



Cowichan Valley Rhododendron Society

Newsletter

Volume 35:1 January 2024

Message from the President

Happy New Year Friends,

Well, this has been a rather rude introduction to the New Year! Now that the cold has gone, and the snow is slowly starting to disappear it is time to chalk up the losses, or not, as the case may be. It can be difficult to assess the likelihood of survival with some subjects. Even those that look as though they have given up the ghost and gone to that great compost heap in the sky, may yet surprise you in the spring.

I am thinking of a lemon verbena, carelessly tossed on a compost heap in late autumn, only to be rescued in the spring as it lay there gasping with fresh green leaves coming all along its frost damaged stems.

A *Lavatera* which succumbed to an Arctic onslaught and re-emerged two years later, apparently unscathed. My bay tree has frozen to ground twice, but sent out strong shoots the following season. Now that it is older it seems to be more resistant to the vagaries of winter, which didn't stop me this time around from covering it, replete with Christmas lights and a family quilt, for the cold spell.

Rhodos from the colder and higher altitude areas obviously have a natural advantage. Living as we do where zonal denial is a real thing many of us are pushing the envelope with species and varieties that are probably a zone out of their comfort zone. Wrapping or putting up windbreaks often is enough to ensure their survival, if not their flowers.

Continued on Page 2

CVRS February Meeting

Wednesday
February 7, 2024
7pm

Roundtable Discussions

[Page 3](#)

Christmas Party Fun	4
Wreath Making Workshop	6
Letter from the Editor	7
<i>Rhododendron longipes</i>	11
Narrow-leaved Rhodos	12
Recommended Book	14
Winter Companion Plant	15
February Garden Tasks	17
Purposeful Pruning	18
Upcoming Events	22
Useful Links	24

Banner Photo

From the top of Mt Prevost, our beautiful Cowichan Valley is barely visible beneath the mist and fog. It may spoil a view for some, but we know *Rhododendrons* thrive in these conditions.

President's Message continued. . .

Rhododendrons, depending on their siting, age, and provenance will react differently to a cold snap like we just experienced. Much of the damage to rhododendrons is from moisture deficit -- the ground is too frozen to take up water and the leaves curl up in response to reduce moisture loss.

In a situation where there is snow before the freeze, the roots may be sufficiently insulated to allow them to continue to supply water to the plant. Mulching a plant in the autumn after the soil has cooled is a good strategy. Mulching while the soil is still warm prolongs the plants period of growth and makes it more susceptible to freezing in the event of an Arctic onslaught.



Plants exposed to wind are more prone to damage as the wind takes away heat and moisture from the plant. Depending on the plant's protection from wind, damage may be minimal or fatal. I remember in the eighties in Victoria an extreme cold spell wiped out plants all over the town. Walking down Richmond Avenue all the *Escallonia* and *Ceanothus* on one side of the street were dead, while on the other they were barely touched, all due to wind direction.

A plant that is blackened with frost and has dead twigs should be judiciously trimmed back in the spring. Scratch the bark to see if there is any green beneath it. Most rhodos will survive being taken down to stumps, so it is possible that despite the top growth being dead, there is still life down below. Don't be too quick to turf anything until it has the chance to throw out some growth in the spring.



A blackened *Rhododendron arboreum subsp. delavayi* in last winter's freezing temperatures given a chance to recover, was unable to do so. A lattice for clematis neglected too long collapsed onto several rhododendrons.

Photo: Verna Buhler

However, perhaps it is a plant that you despise the colour of the flowers, it doesn't bloom well, clashes with the plant beside it, has a scraggly growth habit, your brother-in-law gave it to you so you have to keep it, it is taken over the living room window, it stinks, drops leaves everywhere, always looks half-starved no matter what you do, or you need to do some thinning and can't make a decision as to who will live.

Now is your chance to get rid of it.

"I am sorry," you say, brushing away the tears in your eyes. "It just didn't survive the winter."

~ *Barrie Agar*

Roundtable Discussions

FEBRUARY MONTHLY MEETING

February 7, 2024 7pm

At the Hub



BRING YOUR MUG

HELP YOURSELF TO GOODIES

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Share Ideas
on two essential topics:
ACTIVITIES and **KNOWLEDGE**

ACTIVITIES: This meeting is devoted to collectively plan the CVRS activities in which you would like to participate

Plant Sales *Touring Island Gardens*
Opening Private Rhododendron Gardens to

Let others know:

- ☐ What would make the CVRS Chapter more relevant to you
- ☐ What would attract more members

KNOWLEDGE: specifically knowledge of *Rhododendron*

Collectively, we have a lot of **KNOWLEDGE**. This year, *Round Table Discussions* are replacing the *Expert Panel Discussions* so popular in the past.

Bring your queries and accomplishments:

- ☐ Join the discussion with others to learn how fellow members resolve common and not-so-common issues

Our society is only as strong as its members, so everyone is encouraged to attend and share their successes, challenges, and solutions for this evening's instructions - and perhaps entertainment!!

CVRS Christmas Party Fun

Article submitted by Mary Pike

Photos submitted by Janice Moseley and Mary Pike



The sunny day brought out smiles and cheer as guests filed into the hall, bringing their contributions to the luncheon, gifts for one another and for the Door Prizes, and photos of some special rhodos for the Photo Competition. The hall was decorated with festive poinsettia; attractive bough-laden tables displayed gifts.



Some trusses of rhododendrons in bloom made it all the way from Salt Spring Island, and some beautiful wreaths added to the joyful decor. There was a sense of excitement and anticipation. Unfortunately, our President, Barrie Agar, was laid up with a nasty cold, so Vice President Dorothy Kennedy, stepped in, with the assistance of other Executive Committee members.





The Silver Bowl, which recognizes stellar service to the society, was awarded to Diane Allen, who held the positions of Secretary and Treasurer for several years, and generously gave her time and cooking expertise to our events.

Dorothy also announced that the Bronze Medal, the highest commendation awarded by a local chapter in the American Rhododendron Society for outstanding commitment to the genus Rhododendron, was awarded to both our President, Barrie Agar, and to Ali Morris, who formerly served on the CVRS Executive. Since neither was present, the actual presentation and commendation will be deferred to another time.



The Christmas lunch went down well! The Pub Quiz and Word Scramble generated a lot of conversation. Bernie Dinter's photo entries won the Rhododendron Photo Contest; Malcolm Ho won the beautiful wreath created by Sandra Stevenson; Richard Kerr won the main Door Prize, a CVRS cart.



Donations for the Food Bank, some in kind, and the rest in cash which amounted to \$626.60, was delivered to the Cowichan Basket Society, which was extremely happy to receive it and wanted to know more about the CVRS.

Generous items from the gift table meant that everyone returned home with a gift.

Christmas Wreath Making Workshop

Photos and Text by Mary Pike



Sandra Stevenson, with her artistic expertise and talents, once again agreed to help participants create wreaths in time for seasonal decorating. The workshop took place on Saturday, December 9th, in Mary Pike's garage.

We chose the most miserably cold and dreary day to do this! However, the enthusiasm and energy of the group dissipated the misery, and hot water in the tap helped mobilize frozen fingers.

We were grateful for donations of greenery, some of which just turned up in the garage! Thank you to those kind donors.

Despite the challenges, we were all heartened by the results of our endeavours.

TWO EARLY-BLOOMING SPECIES



Rhododendron barbatum
Photo: William Spoon ARS



Rhododendron strigillosum
Photo: RDBG

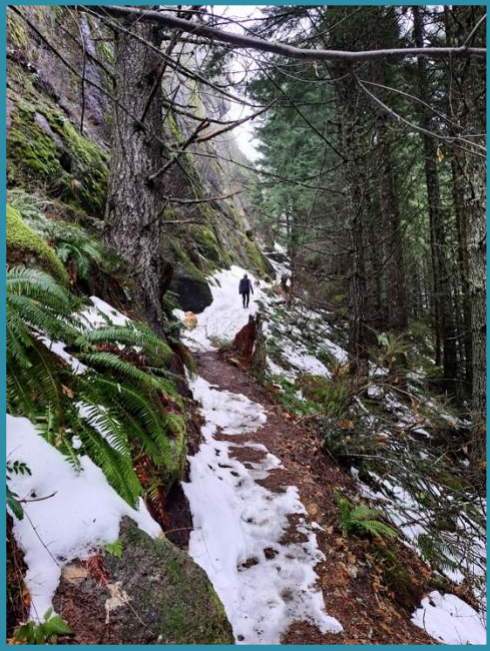


Letter from the Editor

Hi Friends,

Just a short note from the top of Mt Prevost during the week shortly before Christmas, 2023. The weather was mild and our trek along rough trails of the climb to the summit was pleasant. There were five of us in all. We, Rhonda, a long-legged, experienced hiker, two of my Cowichan Valley dogs, one White Rock urban dog, and I met at Ravens' Haven trailhead at 8:50am.

We hiked without pausing for the first hour, caught our breaths after a sharp incline, then continued. The trail became more rugged and slippery as we reached the snowline. Here the trail, in a series of. . .



switchbacks hugged the steep side of the mountain and slowed our progress. The trail had been much improved since one of our earlier treks several years ago, which had required us to use an anchored rope to scale a steep rocky section. At that time, one of my labs had been too frightened to advance after several leaping and sliding attempts and I had had to coax her to ride, quivering, on my lap through

the steepest four metres of the boulder rope climb. Now, we attained the summit along the newer switchbacks about twenty minutes later.

Due to the heavy fog and mist, we were unable to see the fabulous Cowichan Valley with its lakes and ocean stretching below us. Yet the twenty minutes we spent at the top were exhilarating; it was as if before us stretched half-hidden mountains and valleys of Sichuan, China where we might find *Rhododendron sutchuenense** and *R. moupinense* *covering the mountainsides.

On the trek, we saw many specimens of ericaceous plants such as *Polystichum munitum*, *Blechnum spicant*, and evidence of dormant *Adiantum aleuticum*, *Athyrium felix-femina*, and *Pteridium aquilinum*. *Pteridium glycyrrhiza*, at its finest during this part of the year, covered the cliff walls. *Gaultheria shallon* was at a forager's best.

However, we did not see any rhododendrons or unfamiliar plants clinging to the rocks of the mountainside, and therefore did not add to our collection for the always exciting curation process. However, it was well worth the effort for the ephemeral imaginative experience.

Letter from the Editor continued . . .

What prompted this take on a simple Cowichan Valley hike was the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden (RSBG) webinar I joined on Saturday, January 13th, 'The Curator's Classroom' presented by Steve Hootman.

Steve dealt with curation, the process of selecting, organizing, and looking after items in a collection. Curation is Steve's area of specialized training, and his love for that aspect of his responsibilities at RSBG was evident during his presentation. He explained what the detailed information in curation records explain about the special plants in the collection, and the great care that is taken in accessioning of plants and seeds.

For example, when we purchase special plants from the RSBG, the numbers and letters on the label indicate the source and collection story from which our plant derived, or its *accession*. A cutting propagated from such a special plant will be a duplicate of the original, and a plant grown from seed will have typical variations of the species.

Steve informed us that in February he will be on an expedition to Laos, situated between Thailand and Vietnam. If I were a couple of years younger than I am, I would be on my hands and knees begging Steve Hootman to take me along as his personal mule. I would carry his packs, gather kindling, stir up some grubs and other bugs, record his notes, and hold his hand through the most frightening, scary cliffside ledges of the mountainside.

Can you imagine an adventure such as this on your bucket list? I can. So those of you who are young enough to plan a decade ahead, consider postponing the instant gratification of vacations to Los Cabos, Puerto Vallarta, Cuba, or Hawaii. Instead, tuck that vacation money into a fund entitled 'Plant Hunting with Steve Hootman' and do what you must do to make yourself eligible while you still can.

Take it from a 'wanna-be' plant hunter -- a seventy-year-old female, sensitive to immunizations, missing an ACL in the right knee, with a tendency to gag from biting a crunchy shrimp -- plan for this type of adventure while you are young and fit enough!

Knowing what I know now, I would!

Verna Buhler



Photo: Tom Christian

****Rhododendron sutchuenense*** found at 2400 m of Sichuan, China, is hardy to -23C. It may bloom early in February to April, depending on where it is situated.



Photo: RSBG

****Rhododendron moupinense*** also found in Sichuan, is a one of the first rhododendrons to bloom in spring. It is a compact, dwarf rhododendron with lovely white flushed or edged pink blossoms.

It is oftentimes confused with very similar ***R. Cilpinense***, a hybrid cross between *R. cilatum* and *R. moupinense*. Determine whether your plant is the species or the hybrid, by looking for a covering of fine hair on the foliage. The fuzzy covering will tell you that it is not *R. moupinense*.

Rhododendron longipes



Rhododendron longipes
Photo: UBC Botanical Gardens

Rhododendron longipes

The International Dendrology Society identifies this recently introduced (1997), rhododendron's conservation status as vulnerable. Its natural habitat is Sichuan, Guizhou, China at 2000-2900 metres.

Its narrow foliage contrast wonderfully in rhododendron gardens, as evident above. Although compact, after many years, it can reach 10 metres. Hardy in Vancouver Island gardens to -20 to -15 C, it is a rhododendron worthy searching for this spring.



Photo: Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden

Fawn to brownish indumentum on the leaves is felt to compact, and intermixed with a few glands.

The flowers form a lax truss of 8 - 15 pinkish to pale purple funnel-campanulate flowers with darker flecks, blooming in April to May.

Thank you, Al Campbell, for
introducing me to this lovely species.
~ Verna

NARROW-LEAVED *RHODODENDRONS*

Lovely Textural Contrast in Rhododendron Gardens

~ Verna Buhler



Rhododendron makinoi
Photos: Millais Nurseries

Rhododendron makinoi

Rhododendron makinoi rates highly for its fantastic foliage. It has earned an RHS Award of Garden Merit for the best narrow-leaved rhododendron. The dense, rounded shrub produces compact pinkish white trusses in May and June.

Dense fawn indumentum, on the underside, on long, recurved leaves add to its foliage beauty. The new leaves are soft and woolly.

Rhododendron thayerianum

Rhododendron thayerianum is a highly identifiable species because of its unique foliage and growth habit. It has “canoe-shaped” long, narrow, rigid, and stiff leaves, with fawn indumentum. New greyish foliage is tightly clustered at the tips of stems.

The Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden describes it as having a sub-tropical appearance although it is cold tolerant.

Blooming late, in early summer, it presents white flushed pink flowers making its elegant statement after many rhododendrons in the garden have faded.

Rhododendron thayerianum

Photo: Verna Buhler at Webb's garden in Saanich



Photo: UBC Botanical Garden



Photo: RSBG

Rhododendron roxieanum* var *oreonasters

Very distinct species in a rhododendron collection because of its extremely narrow, almost needle shaped leaves. The undersurface has fawn to cinnamon indumentum and the bell-shaped flowers are white, flushed pink, with red-purple spotting.

George Forrester discovered the plant in China. It has earned two RHS awards.



Photo: Oregon State University



Photo: Millais Nurseries

***Rhododendron* 'Blewbury'**

Rhododendron 'Blewbury' is an unusual narrow-leaved hybrid that is a cross between two species, *R. roxieanum*, as described above, and *R. anwheense*. It forms a perfectly rounded mound of long dark, narrow, pointed, recurved leaves with a thin, buff indumentum on the underside.

This rhododendron is stunning even without its blooms. However, in mid-spring, dense trusses of white, bell-shaped flowers with reddish-purple spotting perch atop rounds of dark spiked foliage.

Once again, I must thank Al Campbell for introducing me to this exceptional hybrid. It was at my first visit to the CVRS Rhododendron Plant Fair, that, as I stepped out of Mellor Hall, Al quietly handed me a tiny plant in a 3-inch pot. I now know it would have been a newly rooted plant. I read the label *R. 'Blueberry'* and Al explained that, no, it was *R. 'Blewbury'* named after a village in Berkshire (Oxfordshire) west of London, and that it did not have blue flowers. As I turned to leave, he handed me another tiny rhododendron, *R. hyperythrum*. Coincidentally, or perhaps not, it too has relatively long, narrow recurved leaves, with trusses perched above the foliage.

Our garden at that time was almost non-existent, and I knew little about growing rhododendrons. We were just beginning to landscape. I feared that such tiny plants could easily become lost. Somehow, I managed to protect these special babies by tucking them into a pot with another rhododendron also on hold for a permanent home in a properly prepared garden bed. Both plants are still growing in our garden. *Rhododendron* 'Blewbury' seems very happy where it is situated, but I think I will move *Rhododendron hyperythrum*, as some very large rhododendrons around it are crowding it out.



R. hyperythrum

Photo: Trees and Shrubs Online

Thank you for these, Alan!

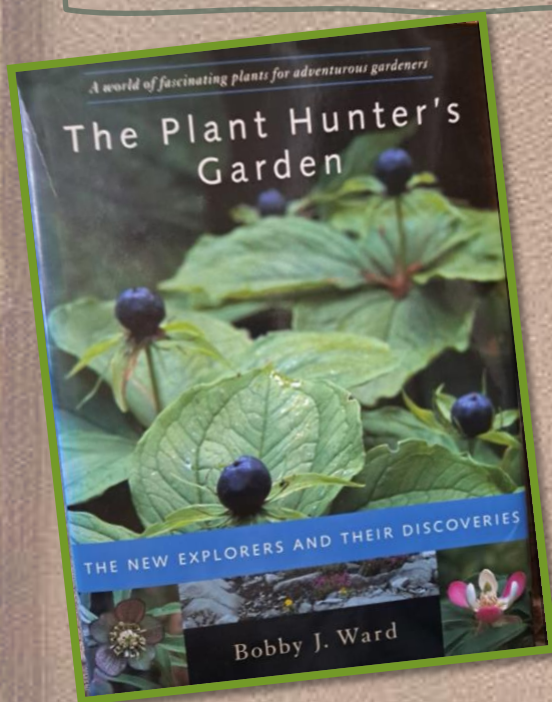
BOOKS - BOOKS - BOOKS

THE CVRS LIBRARY HAS BOOKS FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE

WORTH EVERY MINUTE OF YOUR TIME SPENT

The Plant Hunter's Garden

Bobby J. Ward



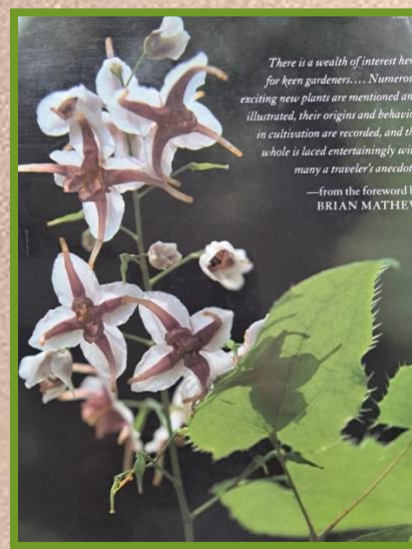
In his forward in this book, Brian Matthew writes *"There is a wealth of interest here for keen gardeners and botanists. Numerous exciting new plants are mentioned and illustrated, their origins and behavior in cultivation are recorded, and the whole is laced entertainingly with many a traveler's anecdote."*

Bobby J. Ward is a past president of the North American Rock Garden Society. He is now a retired environmental scientist who earned his Ph.D. in botany in North Carolina State University.

In gathering the material for this book, Ward contacted thirty-two of today's most prolific plant explorers, extending from the Czech Republic to the Rocky Mountains. These plant hunters are collecting specimens for introduction for horticultural purposes.

Although he does include information about the lives and careers of the new explorers, his primary focus is on the plants themselves.

While you read this book, you will embark on your own journey of plant discovery.



**To access the CVRS Library to sign out this book, contact Verna Buhler.
If you contact me before the next meeting, I will bring it with me for you to borrow.**



Brilliant in February

HEATHER

**Companion Plants Easily Overlooked
in our Garden Center Wanderings**

~ Verna Buhler

Heathers offer colours for all seasons of the year and what better time to offer such brilliance than in the darkest periods of winter. Those that bloom prolifically and daintily during the winter months, *Erica carnea* and *Erica x darleyensis*, are perfect for lifting dreary spirits. Heathers are wondrously versatile components of Pacific Northwest Gardens, well adapted to our climate and soils.

***Erica x darleyensis* 'Jenny Porter'**

...one of my favourites. (photo above) It is a lovely heather, which I grew in my Cherry Point Garden years ago. What drew me to it were the soft lilac-pink flowers blooming in late winter through spring, but I did not realize at that time that it was an RHS AGM winner. It is a vigorous, dwarf winter heather with dark-green foliage tipped cream in spring.

I have not seen it recently, but when I do, I must make a point of adding it to my garden once again.

***Erica x darleyensis* 'Darley Dale'** (photo below) with its soft similar shade of mauve would be harmonious in the same heather wave.

Photos: BBC Gardeners World



The term "heather" is used to refer to different plant genera that include *Calluna*, the true heathers; *Erica*, heaths; *Daboecia*, Irish heaths; and *Phyllodoce*, mountain heaths.

They are natural companions for rhododendrons and azaleas because they thrive in moist, cool conditions and acidic soils. They enjoy about six hours of sun a day and may grow leggy in shadier locations. Therefore, they are excellently suited for part-sun transition areas of the garden.



Snow and waffling temperatures in winter do not faze winter heather. The wiry stems have evergreen leaves that peer out from beneath snow lifting their dainty, cheerful bells. The plants tend to spread outward and create low drifting mounds of ground cover, suppressing weeds, in blending rainbow spectrums.

Erica x darleyensis and *Erica carnea* and other heathers do not require much care. An annual pruning after the blooms have faded -- for winter heather usually sometime in April -- is necessary to keep them healthy. This can be done with a set of hedge shears, contour pruning most of the spent flower stems off, without cutting so deeply that woody stalks are visible. When done properly and in a timely fashion, trimmed heather will always have a dense foliage canopy with a flower display that will smother the contour.

Planting in connected, informal groupings of three or more heathers provide attractive low, spreading mounds flowing in harmonious waves in front of other plants. Sequential bloom times of heathers mean that gardens can be a show place from November to May, particularly when set off against the attractive evergreen rhododendron and azalea plants. Once the blooms fade, fresh and new colourful, varied foliage of winter heather are as attractive as the blooms, just as summer heather foliage is attractive flowing through winter heather swaths. Hellebores interspersed with heather are stunning in February and March.

Understanding that heathers have hundreds of finely textured roots, is important when planting heathers. Potted plants are easily root bound. Moisten the root ball thoroughly and ruffle up the root system to encourage the tiny roots to spread outward into a loose soil mix that is fifty percent fine bark mulch.

Another very important task to ensure success, at least with newly planted heathers that can dry out easily until they are rooted in, is diligence with the watering in their first summer. Once established, heather plants are reasonably drought tolerant as they tend to shade their own roots and hold the moisture in.



Many of us were saddened by the "aging-out" experience of the Heather Society in the Cowichan Valley. The individuals were passionate and knowledgeable; many of us purchased our unique specimens of heather from this group. They are sorely missed.

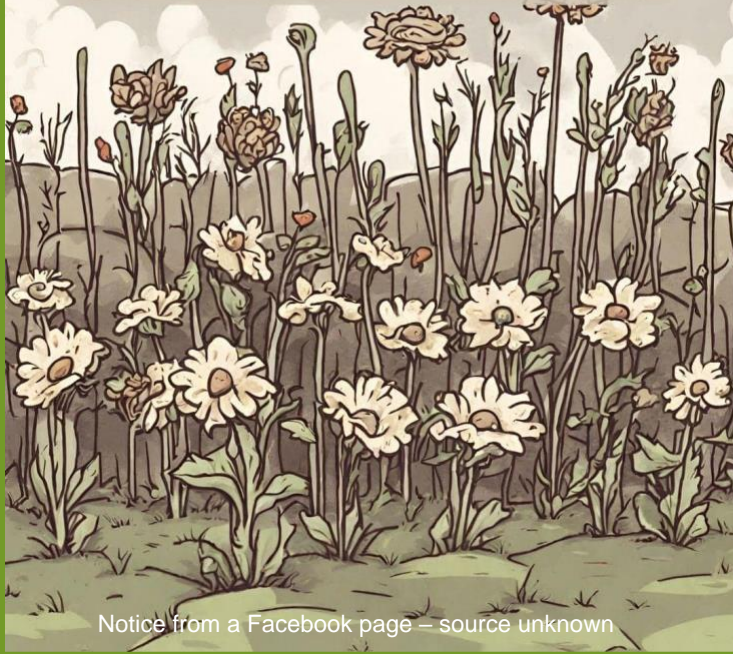
Verna

FEBRUARY'S GARDENING TASKS

By Verna Buhler

LET YOUR GARDEN SLEEP IN

WAIT TO TIDY UP YOUR OLD FLOWERS, STEMS, AND PLANTS
UNTIL SPRING AND UNTIL WEEKS OF 50F OR ABOVE – THERE
ARE POLLINATORS STILL SLEEPING IN THOSE PLANTS



Notice from a Facebook page – source unknown

Congratulations to those of you who took great advantage of the mild December and early January temperatures to complete many Spring gardening chores. Some of you have already completed all your pruning! I, however, was couched by a month-long respiratory virus, and slept through the warm weather, raising my head when the ice, and then, snow appeared.

During that time, I read the notice on the left, advising gardeners to leave garden cleanup for pollinator protection. I found solace in that. Pruning, however, needs to be done. Joe Hudak cheered me by saying that he found the best time to prune was during the first weeks of February.

~TO DO~

- ☐ Clean up tattered leaves of *Hellebores*
- ☐ Prune ornamental trees and shrubs
- ☐ Rake up spent *Hosta* leaves
- ☐ Lift and divide perennials, gently, without disturbing new roots
- ☐ Start seed flats, such as onions and slow maturing flower annuals under glass
- ☐ Plant Sweet Peas and Bells of Ireland outside
- ☐ Prune fruit trees and spray with dormant oil and lime sulphur
- ☐ Prune summer-flowering shrubs and vines, such as *Fuschia magellanica*, *Buddleia davidii* and *Clematis* (check type)
- ☐ Feed *Hydrangeas* with well-rotted compost or manure

- ☐ Plant new bush and cane fruits; prune existing ones. Feed with well-rotted compost or manure
- ☐ Prepare vegetable beds with compost or manure. Add lime two weeks later
- ☐ Plant bare-root roses and cut back only 'die-back' parts of established roses. Pick up dead and diseased leaves and discard (not in compost)
- ☐ Begin lawn renewal; power-rake and aerate lawns; repair dips and hollows with topsoil and coarse sand
- ☐ Apply dolomite lime to lawns at the end of February
- ☐ Turn compost piles regularly

P.S. Drink plenty of water; sleep well at night; smile and keep your chin up!!

PRUNING WITH PURPOSE

Detailed books are written to help gardeners with pruning tasks. Many trees and shrubs require specific types of pruning, and certainly cannot be handled in a short article. However, a few basic tips could be useful. Before picking up your saws, loppers, and hand pruners, do some research. It is worth the extra time to plan your pruning jobs carefully. **Know your purpose before you begin. Here are just four reasons to prune.**

First, study the tree's natural form and habit and work with it:

Begin by understanding the natural growth habit of your tree. Keep this foremost in your mind as you prune. If you purchase a tree that has been trained and shaped through very specific pruning, you will need to continue such formal pruning, or it will grow back to its natural informal habit.

Size and Space:

More space may be needed around a tree for other plants to grow or the tree branches are obstructing a pathway. Many trees have single, clear trunks and therefore pruning off the lower limbs will solve that problem. It often improves the appearance of the tree because the lower branches may have died or grown weak and scraggly over the years.

This *Thujaopsis dolabrata*, or staghorn cedar, had grown to impede movement along the pathway near it. There are also plants nearby that would benefit from more sunlight. In early December, when I was gathering greens to use for Christmas wreaths and swags, I pruned its lower limbs. By removing the lower branches, these issues are resolved and offer an unexpected bonus. The undersides of the leaves are shiny silver in colour. A glance upward provides a new delight.



Length of Limbs Reduce Strength and Create Vulnerability in Heavy Snow:

I have several trees with a natural habit of spreading widely. Several also have very dense branching. They are beautiful, and offer lovely shade, but when heavy wet snows and ice-cold temperatures strike, they are the first to break. Instead of repeated, forced remedial pruning, I am trying to plan and prune preventatively.



The limbs of this *Styrax japonica* spread well beyond the borders of this photo. The tree is known to grow twenty-five feet tall and thirty feet wide. Is it planted in the right place? No, but I intend for it to stay there. Walking under it when it is in flower is cause for pause on any trips out the back door.

I have removed the lower limbs regularly, and always intend to prune the length of the limbs after flowering. However, I have too often neglected to do so.

When the heavy snow and ice catches me in regret, I rush outside to see whether the *Styrax* is intact. The reason the back side of the tree looks sparse is because one year a lovely large limb broke.

As soon as this week's snow melts, I will prune the tree, despite knowing I am cutting off thousands of May's potential white blooms. They wouldn't bloom if the limb broke either!

Crowding and Hampering Other Plants:

A beautiful *Rhododendron* 'Lem's Monarch' has not been as spectacular during the last few years as it was several years ago. A lovely, multi-stemmed *Magnolia* 'Susan' had covered much of the rhododendron with its large, dense foliage, preventing it from growing in its naturally round shape.

The place to begin pruning is from underneath the tree or shrub where it is possible to see the main trunks of the tree. Follow the trunks upward



...to see which branches are crowding the rhododendron. You may be able to remove one large trunk to open the space and still maintain balance in the tree's structure.

However, always begin removing smaller sections of branches from higher in the limb to reduce overall weight of the part coming down. Not doing so is likely to cause the trunk to split and the destruction of nearby plants.

In the photo on the right, large sections of the magnolia have been removed. Several major trunks and branches were cut out and other trunks were limbed up, as well as thinned. The rhododendron will have a chance to fill out on the side nearer the tree.

Not all the necessary pruning was done at this time, as no more than a third of the existing tree or shrub should be removed at any one time.

Competing Leaders:

Sometimes after the top of a tree, the tree's leader, has for some reason been removed, perhaps broken by wind or snow, or unfortunately pruned, numerous new branches may compete for leadership.



When a leader has been lost (photo left *Nyssa sylvatica*), a new leader can be encouraged to grow in its place (photo right 2 years later). It is easier to create a new leader in a young tree than in a mature tree. Tie a stake to the lower part of the main trunk ensuring it rises above the tree for a foot or two. Choose a strong branch near the top of the tree and fasten it to the upright stake. Remove the stake once the new leader has grown strong.



Competing leaders should be removed as soon as possible to prevent the development of dual leaders. An older tree that has lost a leader may develop dual leaders, creating dangerous narrow forks, as in the pine in the photo on the right.





Photo: Verna Buhler



Photo: growsonyou.com



Photo: Singing Tree Nurseries

Picea marianna aureovariegata 'Nana'

The incredible needles of this tree forced me to purchase it when I saw it. It was a lovely pyramidal dense conifer. There was only one in stock, so I didn't have time to think.

I have had a lot of time to think about and appreciate it since. This dwarf, gold-tipped blue spruce shimmers in the winter landscape.

However, I do not know how to manage this tree. It seems to grow in all directions, rather unpredictably. Research doesn't help much; all agree it is structurally interesting. Some sources say it is a rounded conifer. Others say it grows horizontally, but eventually develops a more pyramidal shape.

I have attempted to help it develop its future pyramidal habit. It resists, growing unevenly as it chooses, more densely on one side than the other. I prune to create more balance. It energetically sends up competing leaders, which I discourage by pruning out the entire branch.

One reason for this assertive pruning was because I had a lovely *Acer palmatum* 'Seiryu' growing too close to it. Last winter the maple died after the extended freezing period, so the *Picea* now has room to grow in width.

It appears that my pruning efforts may already have had some effect as a pyramidal shape appears to be forming, if somewhat curvaceous. Therefore, at this point I accept the challenge it presents and will continue my attempts to balance its shape.



Earlier pruning of this pine, labeled as a *Pinus contorta*, or shore pine, would have prevented the fracturing of the secondary large limb and would have allowed the tree to focus its energies on strengthening the rest of the tree. It has become stressed during the last several years.

These are only four examples of a multitude of pruning tasks. There are many more. It can be a formidable task but enjoyable for most of us.

Appropriate and well-maintained tools help a get deal, especially for hands that are experiencing the stiffness and aching of arthritis.

The positive results are rewarding! I look forward to seeing R. 'Lem's Monarch' beam its appreciation.

Above all, Enjoy the Beauty of these Winter Months

Pause in the middle of all those pruning chores to appreciate the amazing beauty of the resilient and brave faces that our gardens offer!



Hamamelis x intermedia 'Jelena' particularly stunning in contrast with the snow Photo: Verna Buhler



Mark Your Calendars!

Two Important Events Coming Up

20th Annual Qualicum Beach **Seedy Saturday**

'Seeding the Future'

Qualicum Beach Civic Centre
Saturday, February 3, 2024
10 am – 3:30 pm



- Seed Swap
- Speakers: Bonnie Zand, Michalina Hunter
- Master Gardeners answering questions
- Seed and Plant Vendors
- Informational Exhibitors
- Nursery Displays
- Door Prizes
- Seedy Café
- 50-50 Draws (cash only)
- No ATM on site

Admission by Donation

Qualicum Beach Seedy Saturday Association
www.qbseedsaturday.ca • info@seedsaturday.com

Bring
your seeds
for the
seed swap!



SAVE THE DATE !
ARS 2024 Spring Convention
Bellingham, Washington
May 2-5, 2024

Four Points by Sheraton, Bellingham
Hotel and Conference Center
714 Lakeway Drive, Bellingham, WA, USA, 98229
Phone: +1 360-671-1011

Highlights:

Pre-Tour: May 1: Private Gardens around Seattle
Convention: Tours * Seminars * Workshops * Banquets
Post-Tour: May 5: Gardens around Vancouver, Canada

Time to check your Passport!

Plus:

Plant Sales * Auctions * Raffles * Photo Booth * Poster Session

Help get the message out!

**Please forward to friends and gardeners in
your community and around the globe.**

Visit ARS2024.org for more information and to register.

2024 – 2025
Calendar of Events

Contact CVRS:

cowichanvalleyrhododendron@gmail.com

Saturday, February 3, 2024, 10am - 3:30pm

Seedy Saturday, Qualicum Beach 20th Annual (See Notice in this issue)
'Seeding the Future' Qualicum Beach Civic Centre (QB Civic Centre)

Wednesday, February 7, 2024, 7pm

CVRS February Meeting: The Hub (2375 Koksilah Road, Duncan)
Round Table Discussions

Monday, February 26, 2024, 12:30pm

Alpine Gardeners of Central Vancouver Island - QB Civic Centre
Dr. Richard Hebda: *'Snowdrops'*

Wednesday, February 14, 2024 7:30pm

MARS February Meeting – QB Civic Centre
Scott Wiskerke: *'Pruning Rhododendrons'*

Wednesday, March 6, 2024, 7pm

CVRS March Meeting - The Hub
Glen Jamieson: TBA

Monday, March 25, 2024, 12:30 pm

Alpine Gardeners of Central Vancouver Island - QB Civic Centre
Bernie Dinter" *'Dwarf Rhododendrons'*

Wednesday, April 3, 2024, 7pm

CVRS April Meeting – The Hub
Margaret Cadwaladr: *'William Robinson'*

Saturday, April 20, 2024, 9am – 1pm

MARS Rhododendron Show and Plant Sale – QB Curling Rink

Saturday, April 20, 2024, 10am – 2pm

Rhododendron Sale – 5008 Old West Saanich Road, Victoria
Home of Ken and Madeleine Webb – *Cash or cheque only*

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN RHODODENDRON SOCIETY EVENTS

May 2 - 5, 2024

American Rhododendron Society Spring Convention – Bellingham, Washington

Registration Now Open – Contact: ars2024.org

(See Notice in this Issue)

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 P.O. Box 904
Duncan, British Columbia V9L 3Y2

<http://cowichanrhodos.ca>

2020-21 Executive

President: *Barrie Agar*
Vice-President: *Dorothy Kennedy*
Treasurer: *Elisabeth Zoffman*
Secretary: *Mary Pike*
Director-at-Large: *Sandy Campbell*
Director-at-Large: *Janice Moseley*
Director-at-Large: *Laurie Moseley*
Director-at Large: *Tricia Guiguet*
Membership Chairperson: *David Annis*

Convenors

Sunshine: *Carrie Nelson*
Tea: Vacant
Raffle: *Hilda Gerrits*
Speaker Team Chair: *Sandra Stevenson*
Fundraising: *The Executive Team*
CVRS Garden Tours: Vacant
CVRS Bus Tours: Vacant
Library: *Verna Buhler*
Newsletter: *Verna Buhler*