Sue take a look at uncommon to very rare introductions to the FRBC collection which are suitable to accompany rhododendrons in the woodland garden. Many of these were acquired on joint collecting trips with our good friend, of whom you may have heard – Steve Hootman. Kidding of course! There will be a bit of plant hunting in the wild as well as seeing how these are performing for us in the Far Reaches of Port Townsend, Washington."



Kelly and Sue have spent their lives learning and working with plants in nurseries, botanic gardens and on plant hunting expeditions. They are owners of Far Reaches Farm whose extensive collection of plants is spectacularly unfocused.

A lovely shade structure at Far Reaches Farm displays some of their beautiful, rare collections

Photo: Verna Buhler



The nursery has been featured in magazines such as Pacific Horticulture, Horticulture, Martha Stewart Living and in 2021, mentioned in the New York Times as “arguably the best nursery in the country for cool-climate perennials” and in Gardens Illustrated as “one of the best nurseries in the world.” In addition, they are contributing editors for Fine Gardening magazine.

They are also founding directors of Far Reaches Botanical Conservancy, a non-profit whose mission is the acquisition and conservation of vulnerable plants of wild and cultivated origin that are new or rare in North America.

Visit them at www.farreachesfarm.com or www.farreachesbotanicalconservancy.org





Harold Wayland Fearing

November 9, 1941 - December 2, 2022

Harold Fearing, beloved husband of Virginia Griswold Fearing, died on December 2, 2022, after a sudden and determined battle with brain cancer, and then COVID. He is survived by Ginny, his wife of 58 years, their son Paul, daughter-in-law Bridget and grandson Colin, all of whom meant the world to him. He is also survived by his brother Franklin Fearing and his sisters Evelyn Dvorak and Julia Thomas.

Except that he planned to spend many more years in retirement, Harold achieved many if not most of his life goals. He enjoyed life. After graduating from the University of Kansas, then Stanford University for a PhD, he achieved recognition as a physicist at TRIUMF (UBC).

On retirement he and Ginny moved to a 40-acre farm where Harold used his science-oriented brain to engage in all aspects of growing species rhododendrons including growing and selling them. All his thousands of plants were documented with meticulous rigor. He volunteered years of service to the Fraser Valley Rhododendron Society. Harold's large rhododendron garden spoke for him through an amazing variety of colors, textures, shapes, and sizes, creating a colorful canvas that was admired by and shared with many.

Harold was a dedicated "birder." As a nature lover living in a beautiful part of the world, he and Ginny camped, hiked, and backpacked extensively. Harold was a devotee of classical music and opera, and murder mysteries. He knew his way around the kitchen; was a connoisseur of chocolate, especially cakes and cookies and his favorite four cheese sauce and spaghetti. Every spring he commandeered every pot and pan to sterilize huge batches of his hand-mixed rhododendron potting soil. Harold was a fine man and will be greatly missed.

The Natural Conservancy of Canada's commitment to preserving British Columbia's wild areas was dear to Harold's heart. In his memory, donations may be made to the NCC (BC) at www.natureconservancy.ca/donate.

R. augustinii

Fertilizing Rhododendrons

Fearing's Farm Nursery website, <http://www.fearing.ca>, has been near the top of my Favorites Bookmark List for many years. It is a "small nursery specializing in rare and exotic rhododendrons and azaleas" situated in the Abbotsford area.

Most of their plants have been grown from seed ordered from the Rhododendron Species Foundation, the American Rhododendron Society, and the Royal Horticultural Society seed list. Over time, their collection grew to about 2500 plants, of which 1100 are species.

On this website is helpful information about growing rhododendrons. Scientifically minded, Harold Fearing qualified his articles by stating that the information about care and culture of rhododendrons was based on Fearing Farm observations and experiences. Considering Harold's many years of experiences in growing a vast variety of rhododendrons, I have great confidence in his practices.

In honor of his meticulous work and passion, this summary on **Fertilizing Rhododendrons** is drawn from Harold W. Fearing's article.

~ Verna Buhler ~

According to Harold Fearing, *and you may certainly have had similar experiences*, consulting books and rhododendron experts when gathering information on specific rhododendrons can provide consistent information. A similar inquiry regarding fertilization of rhododendrons results in a wide variety of responses and even conflicting information. Searches on the internet may provide information tailored to regions unlike the specific climates and soils found in our region and therefore may not be effective in our gardens. Harold has learned by his own observations and experiences, and from that of other local growers, fertilizing practices that should be applicable to most Pacific Westcoast gardeners.

Rhododendrons require basic nutrients of Nitrogen, for vegetative growth; Phosphorus, for root development and flower production; and Potassium, for vigor and disease resistance. Like other plants they also require calcium, iron, sulphur, and other micronutrients. The balance of N-P-K is identified on fertilizer mixtures. Because of our rainy climate, local soils are generally acidic enough that fertilizers designed to add additional acidity are not generally needed.

Harold advises that whether you plan to use chemical fertilizers, or not, you should practice methods as if you were not, as it is very easy to "forget" to add fertilizers in a timely fashion. These important practices mean regularly adding layers of mulch, one or two inches thick, out past the drip line. He suggests using bark mulch, well-rotted compost, pine needles, and similar coarse materials such as shredded leaves, rather than green grass cuttings, peatmoss, and sawdust, as these shed valuable water. Manure is often too alkaline. If the organic materials are too fresh, additional nitrogen should be added, as nitrogen is used when decomposition begins, and initially could cause nitrogen deficiency. Later however, the nitrogen is released as decomposition continues.

Whether or not chemical fertilizers are also required is a discussion that results in divided opinions. Harold does add fertilizers and states that most of the growers with large collections of rhododendrons that he knows, do fertilize as well. He found that when he missed a year, he thought his plants suffered a bit. When he returned to his fertilizing practice the following year, his plants responded significantly, appearing healthier and blooming better.

Most common practice is to fertilize twice a year, before plants begin enthusiastic growth in February/March, and again at the end of their flowering period in June. Harold used a 10-8-6 mixture that had been developed with rhododendron growers and a fertilizer company working together. It was relatively high in nitrogen, with some delayed release, and contained micronutrients. Similar formulations would be as effective; a reasonable N-K-P mix, some of which is time release, and some micronutrients. Harold suggests that the June application of fertilizer could have less nitrogen so that new growth hardens off before winter.

He broadcasts the fertilizer under the plant out to the drip line, using a *“carefully measured amount for each plant – a small handful for small plants and a large handful for large plants!”*

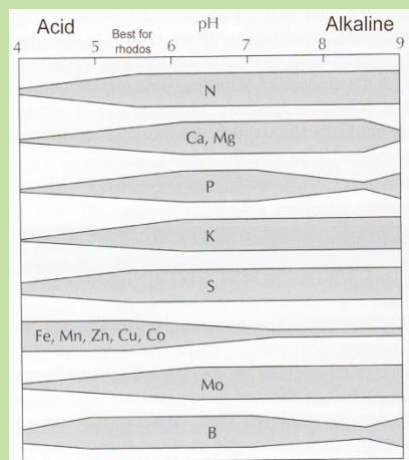
Harold also discusses another theory that advocates fertilizing in late fall or early winter. The thought is that in our region where the ground is usually not frozen for most of the winter, the roots continue to develop over winter and therefore a feeding would stimulate root growth and healthier plants. His concern was that ideal timing of application could be difficult, ensuring the fertilizer could be used in the shallow root zone as the soil warmed, without being washed away by rains. He did not practice that method.

Another theory that he was unable to support by his observations and experience was that some rhododendrons ‘do not like fertilizer’, particularly some small leaved varieties and some hybrids. He adds that he does match the amount of fertilizer to the size of the rhododendrons and has never seen any significant burn with plants in the ground. However, he has over-fertilized plants and experienced burn in leaves of plants in pots.

In his article, Harold adds an **addendum with a graph** to explain the science behind how rhododendrons access available nutrients in the soil.

“Rhododendrons, in general, like acidic soil. The acidity of the soil affects the availability of specific nutrients in the soil and fertilizer to the plants. The figure shows the relative availability of various plant nutrients as a function of the pH of the soil. Neutral is pH 7. Lower numbers correspond to acidic and higher numbers to alkaline soils. Most rhododendrons are said to prefer a pH of 5-6, which is slightly on the acid side.

At the preferred pH the main nutrients N (nitrogen), P(phosphorus), K(potassium) and S(sulfur) are available. Also, Fe(iron) and some of the other micronutrients are available. Not shown is the fact that as the pH becomes much more acidic, aluminum, which is toxic to plants, becomes more available, so one doesn't want the soil too acid. As the pH rises (soil becoming more alkaline, or sweeter) two things happen. First iron becomes unavailable. In rhododendrons this leads to chlorotic leaves with yellow veins.



Secondly, Ca(calcium) becomes more available. That is bad for rhododendrons which need some calcium, but not too much, although there is still scientific debate as to whether it is the calcium or the carbonate, which goes with it, that causes the damage. That is why one should never use regular lime on rhododendrons, as it is mainly calcium carbonate.

[Graph taken with modifications from 'Science and the Garden - The Scientific Basis of Horticultural Practice', 2nd edition, ed. by D. S. Ingram, D. Vince-Prue and P.J. Gregory, page 102, published by Blackwell for the Royal Horticultural Society]



R. augustinii

Photo: Fearing's Farm Nursery

Instead, if the soil needs sweetening, use dolomite lime, which is slower acting, but contains a lot of Mg(magnesium) in place of the calcium, and thus does less damage.

Normal pure rainwater has a pH of 5.6, but the pH can be much lower in polluted areas (acid rain). Some of this acid is neutralized by elements in the soil, depending on the soil type. But the result is that in our rainy climate the soil tends to be naturally acid, which is part of the reason why we can grow rhododendrons so well. In extremely rainy areas, the soil may get too acid and so some people in such areas use a bit of dolomite lime on their rhododendrons. In our garden, the pH seems to be around 6pH, so I have never found that necessary."

~ Harold Fearing

Seedy Saturday is Back in Qualicum Beach!!

Seeding the Future

When: Saturday, February 4, 2023, from 10 am to 3:30 pm

Where: Qualicum Beach Civic Centre

747 Jones Street, Qualicum Beach

Admission: By Donation

Activities:

- Seed Swap (Booth Room)
- Seed and Plant Vendors
- Master Gardeners
- Seedy Café
- Door Prizes
- Two 50/50 Draws: at 12 noon and 3 pm

Contact: Murray Chantler, Publicity Coordinator

(Email: publicity@qbseedysaturday.ca ; Website: www.qbseedysaturday.ca)

Please Note:

Ticket holders must be present to win. If you are unable to stay for the day you may give your ticket to someone to collect your prize for you.

The Town of Qualicum Beach truck will be in the parking lot to collect pesticides and herbicides

2022 – 2023

Calendar of Events

Contact CVRS:

cowichanvalleyrhododendron@gmail.com

Wednesday, February 1, 2023 7:30pm

CVRS Monthly Meeting

Expert Panel – Question and Answer Event

Saturday, February 4, 2023

Qualicum Beach Seedy Saturday (see notice in this issue)

Thursday, February 23, 2023

District 1 ZOOM Presentation

Sue Milliken and Kelly Dodson

Intriguing Companion Plants at Far Reaches Botanical Conservancy

Wednesday, March 1, 2023 7:30 pm

CVRS Monthly Meeting

Glen Jamieson: *Trip to Iceland*

Wednesday, March 8, 2023 7:30pm

MARS Monthly Meeting (QB Civic Center)

Round Table Discussion: *Plant Culture*

Wednesday, April 12 7:30pm

MARS Monthly Meeting (QB Civic Center)

Paul Spriggs: *The Art of Rock and Crevice Gardening*

Saturday, April 22, 2023 10am – 2pm

MARS Rhododendron Show and Plant Sale

Qualicum Beach Curling Club

Wednesday, May 10, 2023

MARS Monthly Meeting (QB Civic Center)

Margot Moser: *Ferns*

May 13 & 14, 2023 10am – 4pm on Sat and Sun

MARS Mothers' Day Garden Tour

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY EVENTS

April 19 – 23, 2023:

American Rhododendron Society Spring Convention, Atlanta, Georgia.

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

Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden:

rhodygarden.org

Nanoose Garden Club:

nanoosegardenclub.ca/

Linda Gilkeson:

lindagilkeson.ca/

Vancouver Island Rock and Garden Society:

virags.com

Linda Chalker-Scott:

<https://puyallup.wsu.edu/lcs/>

Steve Henning:

rhodyman.net

Rhododendron, Camellia, Magnolia

<https://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org/>



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society
A Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society
Duncan, British Columbia

Contact: <http://cowichanrhodos.ca>

2022-23 Executive

President: Barrie Agar
Vice-President: Dorothy Kennedy
Treasurer: Diane Allen
Secretary: Mary Pike
Director-at-Large: Candice Feeney
Director-at-Large: Wendy Wilson
Director-at-Large: Ali Morris
Director-at-Large: Sandy Campbell
Membership Chairperson: David Annis

Convenors

Sunshine: Vacant
Tea: Judeen Hendrickson
Raffle: Hilda Gerrits
Program Planning: The Executive Team
Fundraising: The Executive Team
Garden Tours: TBA
Library: Verna Buhler
Newsletter Editor: Verna Buhler